

THANKSGIVING PARTY

You should always do something special around Thanksgiving for your students. You could do a special extended snack time or a special out of class event.

At Chapelgate PCA in Marriottsville, Maryland, we have an annual Thanksgiving Dinner on a Saturday night a week or two before Thanksgiving. This is a free event. Students are encouraged to bring their family and friends. They come mostly because they know that their teachers and their teachers' families will be there. They consider it an honor for their family to meet their teacher and they are very honored to meet their teachers' families.

We advertise this party in the student notebook that each student receives when they register. Then about 3 weeks before the party, we start giving out tickets. We give announcements in all the languages of our students about the party. We stress that tickets are free, but please do not take them unless you can really come. I go from class to class each week giving out tickets.

We decorate the tables with fake pumpkins and other fall centerpieces. We sprinkle candy corn around them for fun. We put out colorful fall napkins at each place.

We have a commercial kitchen. Our kitchen staff cooks and serves us a complete traditional Thanksgiving dinner including turkey, mashed potatoes and gravy, green beans, cornbread dressing and cranberry sauce. For dessert we have apple pie. We discovered that they mostly throw away pumpkin pie, so we switched to apple. (If you do not have a commercial kitchen, you can ask families in your church to bring in food.)

You need to make sure that you have a "native English speaker" at each table. It is good for the teachers to arrive at least 30 minutes before the students so that you can pray together and also so you can have them seated at the tables and spread out across the room before the students arrive.

You can have table activities at each table if you think that conversation will not naturally flow easily. You can print the word Thanksgiving with each individual letter on a 3x5 card and then have the table see how many English words they can spell with the letters. You can have the table leader (native English speaker) ask the students if they celebrate something similar in their country and talk about how they do that. You can have popcorn (not popped) in a cup at the table and have the table leader give each person 5 pieces of the corn. Then have the table leader explain that during their first winter in America, all the pilgrims had to eat was 5 pieces of corn per day per person. Have each person go around the table and tell one thing they are thankful for – do this 5 times for the 5 pieces of corn.

The table leader should go first and model this. Don't be surprised when the students say they are thankful for their teachers!!!

Every class performs during the evening – something that they have been practicing in class – a jazz chant, song or poem. The Advanced Class usually does a funny skit. The teachers do this with their students.

We always tell the story of Thanksgiving in some way – using simple English and lots of pictures.

We give out silly door prizes. Everyone gets a sticky name tag to wear that has a number on it. Then we pull numbers out of a basket and if we call your number you win. It is all fall/Thanksgiving related items like kitchen towels with leaves on them, or a ceramic tray that says something about being grateful on it or a singing Turkey (Cracker Barrel restaurants are a good source for some of these items – look after Thanksgiving for discounts for next year).

At the end of the evening, we do a simple English Gospel presentation. It is important that the person doing this understands how to do it in simple English and uses lots of visuals. It seems to work best if the person is someone that is already familiar to the students – the director or a teacher.

The Gideons come and hand out Bibles at the end to those who want them.

Because we have outgrown our fellowship hall, we have a separate program for the children in a different area of the church. They too have the full dinner and then do a seasonal craft. We have a Christian balloon man that we hire come in and do a fun presentation for them related to a Bible Story. Then they play until their parents pick them up. We always give each child a goody bag to take home filled with Thanksgiving treats – candy and small toys. You usually need to recruit extra people to do this part of the evening.

This event is also a good time to recognize your teachers/volunteers. Sometime during the evening have them all come up front and present them with something special like a rose. Explain that they all do this for free and let the students know why they do it – because they love the students and they love Jesus.

This event is a good time to recruit future volunteers. Just ask people from your congregation to come because you need extra native English speakers. This gives them a nonthreatening way to meet your students and come to love them. Then later you can ask them to consider volunteering as a teacher, etc..

Your Thanksgiving event doesn't have to be on as big a scale as this, but make sure that you do recognize it. It is the perfect time to share the Gospel more

fully with your students. And because they will bring their family and friends the Gospel reaches even more people.