

Here's what I think ...

By Ty Ankrom

Dec. 5, 2014



On Thanksgiving Day, the *Circleville Herald* published a 10-page section featuring hundreds of submissions from area schoolchildren expressing their thanks. And throughout the month of November, some friends on my Facebook feed were posting reasons for which they were grateful.

It's not uncommon to be grateful on or around Thanksgiving. The celebration's history – and its very name – is based on the idea of thankfulness.

Gratitude needn't be limited to November or the holiday season.

Studies have found that people who are intentionally grateful reap physical and emotional benefits.

For example, a study published in a 2011 issue of *Applied Psychology: Health and Well-Being* found that people who took 15 minutes before going to sleep to write down things for which they were thankful slept better.

Other studies have found a link between gratefulness and optimism, which has been shown to improve immune health, and optimism and positive thinking have been shown to benefit the heart.

The benefits aren't limited to adults. Other studies have researched how gratitude can affect children and youth.

A paper presented at the American Psychological Association's annual meeting in 2012 found that grateful teens are happier, leading to better behavior and being more hopeful.

Until 2005, no studies had been conducted examining the benefits of gratitude in young children.

Since then, a few studies focusing on elementary-school-aged children have found that teaching lessons in gratitude have resulted in children being more grateful.

An easy way to teach children gratitude is by modeling the behavior, but other suggestions, from an article on the Greater Good Web site (http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/seven_ways_to_foster_gratitude_in_kids) are:

- Encourage children to use their strengths, specifically, by directing them to use them to be kind to others.
- Encourage children to pursue goals that help others and benefit their community.
- Encourage children to discover what's important to them. According to the article, "Having a sense of purpose in life gives youth a compass for creating a meaningful life."

For some ideas on activities that can be done in the classroom that encourage grateful thinking, go to http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/gratitude_activities_for_the_classroom.

Ty Ankrom is superintendent of the Pickaway County Educational Service Center.

