TEACHER STORY GUIDE

One Piece, One Conversation

Inspired by Ryann Melendez Eaton, also known online as Ry, Toddler Days with Ry.

Before you begin: consult the appropriate school or district department, secure required approvals, follow school policy, and use age-appropriate materials with adult supervision.

Learning goals

- Communicate an idea through speech, gesture, drawing, home language or an established communication aid.
- Practice listening and responding to another person's contribution.
- Return to a shared creation and notice how it changes.

Context

The supplied story describes Eaton's thankful turkey as a craft revisited through family conversations. This guide offers an editorial adaptation for early learning settings, not her verified instructions. It creates opportunities for communication without promising language or emotional-development gains.

Suggested adaptations (editorial, not the educator's own process)

- Suggestion: Use a paper turkey, tree or other child-chosen shape as a shared visual anchor.
- Suggestion: Invite one contribution during a brief daily routine, with participation always optional.
- Suggestion: Offer a neutral prompt alongside gratitude, such as something noticed, enjoyed or wondered about.

Resources

- Large paper base and paper pieces (required): Reuse clean paper or cardboard; adults can prepare large shapes.
- Age-appropriate markers or crayons and a safe attachment method (required): An adult can attach pieces with tape or suitable adhesive.
- Picture choices or established communication supports (optional): Provide according to individual communication needs.
- AI planning tool (optional): Adult use only; no identifiable child information.

Preparation

- Choose an accessible display location and prepare large pieces without small decorative parts.
- Select one simple prompt and model several response methods.
- Plan an individual alternative for children who prefer not to share publicly.

Time and cost (estimates)

- Estimate: 15–20 minutes preparation, then 3–5 minutes per small-group conversation over five days. Adjust to children's interest and attention.
- Estimate: $0–10 using available supplies, excluding staff time.

Implementation steps

1. Introduce the unfinished creation and explain that children can add to it over several days.
2. Offer one prompt, such as something they noticed or enjoyed. Allow thinking time and the choice to pass.
3. Follow the child's response with a brief, interested comment or question. Accept pointing, drawing and other communication.
4. Invite the child to choose a piece and attach it, or ask an adult to help. Record words only with the child's agreement and without changing their meaning.
5. Return another day. Invite children to revisit a contribution, add something new or simply observe.
6. At the end, discuss how the creation changed and decide together whether to continue, take it down or start another.

Accessibility supports

- Use large, high-contrast pieces and reachable displays; offer tactile shapes when appropriate.
- Accept home languages, gestures, drawings and communication aids without requiring speech or writing.
- Offer pre-cut pieces, adult assistance and participation away from the group.
- Avoid requiring gratitude, personal disclosures or a particular emotion. Do not compare contributions.

Low-tech alternatives

- Use paper, crayons and face-to-face interaction; no device or printer is needed.
- Children may choose plain shapes instead of printed templates.

Assessment

- Notice how each child chooses to participate and which supports help.
- Keep brief, private notes about an observable response or interaction.
- Do not infer developmental improvement from craft completion or the number of pieces added.

Reflection

- Which prompts opened conversation, and which felt too abstract?
- Did children have enough time and meaningful ways to respond?
- What should change before the next conversation?

Variations

- Use individual creations for children who prefer privacy.
- Invite optional family participation without requiring supplies, photographs or home access to technology.

Optional reference: advanced requirements

- For individualized communication or sensory adaptations, consult relevant specialists.
- Obtain required consent before photographing, recording or publicly sharing children's work or responses.

Credits

Activity inspiration: Ryann Melendez Eaton, also known online as Ry, Toddler Days with Ry.
Source post: "26 Days of Thankfulness with my toddler," November 2, 2026: one grateful item written on a turkey feather each day.
Timing, costs, adaptations and optional AI prompts are editorial suggestions. They do not imply Eaton used AI.
No measured developmental outcomes are reported here. Harvard provides general developmental context, not research on this activity.

Links

Toddler Days with Ry: Instagram profile

Original thankfulness post: November 2, 2026

Harvard: 5 Steps for Brain-Building Serve and Return

Center on the Developing Child | May 15, 2019

Optional AI planning prompts

Copy, fill in the bracketed parts, and always review the output yourself.

AI is optional. These prompts help you plan; they do not describe how the featured educator worked. Review every output for accuracy, bias, and fit with school policy before using it with students.

1

Plan and adapt

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Suggest a five-day conversational paper activity for [AGE RANGE] in [SETTING], using [AVAILABLE MATERIALS]. Include [COMMUNICATION AND ACCESS NEEDS], home-language options and a choice to pass. Keep sessions within [MINUTES]. Do not require gratitude or personal disclosure.
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Teacher check: Review developmental suitability, safety, accessibility and policy compliance. Use general needs, not identifiable child information.

2

Prepare materials

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Draft [NUMBER] short, concrete conversation prompts about noticing, enjoying and wondering for [AGE RANGE]. Suggest large paper shapes using [MATERIALS] and response options for [COMMUNICATION METHODS]. Avoid invented child responses and assessment claims.
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Teacher check: Check wording, cultural fit, material safety and communication access before use.

3

Reflect and improve

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Using these anonymous observations, [OBSERVATIONS], identify participation barriers and suggest two changes for [NEXT SESSION]. Separate observed facts from interpretations. Do not diagnose children or claim developmental gains.
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Teacher check: Remove identifying details, verify interpretations against observations and choose changes using professional judgment.