



Teaching Threads

Classroom Reinforcers that are Cheap, Fun, and Healthy

Sharon A. Maroney (2017)

Western Illinois University-Quad Cities

www.sharonmaroney.net

Finding fun ways to recognize student effort and achievement is a challenge for all teachers. This task is complicated by the fact that there is no one reinforcer or reward that is valued by all students and even the most valued reinforcers or rewards weaken over time. What motivates one student does not motivate another. What motivates students today may not motivate them next month. Therefore teachers can benefit from a list of possible reinforcers, especially those that are cheap, fun, and healthy. When using this or any other list of possible classroom reinforcers, teachers should be mindful of the following.

- Teachers decide which reinforcers they will incorporate in their classroom, not the students. As all parents learn very early, just because the child wants something does not mean the child should get it. Teachers are also the best judges of the appropriate time to be spent on activity reinforcement. Many teachers follow the guideline of 5 minutes maximum of reinforcement per hour. The time periods included in this list are only suggestions.
- Reinforcers with multiple sources of reinforcement are recommended over more limited reinforcers. If a group of three students is rewarded with the opportunity to present a 5 minute joke telling presentation to the class, they will receive reinforcement from several sources while engaging in a fun activity with peers and receiving teacher and peer attention. If this same group of students were each given a very cool pencil, their reinforcement would be more limited.
- *Absence makes the heart grow fonder* is also true for reinforcers. For example, teachers can develop a list of five reinforcers available in September and then change the list each month.

Possible classroom reinforcers, which can be given to individual or groups of students, include:

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| ▪ Arm wrestling | ▪ Working on a classroom mural |
| ▪ Lifting weights | ▪ Having something laminated |
| ▪ Surfing the net | ▪ Having lunch with the teacher |
| ▪ Being line leader | ▪ Leading or making up a class rap |
| ▪ Making a phone call | ▪ Wearing sunglasses all afternoon |
| ▪ Using the computer or tablet | ▪ Making cartoons on the computer or tablet |
| ▪ Being the first in line | ▪ Being the teacher for 10 minutes |
| ▪ Making a music video | ▪ Getting a free pass to get a drink of water |
| ▪ Learning a magic trick | ▪ Take home a class game for one night |
| ▪ Using the copy machine | ▪ Recording yourself reading a story |
| ▪ Taking a 5-minute break | ▪ Doing only half of one assignment |
| ▪ Sitting near the class pet | ▪ Teaching something to the class |
| ▪ Taking roll or lunch count | ▪ Adding something to the class website |
| ▪ Telling a joke to the class | |
| ▪ Listening to music or CD | |
| ▪ Using stamps and ink pads | |
| ▪ Playing your favorite app | |

- Having someone special visit the class
- Getting free time in the media center
- Having your name in class newspaper
- Using a special pen or pencil for the day
- Wearing your clothes backwards for a day
- Wearing a special hat to lunch for the day
- Playing the radio in class for 20 minutes
- Shaking hands with the entire class
- Watching an old cartoon with the class
- Adding two words to this week's spelling list
- Tossing balloons in class for 5 minutes
- Changing one class rule for one hour
- Writing the assignment on the board
- Being the neat desk or locker inspector
- Staring out the window for 10 minutes
- Sitting at the teacher's desk for 30 minutes
- Having school lunch with someone special
- Earning a coupon to skip one test question
- Receiving a Happy Gram from the teacher
- Receiving different types of teacher praise
- Working with the radio on for 15 minutes
- Choosing any classroom job for the week
- Making this week's spelling crossword puzzle
- Wearing a gigantic, special T-shirt for the day
- Moving your desk to a new location for the day
- Having a special sign displayed on your desk
- Sharpening your pencil without asking for the day
- Keeping a special stuffed animal on your desk
- Shooting baskets in mini-basket hung on door
- Sitting in any chair you'd like for the afternoon
- Getting a silent cheer from the whole class

- Signing your papers as Sponge Bob for the week
- Getting special recognition from the principal
- Leaving 2 minutes early to lunch, recess, or the bus
- Writing on the board, overhead, or SMART board
- Doing one assignment on the SMART board



- Wearing a "Mrs./Mr. Smith Thinks I'm Great!" pin, hat, or shirt
- Choosing the book for the teacher to read to class
- Thumbing through magazines for 10 minutes
- Posting your name on the classroom Rock Stars bulletin board
- Designing a special section in classroom newsletter
- Having the teacher call, email, or text your parents to brag about you
- Writing on the board or overhead for one assignment
- Bringing in and listening to your favorite CD for 15 minutes
- Spending recess inside playing a game with a special friend
- Giving a 5 minute speech to the class on a topic of your choice
- Receiving class applause with the class applause sign
- Receiving a class 3 Cheers for ____, Hip! Hip! Hurray!
- Having the teacher or class sing "For She/He's a Jolly Good Fellow"
- Making up and teaching a new secret handshake

- Having the teacher send a note home or to someone you request
- Using special stationery to write and send a letter
- Having your teacher use your favorite way to learn
- Decorating the classroom door or bulletin board
- Putting stamps or stickers on the papers as the teacher corrects them
- Recording the spelling test on the audio recorder
- Making an announcement over the school's intercom
- Making a greeting card or greeting video on the computer
- Listening to a scary, funny, spooky, or silly book on tape
- Playing a game with a classmate for 15 minutes
- Having your photo taken or taking a photo with a digital camera
- Sitting in the special chair (an old chair painted with lots of colors)
- Getting total listening time from the teacher or principal for 5 minutes
- Being a helper in the kindergarten, lunchroom, media center, or office
- Singing/lip syncing a song to the class or leading the class in singing
- Sending a Valentine to someone when it's not even Valentine's Day
- Receiving Thank you notes from the teacher, classmates, principal, or staff
- Using the video recorder during recess and playing your tape for the class
- Having lunch in the classroom, with a special tablecloth, napkins, and a friend
- Reading a story to younger children, the principal, the class, or someone special
- Wearing a funny arrow through your head, rabbit ears, clown nose, or crazy glasses for one hour



As always, my intent in presenting these activities is to help teachers answer this question -

What can I do to make it easier for my students to learn and behave?



Sharon A. Maroney, Ph. D., a special educator for over 40 years, has held faculty positions at Western Illinois University and Buena Vista University, teaching and consulting positions in Emotional and Behavioral Disorders, and leadership positions for the Midwest Symposium for Leadership in Behavior Disorders, the Council for Children with Behavioral Disorders, and the Council for Exceptional Children.