

In this lesson, students will understand the meaning of the word gratitude by learning about the story of the French Gratitude Train sent across the United States after World War II.

Supplies

- Projector/interactive white board
- Internet access for a [short video](#) about gratitude
- Appendix A projected or copied as a handout for students
- Art supplies for creating thank you cards and a gratitude wall (e.g., paper, markers, and crayons)

Setup

- Make certain the classroom has a projector and internet access.
- Ensure audio is set up and working correctly for the video.
- Queue up the video prior to class starting.
- Have art supplies organized for easy student use.
- Be prepared to project or have copies of Appendix A.

Objectives

- Students will learn the definition of gratitude
- Students will learn about the Friendship and Gratitude trains exchanged after WWII.
- Students will demonstrate gratitude with a thank you note and the classroom gratitude wall.

Background

Gratitude is the feeling of being thankful and appreciative for the kindness, help, or support we receive from others. It is an important emotion that helps build strong relationships and fosters a positive sense of community. Expressing gratitude can make both the giver and the receiver feel good and can improve our overall well-being. A great historical example of this is the Gratitude Train that France sent to the United States as a thank you for its assistance in helping Europe recover from WWII.

The French Gratitude Train was a remarkable symbol of post-World War II goodwill and gratitude. After

the end of the war, France and Italy were both grappling with the economic and social impacts of the conflict. During the war, France had been occupied by Germany and Italy, members of the Axis powers. In a gesture of generosity and reconciliation, the United States, recognizing the need to support Europe's recovery, organized the Friendship Train.

The Friendship Train's more than 700,000 tons of goods and supplies were shipped to France and Italy in 1947. This train, consisting of more than 700 carloads, was filled with essential items like food, clothing, and medical supplies, all contributed by American citizens to France and Italy.

The French people, deeply touched by this generosity, were moved to reciprocate. More than 6 million families donated enough to fill 49 boxcars for the U.S. carrying gifts and symbolic items such as wines, perfumes, toys, and artwork. Each object had a label with a name and address of the donor, and many contained personalized notes. These gestures were more than mere exchanges of goods; they represented a profound act of solidarity and friendship between the two nations, marking the beginning of a lasting and positive relationship in the postwar era.

North Dakota celebrated the arrival of the French Gratitude Train as a token of friendship. Most of the objects from the train were donated to the State Historical Society of North Dakota. Though many states (43) have kept their boxcar, North Dakota is one of the few to still have most of the contents preserved for history as a lasting symbol of generosity between the U.S. and France.

More information about the train car later donated to the State Historical Society of North Dakota can be found [here](#).

Activity

1. Ask the students what gratitude means. Discuss their ideas and come to a consensus on a class definition.
2. Once the definition is agreed, have the students brainstorm ways they have seen people show gratitude.
3. Share the [video](#) about the French Gratitude Train and discuss the following questions:
 - Why did the U.S. send the Friendship Train to France? (People in France were hungry, and journalist Drew Pearson suggested a train traveling across the U.S. could be filled by individuals donating food and necessities to France and Italy.)
 - What was the train sent to France called? (Friendship Train)
 - What route did the train take? (Los Angeles to New York)
 - How many cars/wagons were there in total? (more than 700)
 - How many boxcars were donated as part of the French Gratitude Train? (49)
 - What types of items did the French give to Americans in the Gratitude Train? (dolls, china, paintings from the Louvre, wine, dolls, books, sculptures, pipes, furniture, flags, tea sets, photographs, candles, cutlery, jewelry boxes, cigar cases, money, military objects, and medals, etc.)
 - Where can you still find Gratitude Train boxcars? (parks, museums)
4. In the appendix below, there are objects that were in the Gratitude Train boxcar sent to North Dakota. Project the picture and description of the object.
 - Discuss with the students why they thought people chose those objects to show their gratitude.
 - What would you give to show gratitude?
 - What types of gifts mentioned in the video are also in the State Museum collections?
5. Provide students with art supplies to create thank you cards.
 - Each student should think of someone they are grateful for and design a card to express their thanks.
 - Encourage students to include a personal message in their card, explaining what they are grateful for and how the person has made a positive impact on their life.
 - Have the students deliver these to the appropriate individual.
6. Talk about how expressing gratitude can make people feel happy and valued, including those that are expressing gratitude.
7. Organize a “Gratitude Wall” in the classroom where students can post notes of thanks and appreciation for their classmates, teachers, or family members. This can be an ongoing project where students add to the wall throughout the year.

Extension

1. Have students start a gratitude journal where they can regularly write about or draw things they are thankful for.
2. Have the students look for and record examples of gratitude that they see throughout the rest of the day or week. Have them share these examples at a later date.

Reflection questions

1. How did you feel after you made the thank you card?
2. Why is it important to practice gratitude?

Appendix A

Below are artifacts that were in the French Gratitude Train boxcar sent to North Dakota. For more information and objects, please check out the information from the French Gratitude Train exhibit at the ND Heritage Center & State Museum or online at history.nd.gov/fgt.



Description: Floral pitcher donated by Mademoiselle Helena Sarazin

Date: 1940-1949

SHSND 1990.25.18



Description: Legion d'Honneur medal and booklet

Date: 1940-1949

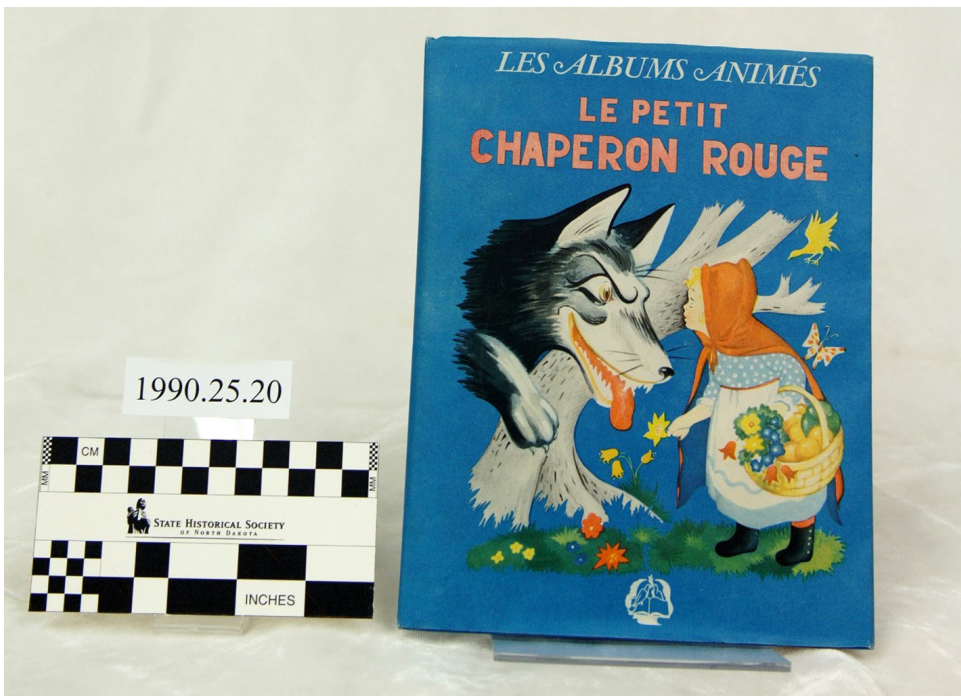
SHSND 199.25.316



Description: Reprint of "The Ironers" by Edgar Degas

Date: 1940-1949

SHSND 1990.25.69



Description: A French language version of "Little Red Riding Hood"

Date: 1948

SHSND 1990.25.20



Description: Framed locomotive

Date: circa 1949

SHSND 1990.25.27