**Day 1: Handprint “High Five to a Great Year”**

Trace a handprint on card stock. Write goals (personal/academic…) one on each finger. Put name in palm of hand. Write birthdate on back. Decorate vividly. Cut out. Punch hole in heel of palm. Put on key ring. Display in front of room. On student’s birthday, flip to that student’s handprint. It’s the decoration until the next student’s birthday.

**WoW: Words of Wisdom (Student Birthdays)**

The classroom calendar indicates it’s Ebonye’s birthday and so, at a transitional moment in the lesson that allows for a one minute interruption, I walk over to my computer with an exaggerated air of gravitas and pull up the Google Spreadsheet that contains this year’s words of wisdom. The kids don’t see the spreadsheet, but they do hear me monologuing with the customary lead up:

 You know, lately I just find myself obsessed with wondering, deep in my soul, about what the answer might be to a single question. And what I want to know, really, is this— and now I’m ready to write it down or type it right into the spreadsheet, and she’s had at least a few seconds to realize what’s happening —***“Ebonye, in your fifteen or sixteen years, please, tell us something — what have you learned about life?”***

Ebonye then shares something pithy or witty or goofy. It may be something she came up with, or a quote she lives by, or something she just made up. I write it down while repeating it, then we clap, and then we move on with the lesson. Before Ebonye leaves, I try to follow up with her individually just to say, “Hey, happy birthday, young lady.”

**Why do I take valuable class time for something like this?**

**It honors my students on (or near) their special day.** Birthdays place the focus on one person; they are a day of remembering who that person is and why they matter. I think recreating that in our classroom, even in a small way, is powerful.

**It reinforces our class culture and values.** I often say to my students that we’re a team. Words of Wisdom communicates that every one of us has something worth sharing, some piece of us worth writing down.

**It communicates that I take each child seriously.** Even if they don’t take their wordsseriously, I still write their words down. As the year goes on, kids are increasingly prone to share genuine insights or treasured lines. But it’s up to them; they are young adults.

**It’s memorable.** A few days ago, a former student and I were speaking, and she asked me if I shared my words of wisdom on my birthday. During the conversation, she mentioned that she still has her end-of-the-year printout from a year ago.

**It’s quick.** Class time is one of the most sacred things a teacher is given. How we use that time is very important. Traditions like this should be meaningful yet efficient.

**The end of the year bonus**

In May, start scheduling words from the kids who have summer birthdays — we need everyone to share, and they know that from my introduction of the tradition with our earliest birthdays of the year. OR—use fertilization or conception birthdays throughout the school year. On the last day of school, I share our class words of wisdom, compiled onto a single printout, along with any cool class photos or other memories. The print-out closes with my send-off letter along with the handprint they made on day one in a sheet protector.