

Apple Cake: A Gratitude

by Dawn Casey

illustrations by Genevieve Godbout

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★ *"Beguiling...display during apple-picking season, and remember that it's perfect for Thanksgiving, as well." –Booklist, Starred Review*

Learning Objective:

A little girl with a fondness for apple cake expresses her gratitude for each of the ingredients that made the cake in this multi-layered picture book by Dawn Casey, with illustrations by Genevieve Godbout. As readers discover in the book, a delicious dessert is made up of many things provided by nature, large and small, and often surprising. Through simple text and stunning artwork, students are challenged to think about how food comes to us, how all our food depends on nature, ways in which people and nature work in symbiosis, and what things they are thankful for in their lives.

Essential Questions in This Unit:

- What ingredients are essential for apple cake, for the main character?
- How is the main character grateful for apple cake?
- What do nature and animals provide to us that end up as our food?
- What besides apple cake does this book also celebrate?
- What people or things are children grateful for in their lives?

Classroom Discussion Topics:

1. Talk about the concept of gratitude with students. What are they thankful for in their lives, and why? Encourage a wide range of answers, from the simple to the sublime e.g. my cat, my mom, my bed, sunshine, the air we breathe, singing, the ability to smell, jump, dream... You might ask listeners to make a sign or a sound (such as a quiet satisfied hum) when they hear someone else name something that they too feel grateful for - hearing the gratitude of others extends our own. What do they do at home to show their gratitude during these special times of the year, or just every day? Do they follow any traditions? Are any special foods part of their traditions?

2. In *Apple Cake*, the main character is sure to show her gratitude to friends and family, especially at the end when they gather together for a meal. Ask what their families usually do together -- do they eat meals together or not very often? What do students' family members enjoy doing together as a family, or apart? Extend the conversation to friendship: What makes a good friend? Do students have good friends in their lives? What do children think good friendship looks like? Do students have special relationships with friends who are not necessarily people, but are a part of nature? Perhaps a beloved pet, a bird who visits their garden or a favorite tree? How does their relationship with nature affect the way they treat nature?

3. Ask students about all the ingredients that make up apple cake in the book, then ask them about their favorite foods. What ingredients would make up the perfect meal or food for them? What makes their favorite food so special? You may want to talk about foods from different cultures. Have students tried food locally or from far away that they liked or didn't like? If they could go anywhere in the world and try a different food, what would they choose?

4. Develop a lesson with students about apples: how and where they grow, how apple seeds and other seeds sprout, and how long it takes apples to grow. Then discuss different kinds of apples. Which varieties grow in your area, if any? Where do the apples we find in the grocery store or at local markets come from? Ask students what other fruit grows on trees, and then discuss what foods grow above ground vs. below ground.

5. Dive deep into the concept of “farm to fork” – what does this mean, and how does it work? Are there restaurants or markets in your areas that demonstrate the concept of “farm to fork?” Then look further into the agriculture industry and the business of getting food to our grocery stores or homes, including discussions on different types of farms (e.g., dairy, produce), large scale farming, types of equipment farmers use, and the timeline of food from farmer to end consumer. Raise awareness of sustainable farming practices by discussing organic farming. You may also want to talk about other ways in which people get food to their tables, such as hunting and fishing as well as growing vegetables and raising animals. Follow up discussions by engaging students in the actual process – planting simple crops such as radishes that can be grown even if the only space available is on a windowsill.

6. Use the book as a launch for a celebration of Earth and awareness of climate. Ask students for examples of ways to keep the Earth clean, such as picking up litter, re-using, recycling, and not dumping harmful materials into sewers or waterways. Focus on the things we can do to actively help the Earth thrive; growing our own food, planting trees, making things instead of buying them. Ask students to think of as many things as possible that we can all do. Then discuss areas of the planet whose ecosystems are endangered, including the Great Barrier Reef, the Amazon rain forest, and the polar ice caps. What has caused these parts of the world to face problems? What are the ramifications from such ecosystems having issues? How can our own actions help?

a. For example, regarding the Amazon rain forest, children can ensure parents avoid buying products made from palm oil, as palm oil farms are grown on deforested land. Similarly, cheap beef sometimes comes from cleared rainforest land – children can help parents make informed shopping choices. We can also ensure that any wooden items bought carry the FSC label, which ensure the wood used was grown in a sustainable way. When buying paper items, buy recycled paper. Regarding de-forestation globally, in what ways can children participate in re-forestation? Planting trees in school grounds, community spaces, gardens? Regarding the Great Barrier Reef, to protect the health of our oceans, we can use toiletries and household products made from natural materials that biodegrade harmlessly. Perhaps children could make their own toiletries, e.g. bath bombs are easily made from simple household ingredients and scented garden flowers. We can avoid plastic packaging – ask children for ideas for alternatives. Regarding climate change, we can re-forest, walk / bike / use public transport instead of driving, switch energy provider to renewables... What else can we do?

Student Activities:

1. Create a Gratitude Tree: gather fallen branches and arrange in a jar or vase to make a tree. Give each child an apple shape cut from red or green card. The cardboard apples have a hole punched in the top. Each child writes their gratitude on their apple and hangs their apple on the tree with yarn. You can also use a real tree as A Gratitude Tree – each child ties a (biodegradable) ribbon to a branch of the tree as they express their gratitude, leaving the tree adorned in a rainbow of ribbons.

2. For a more visual lesson plan about relationships and using charts, go through the story and make an *Apple Cake* chart, asking students to show the relationships between the main character’s “ingredients” and the final apple cake. For example, you might put the apple cake in the center and draw lines outward to “Family,” “Nature,” or “Weather” categories.



Or, you can talk about the concept of chronological order, asking them to plot what the main character thanks on each spread of the book.

3. Ask the children to pick a favorite recipe or meal, and then write a poem about it. Why do they like it so much? Does it just taste good, or is it special to their family? Create a Food Poetry bulletin board, or ask students to recite their poem to the class.

4. Earth Day is often celebrated around the world every year on April 22. Choose this day or another day that is appropriate for your curriculum to honor the planet. Would you serve refreshments or create a classroom mural? How can children prepare year-round for helping our earth? To gear up for the grand finale of your celebration, create a chart of what students can do for the earth each week or month to help the planet.

5. Think about creating a meal for Thanksgiving (celebrated the fourth Thursday in November in the U.S. and other parts of the world) or Harvest Festival (sometimes celebrated in the U.K. the Sunday nearest the harvest moon, which is the full moon that's closest to the Autumnal Equinox). You might serve something simple that each student can bring to class, or even make a classroom feast together that is easy to prepare. You may even consider making apple cake for the class either yourself or together as a class if you have the equipment. Would your school's kitchen allow you to use their facilities for a class field trip?

6. Consider using the illustrations in *Apple Cake* as a springboard for a fun art project. Created by Genevieve Godbout, the art was done using colored pencils and uses perspective in a unique and gently dynamic way. Ask students to create colored pencil artwork of something special to them, whether it be a fond memory, a scene with family or friends, or an image of the home or bedroom. Looking through the book together, can children see different perspectives the artist used? How can their own artwork use perspectives in a different way?

7. If you have land available in the school grounds, children can plant their own fruit tree saplings (or plant fruit seeds in pots to grow into saplings), to create a mini orchard for the whole school to enjoy. A tree planting event is a special celebration as it gives a practical, hands on, way to express our gratitude – thanking the trees for all the fruit we have enjoyed by helping them to grow and thrive.

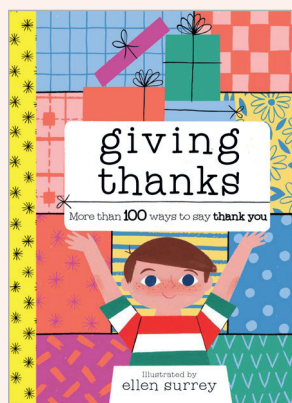
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