

Celebrations of Gratitude & Thanksgiving

WEEK #1

“WORKING TOGETHER BLESSES ALL”

Overall Lesson Intention

The intention of this lesson is to understand that helping others and giving from the heart brings us all together.

Spiritual Principle & Purpose

To teach and demonstrate:

- ◆ When we give from our heart, it blesses the world.
- ◆ Even the smallest thing is a blessing if it is given freely from the heart.
- ◆ We all are capable of caring for our little corner of the world.
- ◆ We never know whom we will bless so it is important to always spread the Truth we know.

Affirmation

What I give blesses the world.

Prayer Focus

“Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”
1 Thessalonians 5:18

PRESCHOOL SACRED CIRCLE

Come To the Circle

Move the children into the circle with song.

Set Up Circle

- Put the pieces out
- Light the Candle

Introductions

Ask each child to say their name and then ask what motion they would like to be greeted with. *(Example: Tap fingers; clap; pat head; stomp feet; wiggle.)*

Then say: (Motion) hello to (Name, name, name), (motion) hello to (name) we love you!

Sacred Breath

This is the time when we use a breathing exercise to de-stress and to move our attention into the present moment. If the children are distracted and moving around it will be more difficult for them to pay attention to what is happening in the circle.

Breathing Examples Include:

- Be a Balloon: Extend your arms out to your sides, about waist high. Then breathe in by taking small breaths through your nose and with each breath, raise your arms until your hands meet over your head. It is like pumping up a balloon. Hold for a few seconds and then release your breath as if you were a balloon deflating.
- Be a Drain: Tighten up all of your muscles - even your face. Lift your shoulders as high as they will go and clench your fists. Hold for a few seconds and then relax everything allowing the tensions to leave your body.

Share A Prayer

- Wear their prayer shawls.
- Share a prayer.

Love Offering

Lead the children in blessing the love offering by inviting them to hold their offering in their hand (their offering can be money or can be anything they would like to bless the world with, such as: love, joy, peace) and pray the blessing of your choice. Then pass the basket and invite each child to add their offering.

PRESCHOOL LESSON

Story

The Story of Thanksgiving By Nancy J. Skarmear

The book tells the story of Thanksgiving in a way that is easy for preschoolers to comprehend.

Discussion

- What do we celebrate at Thanksgiving?
- How did we help the pilgrims?
- What were the pilgrims thankful for?
- How did the Native Americans help the pilgrims?
- What do you eat for Thanksgiving?
- What are you thankful for?

Creative Experience Choices

I Am Thankful for My Friends

Supplies: paper, tape, and crayons.

Give each child a sheet of construction paper and invite them to draw pictures of the anyone or anything they are grateful for.

Music-Makers

Supplies: small cardboard tubes, beans or rice, plastic wrap, rubber bands, wrapping paper, curling ribbon, and clear cellophane tape.

Say: To celebrate their new home and friendships, the Pilgrims and American Indians had the very first Thanksgiving dinner. They wanted to give thanks to God for all the ways that he had taken care of them and given them what they needed. We're going to sing a song of thanksgiving to God with all of our friends-just as the Pilgrims did-but first we need to make musical instruments.

Give each child a paper tube. Wrap plastic around one end of the tube and secure it with a rubber band. Put about 1/2 cup rice or beans in the tube, then wrap the other end with plastic and a rubber band. Help children wrap and tape the wrapping paper around their tubes. Twist the ends of the paper and tie curling ribbon around the ends.

Lead the children in dancing around the room, playing their music makers in gratitude for all of the blessings we have.

ELEMENTARY & TWEENS SACRED CIRCLE

Uniting Affirmation

Invite one of the children to create an affirmation that affirms the lesson of the day, for example: My name is _____. I am _____. The rest of the circle then affirms the first child by saying, "(Name), you are _____." The next child then repeats the affirmation and is affirmed by the circle. This continues until all of the children and teachers have been affirmed.

The Blessing

This activity gives the children the opportunity to bless all those present and all those who could not be with them for the day. This helps the children to know that their presence in the classroom is important and that they are missed when they are absent.

Lead the children in a blessing for all those who are part of your spiritual family.

Sacred Breath

This is the time when we use a breathing exercise to de-stress and to move our attention into the present moment. If the children are distracted and moving around it will be more difficult for them to pay attention to what is happening in the circle.

Breathing Examples Include:

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- Be a Drain: Tighten up all of your muscles - even your face. Lift your shoulders as high as they will go and clench your fists. Hold for a few seconds and then relax everything allowing the tensions to leave your body.

Share A Prayer (Wear your prayer shawls)

Share the, "Prayer for Protection," or another prayer that you would like the children to know.

Love Offering

Lead the children in blessing the love offering by inviting them to hold their offering in their hand (their offering can be money or can be anything they would like to bless the world with, such as: love, joy, peace) and pray the blessing of your choice. Then pass the basket and invite each child to add their offering.

Celebrations

Invite the children to share something they would like to celebrate. Use noise makers and pom-poms to cheer after each celebration.

ELEMENTARY & TWEENS LESSON

Story

Stone Soup by Jon Muth

This is the story of how frightened villagers were able to open their hearts and discover all they had to give.

Interpretation

When we hide from our fears and are suspicious of everyone, we forget that we have wonderful gifts to give. Opening our hearts through giving has the capacity to change our lives.

Discussion

- How does the story begin?
- What question was asked?
- What were the villagers afraid of and why?
- How did the villagers behave?
- Who greeted the monks when they arrived?
- What experience did the monks have next?
- What did the young girl ask them?
- How did she help?
- How did the villagers respond to what the monks were doing?
- How did the villagers help?
- What did they do when the soup was finished?
- What did they remember about themselves because of the making of the soup?
- How did they willingness to give change their lives?
- What is something you have in your heart that you would be willing to give?
- How does giving make you feel?
- How does helping someone else make the world a better place?

Creative Experience Choices

Harvest Stew

Supplies: small pretzels, chocolate chips and popcorn, 3 small bowls, re-sealable plastic bags, message notes.

Today we will create a Harvest Stew that will help us to remember that the energy of God is always there to support us. When we focus on the power of Spirit in our lives and know that God is our Source for all good then we feel empowered.

- Fill one small bowl with pretzels, one with chocolate chips and one with popcorn.
- Print enough copies of the following notes so that each child has one.
- Invite the children to fill their bags with the pretzels, chocolate chips and popcorn and come to back to the circle.
- Hand each one the notes with the descriptions printed on it.
 - **Pretzels:** mean that God is always there even when life gets “twisted up.”
 - **Chocolate:** stands for the sweet presence of the Christ within.
 - **Popcorn:** means that we can always go within and connect with our Christ presence and it will help up “pop” back when life gets rough.

- Now refer back to the events of the story. How might the friends in the story have made use of the ideas in this treat?
 - When were they “**Twisted Up**” and what might have helped them calm down?
 - How would knowing that God lives within us, have helped them?
 - What could they have done that would have helped them “pop” back into being best friends?

Bird, Beast, Fish

Supplies: None

You have to think fast for this game. Everyone sits facing the leader. The leader points to one of the players and says either "BIRD," "BEAST," or "FISH."

The chosen player must come up with the name of an animal that fits the category before the leader counts to ten. **No repeating!**

If the player does not respond in time, he/she is out. The game continues until only one player remains. As you can guess, after a few rounds it can be hard to think of an animal that has not already been mentioned!

Play the game again. This time divide the children into teams of at least 3. Give the teams time to come up with a lot of possibilities for each Bird, Beast, or Fish category.

The teams sit together facing the leader. The leader points to one of the players and says either "BIRD," "BEAST," or "FISH." The chosen player must come up with the name of an animal that fits the category before the leader counts to ten. His/her teammates can help him/her. **No repeating!**

Explore the difference between having to rely only on yourself and having a group of friends willing to help you.

TEENS SACRED CIRCLE

Share the Joy

The purpose of this activity is to invite the students into the facilitation of the classroom experience. Responsibilities written on the stones include: Read Opening Prayer; Take Attendance; Lead the Sacred Breathing; Start the Affirmation; Lead the Whip; Lead the Love Offering Blessing, Read the Story, Lead the Questioning, Lead the Joy Songs, Light the Christ Candle, etc...

Supplies: Basket filled with the above stones

Invite each student to select a stone from the basket and perform the responsibility written on it.

Opening Prayer

(Wear your prayer shawls.) Invite one of the students to lead the opening prayer or to read, The Daily Word.

Sacred Breath

This is the time when we use a breathing exercise to de-stress and to move our attention into the present moment. If the students are distracted and still focusing on life outside of church, they will not be fully present.

Close your eyes and focus on your breathing. Move your focus to your heart center and feel your breath moving in and out through your heart. Spend a few moments focusing on the heart breath. Now bring to mind someone or something you deeply appreciate. Allow the feeling of appreciation to fill your whole body. Sit in this heart breathing, feeling the appreciation that has filled your whole body. Allow the feeling of appreciation to extend out from you and move out into the circle around you. Open your eyes and feel the peace in your heart.

Affirmation

Go around the circle and invite each student to share their name and one word of affirmation.

Whip

Whip around the circle inviting each student to briefly say how they are feeling and to share a prayer request.

Love Offering

Invite one of the students to lead the blessing of the love offering.

Meditation

Invite the students to lead the meditation.

TEENS LESSON

The ideas in this teen lesson was inspired by www.learningtogive.org

Video

It's Up to Us (The Giraffe Project) a 7 minute video found at

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b60gGhxig-Y>

Exploring the question: How might individuals and society address the issues of poverty, homelessness and hunger, and their underlying causes?

Intention

The learners will define philanthropy and identify past and present individuals or small groups who have voluntarily made a difference in their communities or the world. They will explore the opportunity cost as well as the impact and rewards of "joining hands" with those who have volunteered in the past in promoting the common good and a more civil society.

Discussion

Discussion

- What is a hero?
- What do heroes do?
- What motivated the writer to look for positive examples of people making a difference?
- What is the Giraffe Project?
- What does it take to be a Giraffe?
- What does this inspire you to do as an individual, as a group?

Creative Experience

Blue Sky Activity

Supplies: 8 1/2 x 11 paper (blue if possible), enough for each participant; Crayons, markers, colored pencils

Discuss the meaning of community as it relates to the student's experience:

- Home, school, friends, neighborhood, city, state, country, and world.

Ask students to identify what is good about their community and what they would like to see improved or changed. Create a chart to fill-in as the students discuss:

Home	Change or Improve

Give each student a piece of blue paper.

Invite students to portray their ideal world or what they would like their world to look like in 10 years—what the world/community could look like if everyone worked together. Students can draw, color, paint, or create collages on their blue paper.

When the students are finished allow each student time to share their creation with the class. Record students' thoughts and ideas on a display board, and identify and reflect on some of the recurring themes. This can be helpful in identifying student interests for planning of service projects.

As a class, briefly brainstorm ideas on how to achieve the vision and what challenges they might face in achieving "the ideal."

Create a "permanent display" of the students' illustrations. The student papers can be combined into a collage, quilt, or bulletin board display. A paper "quilt" may be rolled up and stored and brought out for appropriate discussions.

Celebrations of Gratitude & Thanksgiving

WEEK #2

“GIVING & SHARING MULTIPLIES BLESSINGS”

Overall Lesson Intention

The intention of this lesson to understand that when we appreciate something and are willing to share it, our good multiplies.

Spiritual Principle & Purpose

To teach and demonstrate:

- ◆ God is always present within us.
- ◆ God provides all we need.
- ◆ The more we give thanks for what God provides – the more we see the blessings in our lives.

Affirmation

God is always within me, providing all I need.

Prayer Focus

“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.

Psalm 23:5

PRESCHOOL SACRED CIRCLE

Come To the Circle

Move the children into the circle with song.

Set Up Circle

- **Put the pieces out**
- **Light the Candle**

Introductions

Ask each child to say their name and then ask what motion they would like to be greeted with. (*Example: Tap fingers; clap; pat head; stomp feet; wiggle.*)

Then say: (Motion) hello to (Name, name, name), (motion) hello to (name) we love you!

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Breathing Examples Include:

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- **Be a Drain:** Tighten up all of your muscles - even your face. Lift your shoulders as high as they will go and clench your fists. Hold for a few seconds and then relax everything allowing the tensions to leave your body.

Share A Prayer

- Wear their prayer shawls.
- Share a prayer.

Love Offering

Lead the children in blessing the love offering by inviting them to hold their offering in their hand (their offering can be money or can be anything they would like to bless the world with, such as: love, joy, peace) and pray the blessing of your choice. Then pass the basket and invite each child to add their offering.

PRESCHOOL LESSON

Story

The Night Before Thanksgiving By Natasha Wing

This story is about all of the blessings that we share at Thanksgiving.

Discussion

- What was happening on the night before Thanksgiving?
- What did the kids do on Thanksgiving morning?
- Who were they expecting to come visit?
- What are some of the things they did together?
- What did they do right before they ate?
- What were they grateful for?
- Who do you celebrate with?
- What kind of things does your family give thanks for?

Creative Experience Choices

I Am Thankful

Supplies: A basket filled with things that will help the kids remember things they are thankful for, i.e.: an apple, a toy car, a stuffed animal, a ring, a key, or a school paper.

After reading the above story and helping the children understand how important it is to be thankful for what we have, invite the children think of things they are grateful for by showing the items one by one.

Say, "This is a traditional basket. Just by looking at it, I'm reminded of Thanksgiving. Inside are some items that might remind you of some things to thank God for. For example, when I pull out this apple, you might think of all the good food God has provided for you. Or you might thank God for good health. When I show you something from the basket, get ready to tell how it reminds you of some way that God has blessed you. After each item we'll all say "Thank you, God."

(Allow several responses.) Are you surprised at some of the things you remembered? Why do you think it's important to remember to be grateful for our blessings?

Thankful Hands

Supplies: Construction paper, scissors and markers.

Trace your child's hand on construction paper and cut it out. Ask him/her to write or draw a picture about something or someone he/she is thankful for on each "finger." Talk to him/her about the value of being thankful. Explain that it's OK to be grateful for things as well as people.

ELEMENTARY SACRED CIRCLE

Uniting Affirmation

Invite one of the children to create an affirmation that affirms the lesson of the day, for example: My name is _____. I am _____. The rest of the circle then affirms the first child by saying, “(Name), you are _____.” The next child then repeats the affirmation and is affirmed by the circle. This continues until all of the children and teachers have been affirmed.

The Blessing

This activity gives the children the opportunity to bless all those present and all those who could not be with them for the day. This helps the children to know that their presence in the classroom is important and that they are missed when they are absent.

Lead the children in a blessing for all those who are part of your spiritual family.

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Love Offering

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Celebrations

Invite the children to share something they would like to celebrate. Use noise makers and pom-poms to cheer after each celebration.

ELEMENTARY LESSON

Story

Pumpkin Soup By Helen Cooper

This is the story of some friends who liked to make soup together and what happened when one of them wanted to make a change.

Interpretation

Sometimes we get stuck in expecting our friends to always act in the same way and when things changed, we get angry or upset. When we are willing to remember what we love most about our friends and to appreciate what they bring to our lives, then we are able to be in a state of gratitude.

Discussion

- What lived deep in the woods?
- What did each one contribute to the making of the soup?
- How did they feel about everyone having their own job to do?
- What did the duck do the next morning?
- How did the others respond to his demand?
- What happened next?
- What happened when the duck did not come home to help make the soup?
- How were they feeling about the missing duck?
- What did they find when they got home?
- What changed about how they made their soup?
- What do you think might have caused the duck to want to stir the soup?
- How do you think the cat and squirrel felt about things changing?
- What did they learn about friendship?
- How do you think they came to appreciate each other more deeply?
- Why is it important to appreciate our friends for the way they are?
- What does it feel like when your friends or family accept you for who you are?
- How does it feel when people don't accept you?
- How does being grateful for our friends and appreciating them help to create good friendships?
- What are some ways you can show others that you appreciate them.

Creative Experience Choices

The Unlimited Love of God

Supplies: A large sheet of paper with 'GOD'S LOVE' written in large letters on it, and a pair of scissors

Show everyone the paper with GOD'S LOVE written on it. Explain that God's love is something we can all have and we can also all give away. Point out that in this case God's love has "4 corners."

Ask, "If I were to give you one of my corners of God's Love how many would I have left?" Some will surely answer 3. Then show them that God's love is unlimited.

Give one student the scissors and invite them to cut off one of the corners. Count the corners now. "I gave one away, and now I've got FIVE!" (*A corner is wherever a point is remaining on the paper.*)

Continue in this way, inviting 3 students to cut off each of the remaining three initial corners.

Look at the remaining sheet of paper. Explain that you end up with MORE corners of God's Love every time you give one away. In the same way, the more of God's Love you give away, the bigger it gets..." PS: - keep on going and cutting off the corners and you get a circle - God's love encircling us!

Gratitude Tree

Materials: The shape of a large tree drawn on the wall or a large sheet of paper, markers and leaf shapes for each child.

Invite the children to think of all the things they are grateful for and write each one on a leaf shape. Mount the leaves on the tree branches.

"Rejoice in the Lord always: again I will say, Rejoice...In nothing be anxious; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God."

The more blessings you give the more leaves fill your tree – the more beautiful it is...

TWEENS & TEENS SACRED CIRCLE

Share the Joy

The purpose of this activity is to invite the students into the facilitation of the classroom experience. Responsibilities written on the stones include: Read Opening Prayer; Take Attendance; Lead the Sacred Breathing; Start the Affirmation; Lead the Whip; Lead the Love Offering Blessing, Read the Story, Lead the Questioning, Lead the Joy Songs, Light the Christ Candle, etc...

Supplies: Basket filled with the above stones

Invite each student to select a stone from the basket and perform the responsibility written on it.

Opening Prayer

(Wear your prayer shawls.) Invite one of the students to lead the opening prayer or to read, The Daily Word.

Sacred Breath

This is the time when we use a breathing exercise to de-stress and to move our attention into the present moment. If the students are distracted and still focusing on life outside of church, they will not be fully present.

Close your eyes and focus on your breathing. Move your focus to your heart center and feel your breath moving in and out through your heart. Spend a few moments focusing on the heart breath. Now bring to mind someone or something you deeply appreciate. Allow the feeling of appreciation to fill your whole body. Sit in this heart breathing, feeling the appreciation that has filled your whole body. Allow the feeling of appreciation to extend out from you and move out into the circle around you. Open your eyes and feel the peace in your heart.

Affirmation

Go around the circle and invite each student to share their name and one word of affirmation.

Whip

Whip around the circle inviting each student to briefly say how they are feeling and to share a prayer request.

TWEENS & TEENS LESSON

Tweens/Teens Story

Feeding of the 5000 *Matthew 14:15-21*

When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, “This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves.” Jesus said to them, “They need not go away; you give them something to eat.” They replied, “We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish.” And he said, “Bring them here to me.” Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. And those who were about 5000 men, besides women and children.

Interpretation

Even though appearances may say otherwise – God always provides everything we need.

Discussion

- How does the story begin?
 - What happens next?
 - How were they going to feed the people?
 - How did Jesus know there would be enough?
 - Tell me about a time when you thought there was not enough of something.
 - What did you do?
 - What were Jesus’ instructions on seeing the God provides for us always.
1. **Jesus ordered the crowd to sit down.** The first thing Jesus did when presented with the challenge was to sit down. This shows us that the first thing we need to do in face of any challenge is to quiet ourselves, go inside and center our heart and mind.
 2. **He looked up to heaven.** We must look away from the appearance of what is happening and look to the unseen. We must look into the situation and really see that God is present there no matter what our senses are telling us. We must remember to look to God for our abundance.
 3. **He then gave thanks.** He gave thanks **in advance** because He knew that God always provides for all of our needs. He demonstrated absolute faith. The only lack we really have in our lives is in not being prepared. Gratitude opens our consciousness to receive more.
 4. **He blessed what He had.** He focused on what He did have not on what He lacked. Sometimes when we are in difficult situations we can only see the problem and we need to be able to gather our wits and start to focus on the things we do have and the positive things we are able to do.
 5. **Jesus broke the bread.** When He broke the bread, He broke the appearance of lack and He broke the thoughts of lack. This shows us that we are to use what we have. If we use it wisely we make room for more. The law is we must give and then we will receive.

Creative Experience

Harvest Stew

Supplies: small pretzels, chocolate chips and popcorn, 3 small bowls, re-sealable plastic bags, message notes.

Today we will create a Harvest Stew that will help us to remember that the energy of God is always there to support us. When we focus on the power of Spirit in our lives and know that God is our Source for all good then we feel empowered.

- Fill one small bowl with pretzels, one with chocolate chips and one with popcorn.
- Print enough copies of the following notes so that each teen has one.
- Invite the teens to fill their bags with the pretzels, chocolate chips and popcorn and come to back to the circle.
- Hand each one the notes with the descriptions printed on it.
 - **Pretzels:** mean that God is always there even when life gets “twisted up.”
 - **Chocolate:** stands for the sweet presence of the Christ within.
 - **Popcorn:** means that we can always go within and connect with our Christ presence and it will help up “pop” back when life gets rough.
- Now referring to their lives, how can each teen make use of the ideas found here?
 - When you are “**Twisted Up**” and what can you do to calm yourself down?
 - How does knowing that God lives within you, help you?
 - When you are angry at your friends, what can help you “pop” back into being peace?

Celebrations of Gratitude & Thanksgiving

WEEK #3

“SEEING BLESSINGS EVERYWHERE”

Overall Lesson Intention

The intention of this lesson to understand that when we acknowledge the blessings in our life, however small, we begin to notice them more and more and we see how rich our life really is.

Spiritual Principle & Purpose

To teach and demonstrate:

- ◆ There is good in everything.
- ◆ It is important to acknowledge the blessings as they show up in our lives.
- ◆ The more we give thanks for what God provides – the more we see the blessings in our lives.

Affirmation

My life is filled with blessings from Spirit.

Prayer Focus

“God is the one who gives seed to the farmer. And He gives bread for food. And God will give you all the seed you need and make it grow. He will make a great harvest from your goodness.” *2 Corinthians 9:10*

PRESCHOOL SACRED CIRCLE

Come To the Circle

Move the children into the circle with song.

Set Up Circle

- **Put the pieces out**
- **Light the Candle**

Introductions

Ask each child to say their name and then ask what motion they would like to be greeted with. *(Example: Tap fingers; clap; pat head; stomp feet; wiggle.)*

Then say: (Motion) hello to (Name, name, name), (motion) hello to (name) we love you!

Sacred Breath

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Breathing Examples Include:

- **Be a Balloon:** Extend your arms out to your sides, about waist high. Then breathe in by taking small breaths through your nose and with each breath, raise your arms until your hands meet over your head. It is like pumping up a balloon. Hold for a few seconds and then release your breath as if you were a balloon deflating.
- **Be a Drain:** Tighten up all of your muscles - even your face. Lift your shoulders as high as they will go and clench your fists. Hold for a few seconds and then relax everything allowing the tensions to leave your body.

Share A Prayer

- Wear their prayer shawls.
- Share a prayer.

Love Offering

Lead the children in blessing the love offering by inviting them to hold their offering in their hand (their offering can be money or can be anything they would like to bless the world with, such as: love, joy, peace) and pray the blessing of your choice. Then pass the basket and invite each child to add their offering.

PRESCHOOL LESSON

Story

My Book of Thanks by B. G. Hennessy

This story is about all the ways to be grateful. It is about seeing blessings everywhere.

Discussion

- What is the person in the story giving thanks for?
- The person had many things to be grateful for. How do you show your loved ones that you are grateful for them?

Creative Experience Choices

Give Thanks

Supplies: Stuffed animal; praise music

For this game on being thankful, have children sit in a circle. Play praise music and have children pass an object, such as a foam ball or a stuffed animal. Pause the music at varying intervals. When the music stops, the person with the object must say one thing he or she is thankful for. Play the game until everyone gets at least one chance to express how they are thankful to God for something.

God's Many Blessings

Materials: water glass, pitchers of water, spoon, Cheerios, 10 to 20 marbles

Practice this a few times before class.

What you will do

You will ask a volunteer to pour water into the empty glass, and to make it as full as possible. Then you will float a cheerio and watch it move to the side of the glass. Then you will drop blessings (objects) into the glass of water one by one until the water swells over the top, but stop before it runs over. Then you will float another Cheerio, and it will stay in the center of the glass. (This works because of surface tension. When the water is first poured in, the surface of the water is shaped like a flattened "u" and the Cheerio wants to go the highest place it can find which is toward the side of the glass. After adding the blessings, the surface of the water is shaped like a flattened "n". Now the highest place is in the center.)

What you will say

In Psalm 23:5-6 King David said his cup was overflowing, not just full but more than full. Why does God give us so many blessings? Is it so we can be happy? (Yes) Is it so we can be safe and comfortable? (Yes) It is also so we can do great things for Him.

Let me show you what I mean. Here I have an empty glass, and a pitcher of water. I need a volunteer to pour the water carefully into the glass, as full as possible. (The child will fill the glass, but will normally stop before it begins to overflow - some coaching may be needed.) We now have a glass that looks full. Now, can we make this cheerio float in the center of the glass? Let's try. (Drop the cheerio onto the surface and watch as it moves to the edge of the glass.) Look, it goes to the edge of the glass.

What would happen if we add blessings? Let's pretend these marbles are blessings. (Add marbles one by one and as you do give an example of a blessing. Watch as the water rises over the brim and stops before it pours over the edge.)

Example: The clean air we breath Food to make us full A loving God
 People who care for us A place to worship God Good friends
 Rain to keep things green Good Health Teachers to teach us
 Ice Cream and other tasty treats

Because God gives us so many blessings, our cup is more than full. Let's see what happens now. (Drop another cheerio onto the surface.) Look! Now it stays right in the center. We can also do amazing things for God because of the blessings he gives us, like sharing Jesus with our friends, or singing in a choir, or helping to teach Sunday school. Not only can these be blessings to us, but they can also be some of the many blessings God gives to others. Let's thank God today for His many blessings.

ELEMENTARY SACRED CIRCLE

Uniting Affirmation

Invite one of the children to create an affirmation that affirms the lesson of the day, for example: My name is _____. I am _____. The rest of the circle then affirms the first child by saying, “(Name), you are _____.” The next child then repeats the affirmation and is affirmed by the circle. This continues until all of the children and teachers have been affirmed.

The Blessing

This activity gives the children the opportunity to bless all those present and all those who could not be with them for the day. This helps the children to know that their presence in the classroom is important and that they are missed when they are absent.

Lead the children in a blessing for all those who are part of your spiritual family.

Sacred Breath

This is the time when we use a breathing exercise to de-stress and to move our attention into the present moment. If the children are distracted and moving around it will be more difficult for them to pay attention to what is happening in the circle.

Breathing Examples Include:

- Be a Balloon: Extend your arms out to your sides, about waist high. Then breathe in by taking small breaths through your nose and with each breath, raise your arms until your hands meet over your head. It is like pumping up a balloon. Hold for a few seconds and then release your breath as if you were a balloon deflating.
- Be a Drain: Tighten up all of your muscles - even your face. Lift your shoulders as high as they will go and clench your fists. Hold for a few seconds and then relax everything allowing the tensions to leave your body.

Share A Prayer (Wear your prayer shawls)

Share the, Prayer for Protection,” or another prayer that you would like the children to know.

Love Offering

Lead the children in blessing the love offering by inviting them to hold their offering in their hand (their offering can be money or can be anything they would like to bless the world with, such as: love, joy, peace) and pray the blessing of your choice. Then pass the basket and invite each child to add their offering.

Celebrations

Invite the children to share something they would like to celebrate. Use noise makers and pom-poms to cheer after each celebration.

ELEMENTARY LESSON

Story

“Miss Rumphius” *By Barbara Cooney*

Interpretation: This is a story of a woman’s quest to make the world a more beautiful place. It tells us that if we each have the intention to contribute one small thing to make the world a better place – it will indeed become a better place for everyone and we will individually be blessed in the process.

Discussion

- Who is Alice?
- What did Alice want to do with her life?
- What did her Grandfather tell her she must do?
- After Alice grew up what did she set out to do?
- What experiences did she have in her life?
- What was the final thing Miss Rumphius wanted to do in her life?
- How was Miss Rumphius feeling?
- When spring came what did she see when she went outside?
- What was her wonderful idea?
- What did she do?
- How do you think she felt when she saw what she had done?
- How long did it take her to figure out how she could bless the world?
- How can we begin to discover how we can bless the world?
- What are some of your ideas?

Creative Experience Choices

Spreading Seeds

Materials: A large variety of seeds & beans, construction paper, tacky glue, and markers

You are being invited to accomplish one good deed today. So, using the seeds and beans, create a visual representation of what that will be. A philanthropic deed is something kind that you do for another without wanting anything in return.

Sample Ideas: (encourage them to come up with their own)

- They can make someone a gift that reminds them of how much they are loved.
- They can create coupons of things they will do.
- They can write a prayer that blesses a person or the whole world.
- They can create a group service project that many people will be blessed by.

Cornucopia Confusion

Supplies: A chair for each child, less one

All of the players will sit on chairs forming a circle. There should be one more player than there are chairs. The player without a chair is the leader. The leader points to each of the players naming each one with cornucopia names such as "Cranberry, Corn, Apple, Turkey," anything related to Thanksgiving.

After names are chosen, the leader calls out two names, for instance... "Turkey and potato!". When she calls the names, those two players must quickly switch places. The leader keeps calling at a quick pace, until suddenly she says "The cornucopia has tipped over!"

Everyone, including the leader, then scrambles for a new place. The player with out a seat, becomes the new leader. The leader may give the same name to more than one person. This game can be confusing at first, but it is also very fun!

Give Thanks

Supplies: Music; 3 or 4 stuffed animals.

For this game on being thankful, have children sit in a circle. Play praise music and have children pass an object 3 or 4 objects in rotating in assigned directions. Pause the music at varying intervals. *(The children will have to be sharp to keep passing things in the right directions, and they'll have to think of more things they're thankful for.)*

When the music stops, the person with the object must say one thing he or she is thankful for. Play the game until everyone gets at least one chance to express how they are thankful to God for something.

TEENS SACRED CIRCLE

Share the Joy

The purpose of this activity is to invite the students into the facilitation of the classroom experience. Responsibilities written on the stones include: Read Opening Prayer; Take Attendance; Lead the Sacred Breathing; Start the Affirmation; Lead the Whip; Lead the Love Offering Blessing, Read the Story, Lead the Questioning, Lead the Joy Songs, Light the Christ Candle, etc...

Supplies: Basket filled with the above stones

Invite each student to select a stone from the basket and perform the responsibility written on it.

Opening Prayer

(Wear your prayer shawls.) Invite one of the students to lead the opening prayer or to read, The Daily Word.

Sacred Breath

This is the time when we use a breathing exercise to de-stress and to move our attention into the present moment. If the students are distracted and still focusing on life outside of church, they will not be fully present.

Close your eyes and focus on your breathing. Move your focus to your heart center and feel your breath moving in and out through your heart. Spend a few moments focusing on the heart breath. Now bring to mind someone or something you deeply appreciate. Allow the feeling of appreciation to fill your whole body. Sit in this heart breathing, feeling the appreciation that has filled your whole body. Allow the feeling of appreciation to extend out from you and move out into the circle around you. Open your eyes and feel the peace in your heart.

Affirmation

Go around the circle and invite each student to share their name and one word of affirmation.

Whip

Whip around the circle inviting each student to briefly say how they are feeling and to share a prayer request.

TWEENS & TEENS LESSON

Story

The Stone Cutter

There once was a stonecutter who lived alone. Though he had acquired a great skill, he was very poor. He lived in a tiny bamboo hut and his clothing was tattered.

One day as the stonecutter was working with hammer and chisel upon a huge stone, he heard the crowd gathering along the streets. By their shouts he could tell that the king was coming to visit his humble village. Joining the procession, the stonecutter gazed in awe as the king, dressed in marvelous silk, was greeted by his subjects. "Oh, how I wish I had the power and glory of the king," he thought. "He has soldiers at his command. There is no one more powerful than our king."

His cry was heard in the heavens, and immediately the humble stonecutter was transformed into a powerful king. He found himself riding on a great horse, waving at the crowds of people who flocked to see him. "This is power," he thought.

As summer progressed, however, the new king watched the effects of the heat upon his people. Men and animals became weary, and plants withered under the powerful rays of the sun. As he looked at the sky, the new king realized that the sun was far more powerful than any earthly ruler. "How I wish I were as powerful as that," he thought. "I wish I were the sun." Immediately his wish was granted.

How the stonecutter relished his new role as the sun. He gloried in the power he felt as he surveyed the kingdoms below him. As he sent bright rays to the earth, he watched kings and princes hide under their parasols, he watched as powerful warriors became weak under his gaze. Even the crops in the field were under his command.

Then one day a tiny cloud moved over the land, shielding the earth from the sun's bright rays. Seeing that here was something more powerful, he thought, "I want very much to be a cloud." Again his wish was granted.

Now he blocked the sun's rays and felt important. He gathered all of his strength, becoming a gigantic cloud, and began to pour down rain on the earth. Rivers formed where previously there were none, and water flooded the streets of the cities and the farmland. Everything – trees, animals, people – seemed to be awed by his power. Everything except a huge rock that remained untouched. Again he had discovered something more powerful. "There is nothing," he thought, "as powerful as a rock. How I wish I were a huge stone." His wish was granted.

As a stone he remained motionless and powerful, unmoved by either sun or rain or anything that nature could bring. The stonecutter felt exempt from all of the forces that shaped the life and existence of those around him.

Then one day a man approached him, carrying a bag. When he stopped, he pulled out a chisel and a hammer and began to chip away at the rock. Realizing that the man with the tools was more powerful than any rock, he cried out, "Oh, I want to be a stonecutter." Once again his wish was granted, and he lived in a bamboo hut and made a living with his hammer and chisel. And he was content.

Interpretation

When we are grateful for what we have we can more easily see just how blessed we are.

Discussion

- Who is this story about?
- What is the main character doing?
- What does he want?
- What keeps happening to him, over and over again?
- What caused him to want to be other things?
- What one thing was he forgetting about himself?
- Why is being thankful for who we are important?
- Tell me about a time when you wished you were someone else?
- Did you ever get back to being who you really are?
- What are you grateful for?

Creative Experience Choices

This Is a What?

Supplies: A variety of everyday objects

Another game that seems simpler than it is. Have everyone sit in a circle. Pick up an object, *(For this example you selected a candle)* and say to the group, "This is a candle." They ask, "A what?" You respond, "A candle, but it is so much more..., It is..... (Fill in the blank with ideas about the metaphysics of the object, such as: "It represents the God light within me...")"

Continue around the circle with each teen selecting an object and sharing the deeper meaning of it.

Discuss with them how important it is to look past experiences and see the blessings within.

Give Thanks

Supplies: Music; 3 or 4 stuffed animals.

For this game on being thankful, have teens sit in a circle. Play praise music and have teens pass an object 3 or 4 objects in rotating in assigned directions. Pause the music at varying intervals. *(The teens will have to be sharp to keep passing things in the right directions, and they'll have to think of more things they're thankful for.)*

When the music stops, the person with the object must say one thing he or she is thankful for. Play the game until everyone gets at least one chance to express how they are thankful to God for something.

Celebrations of Gratitude & Thanksgiving

WEEK #4 “I AM GRATEFUL”

Overall Lesson Intention

The intention is to celebrate all we are thankful for.

Spiritual Principle & Purpose

To teach and demonstrate:

- ◆ God is always present within us.
- ◆ God provides all we need.
- ◆ The more we give thanks for what God provides – the more we see the blessings in our lives.

Affirmation

I am thankful for the good in my life.

Prayer Focus

“Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name.” Psalm 100:4

PRESCHOOL SACRED CIRCLE

Come To the Circle

Move the children into the circle with song.

Set Up Circle

- Put the pieces out
- Light the Candle

Introductions

Ask each child to say their name and then ask what motion they would like to be greeted with. (Example: *Tap fingers; clap; pat head; stomp feet; wiggle.*)

Then say: (Motion) hello to (Name, name, name), (motion) hello to (name) we love you!

Sacred Breath

This is the time when we use a breathing exercise to de-stress and to move our attention into the present moment. If the children are distracted and moving around it will be more difficult for them to pay attention to what is happening in the circle.

Breathing Examples Include:

- Be a Balloon: Extend your arms out to your sides, about waist high. Then breathe in by taking small breaths through your nose and with each breath, raise your arms until your hands meet over your head. It is like pumping up a balloon. Hold for a few seconds and then release your breath as if you were a balloon deflating.
- Be a Drain: Tighten up all of your muscles – even your face. Lift your shoulders as high as they will go and clench your fists. Hold for a few seconds and then relax everything allowing the tensions to leave your body.

Share A Prayer

- Wear their prayer shawls.
- Share a prayer.

Love Offering

Lead the children in blessing the love offering by inviting them to hold their offering in their hand (their offering can be money or can be anything they would like to bless the world with, such as: love, joy, peace) and pray the blessing of your choice. Then pass the basket and invite each child to add their offering.

PRESCHOOL LESSON

Movie

Madame Blueberry *Veggie Tales*

Madame Blueberry is blue because she wants more stuff. Sure, she has everything she needs – good friends, plenty of food, a nice tree house to live in – but some of her friends have a lot more. Sound familiar?

Lets spend some time with Madame Blueberry and the rest of the Veggies as they find out that “being greedy makes you grumpy – but a thankful heart is a happy heart.

THE MOVIE IS 30 MINUTES LONG SO START IT BY 11:30.

Creative Experience Choices

A Thankful Heart

Materials: None

Go around the room and invite the children to share what makes their heart happy and what they are thankful for.

Thoughtful Thanks

Supplies: Note paper and markers

Explain to your little ones what a blessing it is to visit Grandma and Grandpa. Ask them to think special thoughts about those with whom you will spend time during Thanksgiving. Help them write a short note to express their feelings. Younger children can draw pictures. Fold these in half and address them. On Thanksgiving Day present these thank-you notes to your hosts.

ELEMENTARY & TWEENS SACRED CIRCLE

Uniting Affirmation

Invite one of the children to create an affirmation that affirms the lesson of the day, for example: My name is _____. I am _____. The rest of the circle then affirms the first child by saying, “(Name), you are _____.” The next child then repeats the affirmation and is affirmed by the circle. This continues until all of the children and teachers have been affirmed.

The Blessing

This activity gives the children the opportunity to bless all those present and all those who could not be with them for the day. This helps the children to know that their presence in the classroom is important and that they are missed when they are absent.

Lead the children in a blessing for all those who are part of your spiritual family.

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Share A Prayer (Wear your prayer shawls)

Share the, “Prayer for Protection,” or another prayer that you would like the children to know.

Love Offering

Lead the children in blessing the love offering by inviting them to hold their offering in their hand (their offering can be money or can be anything they would like to bless the world with, such as: love, joy, peace) and pray the blessing of your choice. Then pass the basket and invite each child to add their offering.

Celebrations

Invite the children to share something they would like to celebrate. Use noise makers and pom-poms to cheer after each celebration.

ELEMENTARY & TWEENS LESSON

Story Experience

Today we will begin with the an activity...

I Am Grateful

Supplies: 10 small gifts (You can choose any gift as long as the gifts are the same and something the participants would enjoy. A candy bar or individually wrapped piece of candy works well.)

Put all the smaller gifts inside a box and wrap it box so that it looks special! (*Do NOT individually wrap the smaller gifts.*)

Write instructions on slips of paper for each youth and put them in a bowl.

On 1 slip of paper write the following instructions...

- "Do not show this to anyone. Do not talk about it to anyone. Congratulations: You are the grand prize winner! Later when I announce the prize, come forward and claim your prize! But before you can claim your prize you must agree to ONE condition. If ANYONE asks you to share, you MUST give them one of the smaller prizes found inside, even if it means you will have none left for yourself!"

On 10 of the slips of paper, write the following instructions...

- "Do not show this to anyone. Do not talk about it to anyone. Someone will be announced as a grand prize winner. Once the person has unwrapped his prize, go to him and ask him to share it with you. When he does, do not say ANYTHING. Do NOT say thank you or anything else. Take the candy and return to your seat. If you say anything after he shares his prize with you, you will lose it"

On the remaining slips of paper (one for each other person participating) write...

- "Do not show this to anyone. Do not talk about it to anyone. Something interesting is going to happen today. Watch carefully. Do not do make any comments until I announce that, "We are going to discuss what just happened."

Invite the children to draw the slips and follow the instructions on each one.

Discussion

What was strange about what just happened?

To the grand prize winner:

- How did it feel to receive the prize?
- Did you say any words of thanks for it? why or why not?
- How did it feel to have to give what you received away to everyone else?
- Were you upset that no one said "thank you"?
- Would you have felt different if someone has expressed a few words of thanks?

To the 10 who received gifts:

- How did it feel to accept the gift without expressing your thanks?

To all:

- What is important about giving thanks?

Story

The Ten Lepers Luke 17

Lepers were required to keep away from people in fear that others would catch their disease. The disease is quite terrible. They cannot feel anything. No pain, nothing. Because of this they get infections and injure themselves without knowing it. Then the infection spreads and they smell like rotting meat. They often lose fingers, arms, feet and other body parts.

Lepers were outcasts. Their condition had made them unclean in the eyes of the public and the authorities. They were not allowed to join in with the rest of society. They had to avoid ANY contact with any other people. They could not touch anyone and no one dared to touch them. They could not touch anything that others would touch. And no one dared touch anything that belonged to them. They could not stay in the same place, they could not worship with others, they could not work, could not drink the same water, could not eat the same food. They were forced to live away from everyone else - completely isolated. They were rejected. Lepers were not allowed to mingle with the public in any way.

If the lepers had tried to approach Jesus there would have been a riot. Instead, they kept their distance and shouted all together as one voice "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" In this way, Jesus was drawn to them.

By what they had heard about Jesus, they knew that he had the power to heal them. Jesus healed them, but then Jesus did something that may seem a little strange. He asked them to go to the Priests? Why? Because even though healed, people would want to have a public validation that they had been healed. Only the Priests could do that. Priests were the ones who could inspect a leper and say, "yes, you are clean now, go free. You don't have to remain an outcast anymore". By this, Jesus not only healed the lepers, but also brought them back into fellowship with the community.

Discussion

- How do you think Jesus felt as the lepers left?
- How do they think it felt when the one leper returned to thank Jesus for healing him?
- What kinds of things should we be grateful for? (Make a list on the board)
- What are some things that have happened to you for which you should be thankful?
- Make a list of the things you are personally thankful for, then let's offer a prayer of thanks.

Creative Experience Choices

Gratitude List

Materials: Gratitude Sheet, pencils; magazines, construction paper, glue sticks; scissors & markers.

Fill out the gratitude sheet with all the blessings in your life. See how many you can count. You can use the attached sheet or create a collage of your blessings using the paper, glue and magazines. ***Understand that the same power that created all of these good things in your life is an unlimited source from which will flow whatever good you accept.***

Harvest Relay

Use this fun game to teach kids about God's harvest.



Use this fun game to teach kids about God's harvest. At one end of the room, fill a large tub with cold water, cranberries, and a few apples. At the other end of the room, form teams of four or five. Give each child a plastic spoon and each team the same size container. Each team has five minutes to make its container the heaviest. You'll need a scale at the end of the game.

On "go," one child from each team runs to the tub, scoops up cranberries or apples using only a plastic spoon (no hands), and returns to his team to dump cranberries or apples into his team's container. If he drops the fruit on the way back, he has to pick it up with the spoon. The next person in line repeats the process. Kids will learn that apples increase the weight in their team's bucket, but they're harder to remove and use up more time.

Weigh the containers at the end of the relay. As kids are enjoying the fruit, ask, "How easy or difficult was it to get the cranberries in the bucket? How about the apples?"

Read aloud Luke 10:2. Say, "God wants us to go into his harvest—which is the world—and help others know his love. When we share with others about God, sometimes they might slip away just as the cranberries that rolled off the spoons. Sometimes it takes more time and effort to share with our friends, just as the apples took more work. How can we work together to share God's love with people?"

TEENS SACRED CIRCLE

Share the Joy

The purpose of this activity is to invite the students into the facilitation of the classroom experience. Responsibilities written on the stones include: Read Opening Prayer; Take Attendance; Lead the Sacred Breathing; Start the Affirmation; Lead the Whip; Lead the Love Offering Blessing, Read the Story, Lead the Questioning, Lead the Joy Songs, Light the Christ Candle, etc...

Supplies: Basket filled with the above stones

Invite each student to select a stone from the basket and perform the responsibility written on it.

Opening Prayer

(Wear your prayer shawls.) Invite one of the students to lead the opening prayer or to read, The Daily Word.

Sacred Breath

This is the time when we use a breathing exercise to de-stress and to move our attention into the present moment. If the students are distracted and still focusing on life outside of church, they will not be fully present.

Close your eyes and focus on your breathing. Move your focus to your heart center and feel your breath moving in and out through your heart. Spend a few moments focusing on the heart breath. Now bring to mind someone or something you deeply appreciate. Allow the feeling of appreciation to fill your whole body. Sit in this heart breathing, feeling the appreciation that has filled your whole body. Allow the feeling of appreciation to extend out from you and move out into the circle around you. Open your eyes and feel the peace in your heart.

Affirmation

Go around the circle and invite each student to share their name and one word of affirmation.

Whip

Whip around the circle inviting students to briefly say how they are feeling and to share a prayer request.

TEENS LESSON

Story

Elisha and the Widows Oil – 2 Kings 4: 1-7

The wife of a man from the company of the prophets cried out to Elisha, “Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that he revered the LORD. But now his creditor is coming to take my two boys as his slaves.”

Elisha replied to her, “How can I help you? Tell me, what do you have in your house?” “Your servant has nothing there at all,” she said, “except a small jar of olive oil.” Elisha said, “Go around and ask all your neighbors for empty jars. Don’t ask for just a few. Then go inside and shut the door behind you and your sons. Pour oil into all the jars, and as each is filled, put it to one side.”

She left him and shut the door behind her and her sons. They brought the jars to her and she kept pouring. When all the jars were full, she said to her son, “Bring me another one.” But he replied, “There is not a jar left.” Then the oil stopped flowing.

She went and told the man of God, and he said, “Go, sell the oil and pay your debts. You and your sons can live on what is left.”

Interpretation

This story is about looking past appearances, giving thanks for what we have and seeing our blessings grow.

Discussion

- What problem is the woman having?
- What did Elisha tell her to do?
- What did she do?
- How does the story end?
- What importance does faith have in this story?
- What does this story say about gratitude?
- What thoughts did the woman have to change in order to experience her prosperity?
- What thoughts would I have to change in order to become conscious of all I have to be grateful for?
- Ask yourself - How do things look when I perceive them in gratitude, no matter what their outward appearance is?
- What simple practices would allow you to be grateful throughout the day?

Creative Experience Choices

Gratitude Lists

Supplies: Paper and pencils

Make a list of twenty-five things you are thankful for and why you are thankful for them. Specifically give thanks for each one of them. Take time to visualize each one fully. Get the feeling of it in its full expression. Give your imagination full play. Realize that there is no limit to the good that is expressed through you.

Understand that the same power that created all of these good things in you life is an unlimited source from which will flow whatever good you accept. Reach the realization of desired good and give thanks for it even though it has not yet appeared.

Stuff the Turkey

(From Group Publishing)

Supplies: Large plastic trash bags; scissors; lots of balloons; watch or timer

Prepare Ahead

Cut two leg holes in the bottom of each trash bag. You'll need one trash bag for each team of four to six people.

Action

- Divide the group into teams of four to six people (make the teams as even as possible).
- Ask one person from each team to serve as the "turkey" and one to serve as the "farmer." Hand each turkey a prepared trash bag.
- Ask that turkeys wear the bags as shorts, with the legs placed through the holes.
- Give each farmer several balloons. Hand all the other players one balloon each.
- Position teams around the room, mixing players from different teams.
- Once positioned, tell players with balloons that they may not move during play.
- Explain that players are to inflate and tie off balloons while turkeys run around and try to "feed." To feed, turkeys must run around so teammates can drop balloons into the trash bags they're wearing.
- To keep the balloon players supplied, farmers run around and distribute new balloons - but farmers can't feed the turkeys.

Start the game, and call time after three minutes (or more depending on group size and how things are going). Declare the team whose turkey has the most balloons the winner.

Play the game several times so other players can be turkeys