

Gratitude Balloon Toss - Levels C - D

PLAY

To support students to practise the life skill of gratitude through an active, playful balloon game. Inspired by Saturn in the Playful Astronauts journey, this activity highlights how grateful thoughts create connection and joy, spreading outward like Saturn's rings and bringing people together.



Learning Intentions

Students aim to recognise and share things they are thankful for.



Students aim to practise turn-taking and cooperation during a group game.

Students aim to connect positive feelings to shared play experiences.



Success Criteria

I can say, show, or choose something I am thankful for.

I can safely tap, toss, or pass the balloon with others.

I can listen respectfully when others share their gratitude.



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Duration: 10 - 15 minutes

Objective

To support students to practise the life skill of gratitude through an active, playful balloon game. Inspired by Saturn in the Playful Astronauts journey, this activity highlights how grateful thoughts create connection and joy, spreading outward like Saturn's rings and bringing people together.

Players

Whole class or small groups

Suitable for 4 - 26 students

Played in a circle or open space

What You Need

One or two large, lightweight balloons

Optional: upbeat or calm background music

Optional: visual gratitude prompt cards (family, friends, pets, toys, nature) (found in PDF resource)

AAC devices or communication boards as required

Setup

1. Print and cut out the visual gratitude cards.
2. Revisit the Saturn theme using simple language:
 - "Saturn reminds us that gratitude connects us."
 - "When we say thank you, good feelings spread."
3. Ask a few warm-up questions:
 - "What does grateful mean?"
 - "How does it feel to say thank you?"
4. Arrange students in a large circle or open space where everyone can see and reach the balloon.
5. Explain safety expectations: gentle taps, eyes watching, balloon stays in the air.
6. Take the students through the example gratitude visual cards to assist with their understanding of gratitude and provide some ideas for them to call upon and use during the activity.
7. Confirm AAC devices are on and open to thank you, like, people, or things pages.

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Gameplay option 1.

Step 1: Hit and Thank

1. Hold up the balloon and explain the rule clearly:
 - “Either before or after you tap the balloon, you share something you are thankful for.”
2. Model first:
 - “I am thankful for my family.”
 - Gently tap the balloon into the air.
3. The next student:
 - Shares their gratitude
 - Gently taps, tosses, or passes the balloon to the student next to them (or completes these steps in the reverse order).
4. Continue around the circle, supporting students with prompts if needed:
 - “Someone who helps you.”
 - “Something that made you smile today.”
 - “A favourite activity or place.”

..... All forms of sharing are accepted, spoken words, gestures, pointing to visuals, or AAC.

Step 2: Add a Challenge (Optional)

Choose one option to extend the game:

- Add a second balloon to encourage teamwork
- Change direction when the teacher calls “Switch!”
- Use music, when the music stops, the student with the balloon shares gratitude

Keep the pace light and supportive rather than competitive.

Gameplay option 2.

Step 1: Hit and Thank

- The students select one of the gratitude visual cards they would like to focus on and demonstrate their appreciation for. They place the card on the floor between their feet or in-front of them.
- Play the game as per the steps above, however for this version leave out the step where students need to verbalise something they are grateful for before or after each tap of the balloon.
- In this version simply let the students keep the balloon in the air using teamwork or get them to pass the balloon around the circle trying to be intentional with passing it along to the next person in the circle.
- Upon completing a full circle of taps from the group or when the balloon hits the ground as the students to pick their visual gratitude cards up and share it with the class (adults can help to narrate where needed).
- Students can then select a new visual gratitude card and play the game again.



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Debrief / Reflection

Bring students back together and ask one question at a time:

- "How did it feel to share something you're thankful for?"
- "Did you hear something that made you smile?"
- "Who could you share gratitude with at home?"

Reinforce the message:

"Gratitude helps us feel happy and connected."

Winning the Game

There are no winners or losers.

Success is shown through sharing, listening, and playing together kindly.

Sensory-Specific Learner Variation

Purpose: To support regulation and comfort during active play.

Adjustments include:

- Use a larger balloon or beach ball for slower movement.
- Play seated in a circle for predictability.
- Reduce noise and remove music if needed.
- Allow students to observe first and join when ready.
- Offer short movement breaks between rounds.

AAC-Specific Supports

1. Prepare AAC in Advance

- Pages with: thank you, happy, family, friend, play, food, home

2. Model AAC Use

- Teacher models selecting a gratitude symbol before tapping the balloon

3. Supported Participation

- Students may:
 - Select a symbol
 - Use eye gaze
 - Activate a single-message button
 - Point to a visual card

4. AAC Reflection

- Ask: "What are you thankful for?"
- Students respond using AAC, gesture, or pointing



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Accessibility and Inclusion Notes

- Ensure the circle is spaced to allow wheelchair access and easy movement.
- Accept tapping, rolling, or directing the balloon verbally as valid participation.
- Provide alternative roles such as caller, encourager, or balloon launcher.
- Celebrate all contributions equally, verbal and non-verbal.

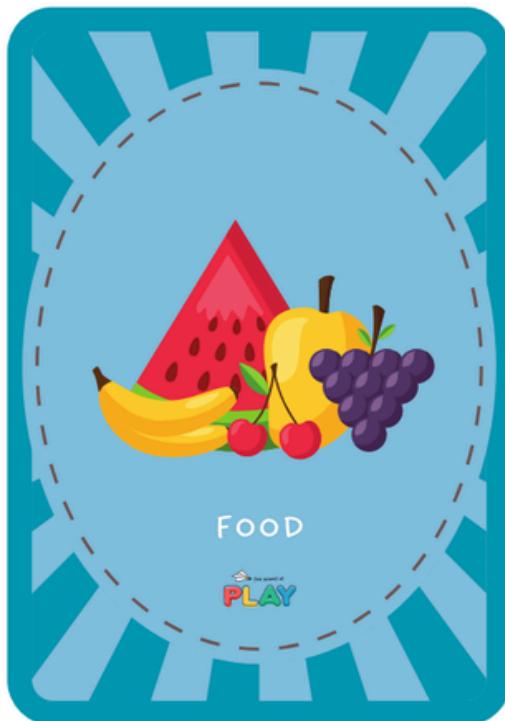
Teacher Notes

“Gratitude Balloon Toss – Levels C & D” supports gratitude, cooperation, and joyful engagement. Linked to the Saturn theme, it reinforces that appreciation grows stronger when shared. This activity works well as a warm-up, reflection activity, or positive close to a session, leaving students feeling connected, valued, and uplifted.

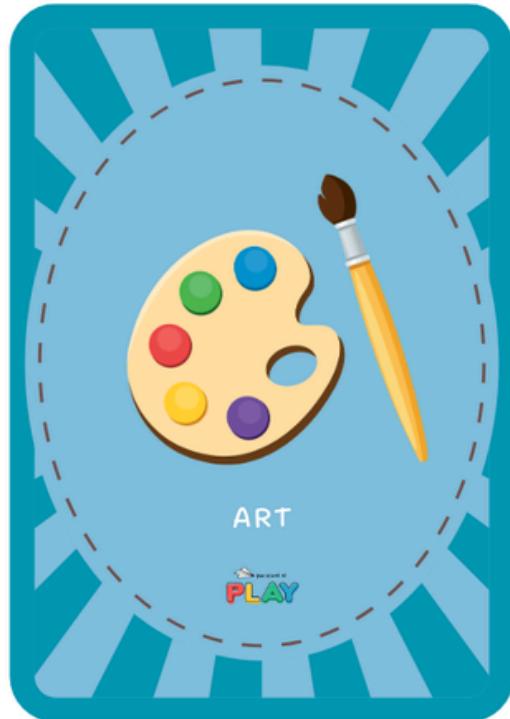
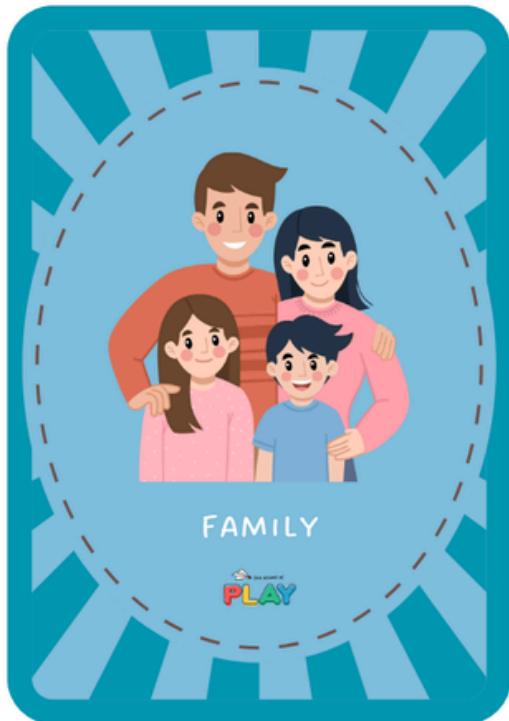


GRATITUDE PROMPT CARDS

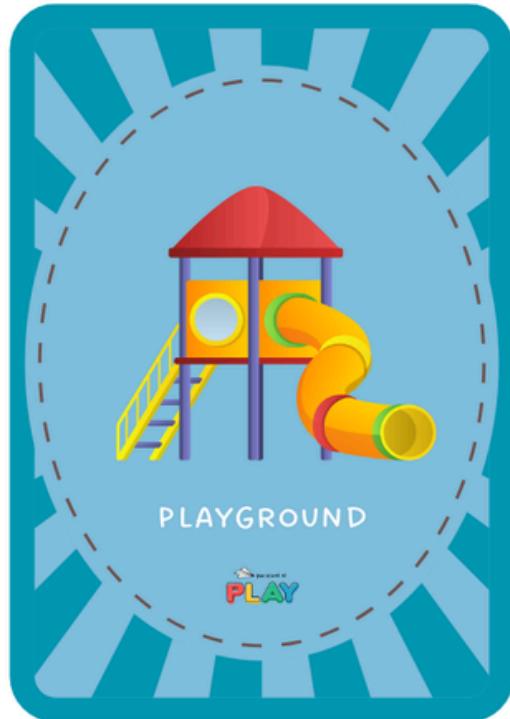
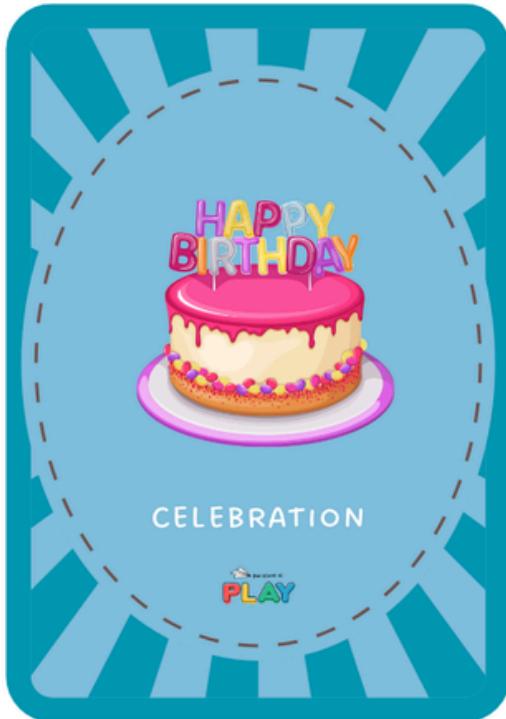
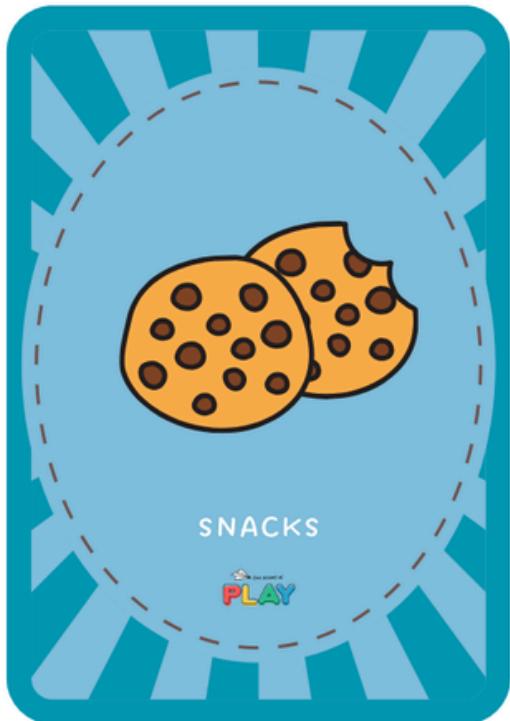
PRINT AND CUT OUT THE CARDS. STUDENTS TOSS OR PASS THE BALLOON, THEN CHOOSE A CARD TO SHOW OR SHARE SOMETHING THEY ARE THANKFUL FOR USING SPEECH, GESTURE, POINTING, OR AAC. CONTINUE TO PLAY AROUND THE CIRCLE, SUPPORTING TURN-TAKING AND MODELLING GRATITUDE LANGUAGE.



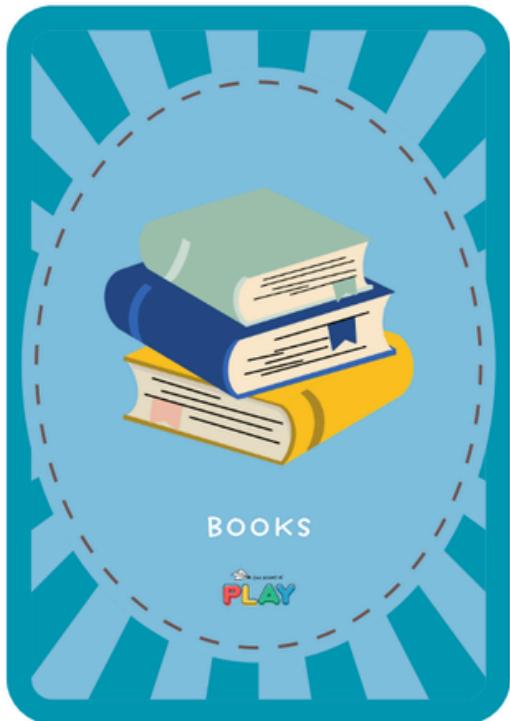
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