

Ideas for Non-food Classroom Rewards

As teachers know, classroom rewards can be an effective way to encourage positive behavior. Food rewards, especially candy, are often used because it is inexpensive and students like it. It is important to understand, however, the potential harmful affects that using food, especially non-nutritious food, may have on student health. Obesity among children had doubled over the past 20 years and has become a national concern. Health problems related to obesity include diabetes, heart disease, and high blood pressure. A study in *Pediatrics* (1999) report that “one quarter of children ages 5-10 show early warning signs for heart disease such as elevated blood cholesterol or high blood pressure.”

There are many disadvantages to using food as a reward:

- It undermines nutrition education being taught in the school environment.
- It encourages over consumption of foods high in added sugar & fat.
- It teaches kids to eat when they're not hungry as a reward to themselves.
- In addition to health concerns, it is well known that children who suffer from poor nutrition score lower on tests.

Why should teachers use nonfood rewards in the classroom?

Nonfood rewards promote a healthier school environment by encouraging healthy eating habits. When students are given soda, candy, and other sweets as a reward for good behavior and academic achievement, food becomes a primary motivator in their life. Because these foods have little nutritional value, using them as rewards contributes to poor eating habits.

The following is a list of options for nonfood rewards in the classroom. It is by no means a complete list; many additional ideas for nonfood rewards exist. Simply remember that motivating students is the goal.

Elementary School

- Stickers
- Pencils, pens, and markers
- Erasers
- Bookmarks
- Books
- Rulers
- Trinkets (magnets, frisbees, etc.)
- Paper
- Activity/game sheets
- Game time
- Reading time
- Class, homework time, or reading time in a special place (on the couch, outside, etc.)
- Extra recess
- Extra credit
- Extra art time

- Computer time
- Be the helper
- Teach class
- Sit by friends
- Eat lunch with the teacher or principal
- Eat lunch outdoors
- Have lunch or breakfast in the classroom
- Private lunch in the classroom with a friend
- Be a helper in another classroom
- Watch a fun video
- Walk with the principal or teacher
- Take a fun physical activity break
- Dance to favorite music in the classroom
- Show-and-tell
- Bank System—earn tokens for privileges
- Teacher or volunteer reads a special book to class
- Teacher performs a special skill (singing, cartwheel, etc.)
- Have free choice time
- Listen to a book on tape
- Listen to music while working
- Field trip

Middle School

- Sit with friends
- Listen to music while working
- Talk time at the end of class
- Reduced homework
- “No Homework” pass
- Extra credit
- Extra recess
- Fun video
- Assemblies
- Computer time
- Brainteasers
- Field trip
- Eat lunch or have class outside
- Stickers
- Pencils and pens
- Erasers
- Bookmarks
- Books
- Art time
- Coupons/gift certificates for video stores, music stores, and movies

High School

- Sit with friends

- Listen to music while working
- Eat lunch or have class outside
- Talk time at the end of class
- Reduced homework
- “No Homework” pass
- Extra credit
- Extra recess
- Fun video
- Assemblies
- Brainteasers
- Field trip
- Stickers
- Bookmarks
- Erasers
- Pencils and pens
- Books
- Computer time
- Art time
- Drawings for donated prizes

Recognition or Rewards

- Phone parents to tell them what a great child they have
- Give a note to the student commending his or her achievement
- Design a “Caught Being Good in the Act” coupon
- Maintain a photo recognition board in a prominent location in the school
- Recognize a child’s achievement using the morning announcements and/or the school or classroom website

Make your Own!

Reward students by making low cost items such as bookmarks at school by printing bookmarks on a color printer and laminate. The following websites offer free printable bookmarks, certificates, and/or posters:

www.abcteach.com (teaching extras)

www.andreaspalding.com

www.janbrett.com

www.motivationposters.com

Purchasing Items for Rewards

Try the vendors listed below to purchase inexpensive or bulk items:

- Oriental Trading – 1-800-875-8480; www.oriental.com
- Mello Smello – 1-800-394-1406; www.mission-nutrition.com
- Really Good Stuff – 1-800-366-1920; www.reallygoodstuff.com
- Teachers Paradise.com; www.teachersparadise.com
- Carson Dellosa – 1-800-321-0943; www.carsondellosa.com
- For inexpensive books go to www.bookecloseouts.com

This document adapted from the following sources:

<http://doe.sd.gov/oess/cans/training/docs/NonfoodRewards.pdf>.

<http://www.nmusd.k12.ca.us/web-beta/depts/ns/resources/Handout-Constructive%20Classroom%20Rewards.pdf>.