

say it --- now

The Gratitude Express

Teacher Resource

Lesson: The Gratitude Express

Purpose:

- This guide accompanies The Gratitude Express, a story about Daniel's magical train journey to moments and people from his past who shaped his life — and the realization that we shouldn't wait to express gratitude.

Objective:

- Students understand the importance of expressing gratitude in real time.
- Students identify personal connections to the story's themes.
- Students practice expressing gratitude through written, spoken, or creative forms.

Themes:



Gratitude



Relationships



Reflection



Empathy



Courage

Implementation Tips:

- **Adapt timing:** This can be a single block lesson or spread over 2–3 days.
- **Model vulnerability:** Share a personal gratitude story of your own to encourage openness.
- **Celebrate actions:** Create a classroom “Gratitude Wall” (either physically in your class or digitally on a virtual whiteboard) where students can post notes about people they've expressed gratitude to.

Materials:

A copy of The Gratitude Express (book or read-aloud)
Student notebooks or printed worksheets (provided below)
Pens/pencils
Chart paper or whiteboard

Estimated Time:

2-3 lessons (can be shortened)



Brain Bite

What's good for the body is good for the brain. What's good for the brain is good for the body!

Throughout the lessons you will find brain icons with actions and facts about the brain. It is important for students to understand the importance of the brain and how it impacts our well-being.

Part I. Before You Read

(30-40 minutes)

Purpose:

Activate prior knowledge, build personal connection, set a purpose for reading.

Step 1:

On the board, write “Ways to Show Gratitude.” Invite students to share ideas — verbal, written, creative, group experiences. Encourage all forms (big and small).

- As a class, brainstorm ways people can show they’re grateful for someone. Students will also write 3–5 ideas in their own notebooks.

✱ Optional worksheet included below ✱

Step 2:

Ask:

If there were a magical train that could take you to any place, any time to express gratitude to someone, where would you go and who would you visit? Have students jot responses, then share in pairs.

- Students should write at least 3 sentences to describe the time, place, and person they wish to thank.

Step 3:

Guide students to think about someone who has influenced their life — a teacher, coach, family member, friend. Ask students to write a paragraph about that person and whether they’ve shared their appreciation.

- Remind students to reflect on what the person has done for them and to consider if this person knows the impact they have had



Brain Bite

Reflecting on your past experiences helps engage the prefrontal cortex and improve synaptic connections.

This engagement then helps improve memory and cognitive ability.

Part 2. During Reading

(30 minutes)

Purpose:

Focus attention, track observations, engage actively with the text.

Notice and Note Prompts:

While we read, remind students to pay attention to:

- How Daniel's feelings about expressing gratitude change from beginning to end.
- The different stops the Gratitude Express makes — what each teaches Daniel about his past and relationships.
- How people respond when Daniel expresses or hears gratitude.

Teacher Instructions:

Read the story aloud, play an audiobook, or have students read independently/in groups.

If reading as a class (or remind students to if reading in groups/independently), pause after each major stop on the train for quick check-ins:

- What did Daniel learn here?
- How does this moment connect to the theme of gratitude?



Brain Bite

Expressing gratitude to someone helps activate the parasympathetic nervous system.

This helps your body relax and be calm.

Part 3. After Reading

(40- 50 minutes)

Purpose:

Reflect, personalize, and apply the message.

Discussion Questions:

Teacher to choose 3-5 to focus on:

- Why do people often wait until someone has passed away to share how they feel?
- Which Gratitude Express stop stood out to you most? Why?
- How might expressing gratitude “in the moment” change both the giver and the receiver?
- If you had one stop on the Gratitude Express, who would you visit and what would you say?
- The conductor says: “It can be too late, but it’s never too soon.” What does this mean to you?

Activity 1:

Say It Now Letter (20-30 minutes)

Give students time to write a letter to someone they want to express gratitude to now. Letters should be delivered within a week.

Say:

Think of someone in your life who has made a difference. Write them a letter expressing your gratitude, including specific examples of what they did and how it impacted you.

✱ Optional worksheet included below ✱

Activity 2:

Gratitude Mapping (20 minutes)

Students draw a “map” of their life with important stops — moments where people have helped, supported, or inspired them. Note people already thanked and those not yet thanked.

Say:

Draw a timeline or map of your life. At each “stop,” write the name of a person who influenced you and how. Color code: thanked (green), not yet thanked (yellow).

✱ Optional worksheet included below ✱

Activity 3:

Gratitude Interview (20-30 minutes or Homework)

Students interview a family member or friend about a time someone expressed gratitude to them. Share takeaways in class.

Say:

Ask someone: “Tell me about a time when someone expressed gratitude to you and it really meant something.” Write 5–6 sentences about what you learned.

✱ Optional worksheet included below ✱



Ways to Show Gratitude

Imagine someone did something that made a positive impact in your life.

What are all the possible ways you could show them you're grateful? Think of words, actions, photos — anything!

You can write, draw, or use symbols or images to show your ideas.

The Gratitude Express - Stops & Lessons

Stop/ Person	What Happened?	Lesson on Gratitude
Andreas (School)		
Beth (Groceries)		
Stan (Career)		
Grandfather		

Say it Now Letter

Think of someone in your life who has made a difference. Write them a letter expressing your gratitude, including specific examples of what they did and how it impacted you.

Dear: _____

Signed: _____

Gratitude Map

Draw a timeline or map of your life. At each “stop,” write the name of a person who influenced you and how. Color code: thanked (green), not yet thanked (yellow).

