

Gratitude (2024)

Imagine what Central Indiana would look and feel like if we practiced 10 days of gratitude? If we collectively reflected, enacted, and demonstrated what it means to give, accept, and center a spirit of appreciation while sharing space with strangers, wrestling with new ideas, and creatively expressing ourselves?

Gratitude plays a role in several of the world's religions, influences ancient and modern philosophical thought, and finds expression in a range of artistic practices. In November of 2024, Spirit & Place invites you to move beyond cliched interpretations of "thanksgiving" to explore the theme of *GRATITUDE* in all its depth and meaning.

By asking how our communities and organizations could be different if we foregrounded gratitude, we hope festival applicants will craft events designed to explore from where gratitude emanates, how it is expressed, the function it serves in public and spiritual life, and the ways in which human creativity has blossomed and shined when expressing gratitude. We also hope the community will be given a chance to express its own feelings of gratitude in participatory events aimed at strengthening our collective sense of place and belonging.

Theme Prompts:

Synonyms

If "gratitude" does not resonate with you, discuss these words with your team to see what ideas might be sparked:

- *Acknowledgement*
- *Obligation*
- *Recognition*
- *Thanks*
- *Appreciativeness*
- *Grace*
- *Gratefulness*
- *Honor*
- *Indebtedness*
- *Praise*
- *Responsiveness*
- *Requital*

Arts

From the Diane Wakoski's poem, ["Thanking My Mother for Piano Lessons"](#) to school children sharing creative hand-made messages of appreciation to healthcare workers during the pandemic, the arts have always been a fruitful space for expressing gratitude.

- By giving thanks, we show appreciation for the people and places around us. How have the arts been used to show appreciation throughout time? How have they been used in recent years?
- How can the arts help us express ideas and emotions around gratitude?
- How can the arts guide a mindful practice of gratitude?
- Art creates space to explore present issues and to think about the past. In what ways does art honor the complexity of these issues?
- Visitor studies show people value art (and other) museums because of their social nature – they are spaces that bring people together. What kind of exhibit and performance spaces can be created to bring people together in a spirit of gratitude?

Humanities

“[G]enuine gratitude is a celebration of being human, and the humanities give us the depth and context for the celebration itself. . . . The humanities are the study of what it means to be human, and gratitude is thankfulness for actually being human.” – Jodi Graham, Executive Director of Utah Humanities

- In 1863, Abraham Lincoln declared the fourth Thursday of November a day of “Thanksgiving” to commemorate the Battle of Gettysburg. For lots of reasons, Thanksgiving Day in America has never truly had anything to do with honoring Indigenous people or Pilgrims. How can the humanities help us understand the nature and meaning of “gratitude” during a month of “thanksgiving” rooted in a complex and poorly understood history?
- How do disciplines such as literature, history, philosophy, or ethics help us understand the importance of gratitude in the human experience?
- How does appreciating a range of cultural expression through the lens of history, geography, sociology, or anthropology, help us better understand and acknowledge the contributions of others, particularly those who have been ignored for their contributions?
- How do the humanities help us clarify what we value and are thankful for?
- How do the humanities help us recognize what has come before so that we can better acknowledge the importance of people and ideas today?
- What past expressions, traditions, or rituals of thanksgiving continue to shape modern life?
 - **A NOTE ABOUT THE SOCIAL SCIENCES:** We realize fields such as sociology and psychology play a role in the study and understanding of gratitude, especially its positive impact on (mental) health. We welcome these interpretations of the theme; however, events using the social sciences must also use humanistic content to explore their ideas (e.g., bring in literature, poetry, history, etc. to illuminate the points you are making.)

Religion

Gratitude is an important element in Buddhism, Judaism, Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, and the Bahá'í faith among others, with expressions of gratitude found in sacred texts, teachings, traditions, rituals, and music.

- What do sacred texts and teachings have to say about gratitude and how does it inform contemporary life?
- What can we learn from religious songs or other artwork to help communities' express gratitude?
- What role does shared ritual and individual practice have in helping people embody and express their appreciation?
- How do different faith traditions approach the concept of thankfulness?
- How do faith traditions and practices encourage the practice of gratitude?