

From heartfelt to hilarious: the best (and weirdest) gifts teachers have ever received

It's that time of year when classroom mugs start multiplying and tins of shortbread mysteriously appear on desks. But what makes a teacher gift truly memorable?

We asked Teacher Tappers to share the gifts they'll never forget – and wow, did you deliver. From handmade keepsakes to half-eaten Maltesers, the stories had us laughing, crying, and occasionally Googling "Is this even legal?"

Let's dive into the most-loved, most-bizarre, and most-what-were-they-thinking gifts ever received.

■ The best gifts aren't the most expensive

The gifts that stick in your memory? They're rarely expensive. It's the ones that show a pupil really knew you. Like the student who gave a mug with their teacher's name in British Sign Language – because they were a Qualified Teacher of Deaf children. Or the custom maths fabric for a teacher who sews. Or the pupil who remembered a conversation from a year and a half ago and bought a print of Swanage, where the teacher got engaged.

One student handed over a packet of seeds and a card that said: "Thank you for helping me grow." Another gave a soft toy germ from a medical museum. (Science teachers, you're a category of your own.)

Handwritten letters were especially treasured. One teacher said, simply:

"Anything handwritten or handmade is most memorable and special. I cherish those things most."

■ Food, glorious (and sometimes weird) food

Yes, teachers love a cake. And a pie. And apparently... a giant watermelon, a bag of pasta, or a block of cheese (mild).

You told us about hand-baked cupcakes, still-warm lemon drizzle, and even a giant pork pie personalised with your name. Delicious, if not particularly practical to carry home.

Then there were the offerings that sparked more questions than gratitude:

- A tin of cat food.
- A half-eaten box of Maltesers.
- A plum.
- A candle that “smelled like curry”.
- And, our personal favourite: a 3D-printed pickle with Nicolas Cage’s face on it. Why? We may never know. But we will never forget.

■ ■ Weird but wonderful

Some gifts were just bizarre enough to be brilliant. A hand-knitted calculator. A Pepsi Max can made from clay. A crocheted duck featuring a teacher’s favourite German saying. One teacher was immortalised in a flag reimagining the Teletubbies scene – they were the sun.

And then there was the teacher who received a baby African land snail. Live. In a box. From a student. ■ ■

■ ■ Secondary school teachers – we see you

Several secondary teachers pointed out that gifts are less common in their setting. But when they do arrive, they’re extra appreciated:

“I work in secondary and I don’t expect anything – so any gift is memorable ■ ■.”

“Students at my school don’t tend to give gifts.”

“A handwritten note from a Year 11 thanking me for believing in them – that meant everything.”

■ ■ So what makes a great gift?

Whether it’s a heartfelt letter, a punny mug, or a 3D-printed celebrity vegetable, the message from teachers is clear: it’s the thought that counts. A card that shows care, a gift that links to a shared joke, or something that acknowledges a teacher’s subject, personality or quirks – these are the things that stay with you long after the class has moved on.

And in the end, it’s not about the gift at all. It’s about knowing you made a difference. Even if that difference comes in the form of a potato.