

Cataloging Gratitude Prompts

Welcome to your gratitude journal. Read the introduction below to get your bearings before you get started.

*I want so badly to rub the sponge of gratitude
over every last thing, including you, which, yes, awkward,
the suds in your ear and armpit, the little sparkling gems
slipping into your eye.*

— from “Catalog of Unabashed Gratitude” by Ross Gay

This is your personal gratitude journal. It is meant as a space where you can catalog your relationship to the world — the small moments and the big ones, the present and the past, the things and the people that make you say “thank you.” It is a tool to help you use great writing as a catalyst for your own personal growth. And, with time and consistency, the hope is that you’ll find it easier to notice the things in your life you can be grateful for.

This journal is also an opportunity to experiment with your writing. As you express your gratitude, consider the following:

- Use literary devices, such as: imagery, rhyming words, alliteration, similes, metaphor, and repetition.
- Write formally or incorporate slang.
- Play with your tone. There’s no right way to express gratitude. Be serious, be playful, be bombastic!
- Experiment with sentence length. Write entries with only long, rambling sentences. Write entries with short, punctuated ones. Write entries with a mix of both.
- Play with the form of your writing. Write poetry, write prose, write long entries, write short ones, add pictures to your writing, write poems that look like pictures.

The only rules are that you write with intention, that you express gratitude, and that you persevere even on days when it feels like there is not much to be grateful for. You might surprise yourself!

In the following pages, you’ll find a list of prompts inspired by Ross Gay’s “Catalog of Unabashed Gratitude” that you can use to get the wheels turning. There is no order and you don’t have to write about them all. Consider them starting places which you can shape into your own. If there is a prompt that doesn’t speak to you, skip it over or come back to it another day. If there is one that speaks to you loudly, respond to it more than once. If there is something you want to express gratitude for that doesn’t fit into the prompts, write about that instead!

The only exception is the first prompt. You’ll start by expressing gratitude to the poet who brought us to this moment.

Cataloguing Gratitude Prompts

Use the prompts below as starting places for your daily gratitude journaling practice. Most prompts include a note indicating the stanza that inspired it. If you're feeling stuck, it may be helpful to re-read that section of the poem for inspiration.

Prompt for Day 1:

- Thank Ross Gay for his poem. Here are some questions to help you along:
 - What did you like about it? What moments spoke to you?
 - Think about the space he created for you in the poem (see stanzas 5, 9, and 15). What feelings did this evoke?

Prompts for Daily Journal Practice:

- Ross Gay expresses gratitude for the kinds of things that might make some people squirm — dung, worms, smelly grains. Do the same. *[inspired by stanza 2]*
- Think of a moment when you were allowed to be unabashed, to be unapologetically yourself. Give thanks to everything that made this moment possible.
- “Catalog of Unabashed Gratitude” is brimming with nature imagery. Write about a moment you spent in nature that you are grateful for.
- Write with gratitude about a moment when you saw (or you were) someone who took care of nature.
- Give thanks to nature for a time when it took care of you.
- Gay calls his community garden “the realest place” he knows, a place he loves so much that it makes him “squirm like a worm”. Write about a place you love that much. Thank it. *[inspired by stanza 2]*
- Gay reflects on moments when he and his friends could have made detrimental decisions, but chose instead to act with kindness to themselves. Thank yourself for finding your own strength in tough times. *[inspired by stanza 3]*
- Aralee sometimes laughs so hard her nose runs. Catalog the funny little things about the people you love. Express your gratitude for those little things. *[inspired by stanza 3]*

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- When the bees died in the spring, the speaker's tears gave the world a "glacial shine." When we get through tough moments, we sometimes see the world in a bright new way. Give thanks to the breadth of emotions you can feel in your body. *[inspired by stanza 4]*
- In Stanza 5, Gay uses imagery to create a cozy space for you, the reader. Give thanks to the things in your life that bring you a sense of coziness.
- Think of the people who love you. Write about the ways they love you. Give thanks for their love. *[inspired by stanza 6]*
- Gay highlights the moments of mutual care between strangers, like the men who flock to help "the old lady falling down on the corner of Fairmount and 18th." Think about a time when you witnessed someone extend kindness to someone else. Express your gratitude. *[inspired by stanza 7]*
- In the poem, "kids" and "oldheads" duked it out on the basketball court. Catalog a moment of joy between you and people much younger or much older than you. Express gratitude for the ability to come together across generations. *[inspired by stanza 7]*
- In Stanza 9, Gay thanks us for the ways that we show we are listening. Think about the ways that people show you they listen. Catalog these and give them thanks. *[inspired by stanza 9]*
- Gay reflects on the loss of people he's loved, expressing gratitude for all the traces of joy they left behind. If you have experienced loss, think about the ways that you are reminded of the joy you experienced in their presence. Give thanks to the reminders. *[inspired by stanzas 10 and 13]*
- Your existence is not inevitable. You are here today because of all the people who came before you. Gay thanks his ancestors the caretakers of the land, the ones who escaped to freedom, the ones who came back to keep living. Think about the chain of events that made it possible for you to be here today. Express your gratitude. *[inspired by stanza 10]*
- Gay catalogs the plants in his garden. He thanks them for making him glad. Think about the objects in your life that make you glad. Thank them. *[inspired by stanza 11]*
- In an expression of self-love, Gay thanks his own heart. Thank yourself. Thank your heart. *[inspired by stanza 12]*