

Gratitude Balloon Toss - Levels F-3

PLAY

To promote the life skill of gratitude by encouraging students to express appreciation while engaged in a playful balloon-tossing activity. Saturn, known for its beautiful rings, reminds us that grateful thoughts create connection and joy, circling outwards like ripples of kindness.



Learning Intentions



Students will learn to think of things they are thankful for. This supports emotional awareness and appreciation.

Students will practise taking turns and listening while playing a group game. This promotes cooperation and respectful communication.

Students will learn to share their gratitude in a fun and playful way. This helps connect positive feelings to social experiences.



Success Criteria

I can name something I'm thankful for out loud.
This builds verbal confidence and recognition of the good in life.



I can safely toss and catch the balloon with my friends.
This improves coordination and teamwork.

I can listen to what others are thankful for.
This builds empathy and attentiveness.



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Objective:

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Players:

Ideal for 4–26 students in a safe, open space.

Materials:

- 1–2 large balloons (lightweight and safe for indoor use)
- Optional: Music for an added rhythm or pause function
- Optional: Visual cue cards with gratitude ideas (e.g., family, pets, nature)(you could brainstorm a list of things/people/experiences students feel grateful for).

Time Required:

10–15 minutes

Setup:

Begin by reading the Saturn page from *The Playful Astronauts*. Ask students:

- “What is gratitude?”
- “How does it feel when we say thank you?”
- “Why is it important to notice what we’re grateful for?”

Gather students in a large circle or open space. Blow up the balloon and explain the activity.

Gameplay:

Step 1 – Hit and Thank:

Explain: “We’re going to pass this balloon around the circle by hitting it in the air and not allowing it to hit the floor. But before you hit it towards a friend, you need to say one thing you are thankful for.”

Demonstrate:

- “I’m thankful for my dog.” *Hit the balloon in the air!*
- “I’m thankful for lunch.” *Hit the balloon in the air!*

If students get stuck, you can prompt them with ideas:

- Someone in their family
- A toy they love
- A friend or classmate
- Something that made them smile today
- Something they are looking forward to
- Something fun that has happened to them

Keep the game light and joyful. The balloon can be bounced, tapped, or gently tossed.

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Step 2 – Add a Challenge (Optional):

Introduce a second balloon or change direction mid-game to keep students engaged. You can also use music: when the music stops, the person holding the balloon shares something they're thankful for. Continue to add in more balloons if the students can keep them off the ground as a team (encourage teamwork!).

Step 3 – Reflection:

At the end of the activity, ask:

- “How did it feel to say things we're grateful for?”
- “Did anything someone else say make you smile too?”
- “Can we try doing this at home or with our family?”

Winning the Game:

There is no winner. The real reward is in expressing thankfulness and hearing others do the same, creating a ring of gratitude that connects everyone, just like Saturn's beautiful rings.

Variations:

Younger Students:

Use visual prompt cards with simple gratitude images (e.g., a heart, a tree, a sun, a pet). When they hit the balloon, they can point to or name one image instead of forming a full sentence.

Older Students:

Have them expand their gratitude response by explaining *why* they're thankful (e.g., “I'm thankful for my best friend because they make me laugh.”).

Partner Version:

Students play in pairs, passing the balloon back and forth and taking turns saying what they're thankful for.

Calm Reflection Edition:

Instead of active tossing, use a single balloon or soft ball. Each student holds it, shares something they're thankful for, and passes it on quietly, promoting calm gratitude and mindfulness.

Family Edition:

Encourage students to teach this game at home with their families, turning gratitude into a fun daily ritual that keeps everyone smiling and connected.



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For Wheelchair Users / Accessibility:

- Play in a seated circle where the balloon can be gently tapped, rolled, or passed between players.
- Ensure adequate space for mobility aids and that all students can reach or hit the balloon comfortably.
- Use a lightweight beach ball or larger balloon for slower, easier movement.
- For students with limited mobility, allow them to verbally cue another player (“Hit it to Sam!”) or share their gratitude aloud as part of the team effort.
- Students with communication devices can use preloaded gratitude words or images to share their thankful messages.

Notes for Inclusion:

- Reinforce that *everyone’s gratitude matters*, whether it’s big or small, silly or serious.
- Model vulnerability by sharing your own gratitude first (e.g., “I’m thankful for playing this game with all of you!”).
- Celebrate all contributions equally, smiles, gestures, and participation count as expressions of gratitude.
- Encourage positive listening: after each student shares, the group can say together, “That’s something to be thankful for!”
- Support quieter students by letting them whisper their gratitude to a teacher or partner if they prefer.
- End the session with a collective affirmation:
- “When we share what we’re thankful for, our hearts grow bigger and brighter, just like Saturn’s beautiful rings.”

Additional Notes:

“Gratitude Balloon Toss” turns appreciation into a game of joy and connection. Students learn that gratitude is not only a quiet feeling. It can also be shared, celebrated, and bounced around a room like the most wonderful kind of energy. Just like Saturn’s rings, our thankfulness circles back and brings us closer together.



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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SNACKS



TECHNOLOGY



CELEBRATION



PLAYGROUND



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