


all the good things

MONTH LONG PRAYER JOURNEY



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*There is still plenty of
good in the world. Don't
be convinced otherwise.*

Darcie@LeightonLane

Red Velvet Cake

Cake.

Cake, it's a good thing in this world.

It's a hallmark of celebratory times. It comes in many flavors, colors, and sizes. There are now more ways to bake a cake than there are ways to cook shrimp. I feel like the character, Bubba in Forrest Gump, just trying to name all of the flavors. It has now become a work of art for many bakers.

And of course, it tastes good.

If you don't like cake, you are part of the problem.

I recently wrote a post about being distracted and ironically I found myself distracted. Funny how that works, right? I taught myself a lesson without even realizing it. Actually, God probably had a hand in that.

I was distraught and distracted by the very thing I said to not get caught up in. Honestly, it's kind of hard not to get caught up in something when it's all over the news and it's running rampant through your social feed.

It's hard not to get distracted by the bad things and forget about the good things.

When I get distraught and distracted, I've learned to turn my focus on the one sure thing – Jesus Christ. So, I started praying. I wanted to think about something good. I wanted to write about something good.

Like, really good. Because we could all use some good right now.

Before the Amen even rolled off my lips, I heard the word “cake”. But not just any cake, Red Velvet cake. I smiled at the very thought of it.

I don't even like red velvet cake.

I like Italian Cream and White Wedding cake. A really good fudgy chocolate cake makes me drool just thinking about it. Then there's something called a Cannoli Cake. You haven't lived until you've tried Cannoli Cake. Lemon and Strawberry cake, Blueberry – you name it. Coconut is an all-time fav of mine.

I like when they mix chocolate and white too. They call that one Marble Cake.

I'm trying to sound like Bubba here and I'm also trying to make you really crave some cake.

But, I really don't like Red Velvet Cake. And I have a sweet tooth like no other. It's inherited.

A woman, named Ms. Jesse ruined it for me.

Ms. Jesse made the best scratch Red Velvet Cake that has ever graced the tip of my tongue. I mean it was like being filled with the Holy Spirit with each bite. And it has been probably twenty-five years since I've had a piece of that manna from heaven.

It had the creamiest cream cheese frosting that would get a slight crust on the top culminating the perfect consistency and texture. She sprinkled just the right amount of walnut halves on top of the cake and in the batter. The cake itself was the perfect combination between spongy and not too spongy.

If that even makes any sense. It was just that good! She would win every bake-off show there is on TV today. Hands-down.

Nowadays, I politely take a bite if I'm offered Red Velvet cake and I pass the rest to my husband or friend – whoever is around. They never tasted Ms. Jesse's cake so they wouldn't understand. The only thing good that comes out of looking or taking a single bite of subpar Red Velvet cake, is I immediately picture Ms. Jesse.

To know Ms. Jesse, you'd have to know that she was friends with my Mom. They reminded me of the characters of Bubba and Forrest Gump. They worked together. Not in the Jungle fighting in a war like in the movie. But they saw each other pretty much every week day in the basement of a public library in downtown.

And they had built a really good friendship.

Ms. Jesse was an older African American lady and my Mom does not have the same skin color. But they were friends nevertheless. Ms. Jesse liked my Mom so much, she'd bring her in baked goodies on Mondays. They were left over from baking every Sunday morning for her church. That's how I got to taste the slice of heaven.

I remember thinking I'd like to go to a church like that. We didn't have baked goodies every Sunday, unless you count the stale bread as croissants.

I imagined my introduction as I opened the doors to Ms. Jesse's predominately African American church. I'm sure everyone would turn their heads when the tall, pale-skinned girl with freckles walked in.

I'd say, "I'm here for Jesus Christ. And Ms. Jesse's Red Velvet cake."

They'd open their arms and say, "Welcome Sister."

The rest would be history.

See, my Momma had a big sweet tooth and Ms. Jesse had a big heart. I remember visiting with her in the library when I'd come to see my Mom on occasion. We'd chat about things. And being the precocious adolescent that I was, I slyly mentioned I hadn't had any of the delicious cake lately.

It turns out Ms. Jesse had indeed been bringing my Mom a slice or two. It just hadn't been making it home. Ms. Jesse had a little talk with my Momma and the next Monday, things were in order again.

Ms. Jesse and my Momma -- they were the same. I never saw any difference. And my Mom never had to sit me down to talk about "things". Like the kind of "things" being witnessed today. Those "things" were around then too. Of course, they were. Probably worse.

There were history books and newspapers for that. Yes, I said newsPAPERS. Don't age me.

But those two ladies showed me what it looked like to put the "things" away and just love each other. They were writing a new history book for the next generation.

At least the ones who wanted to study.

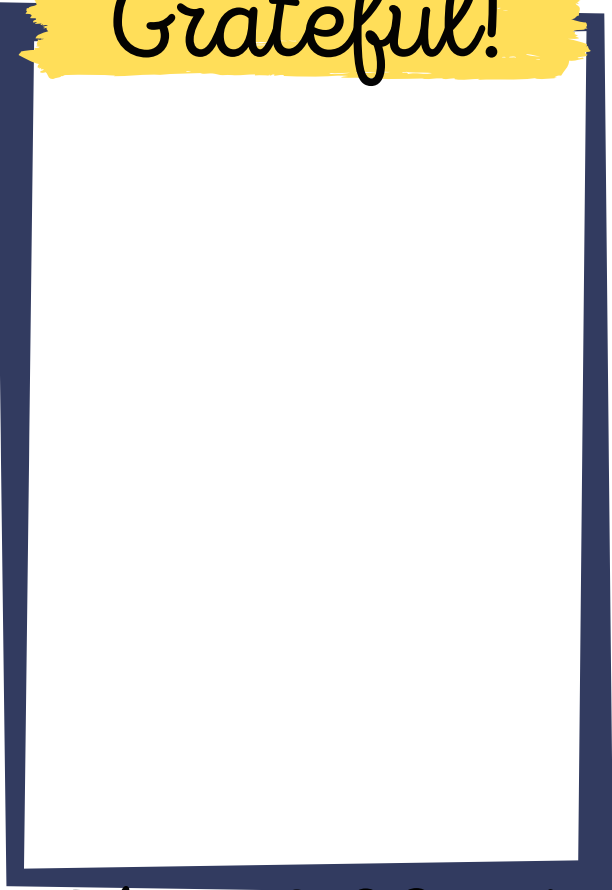
And they both knew experiential learning and loving -- is the best THING.

*Forever Sold,
Darcie*

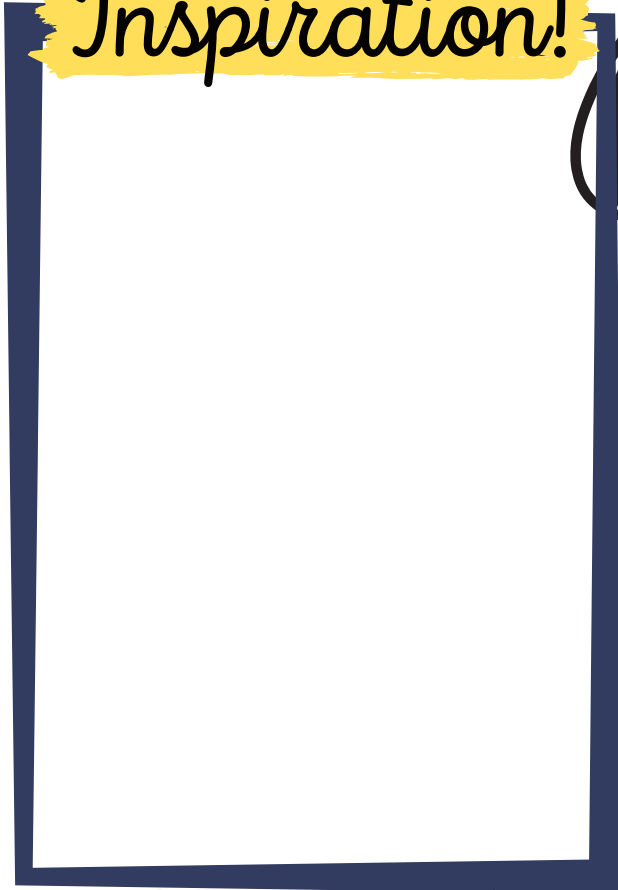
*What changes can you make to see the good
and focus on the light?*

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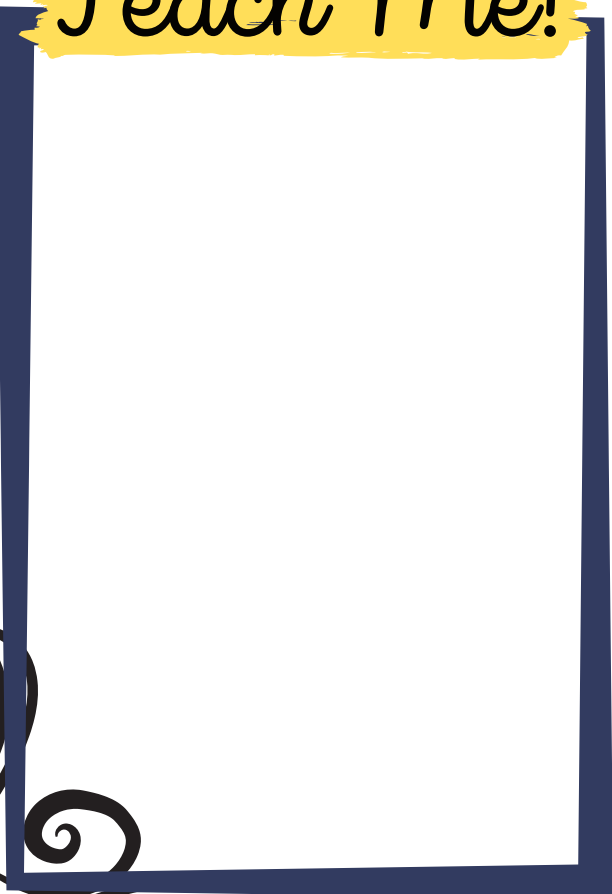
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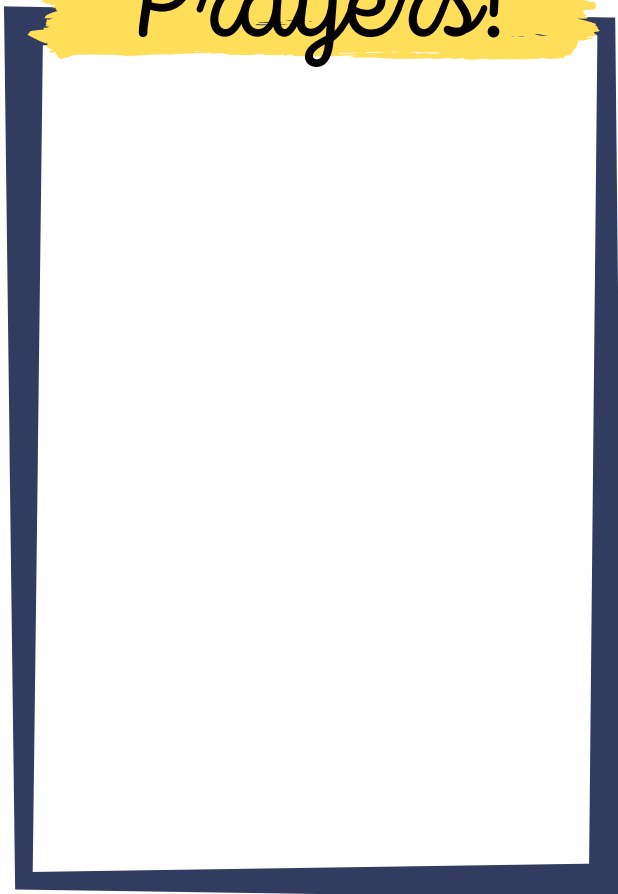
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Teach Me!

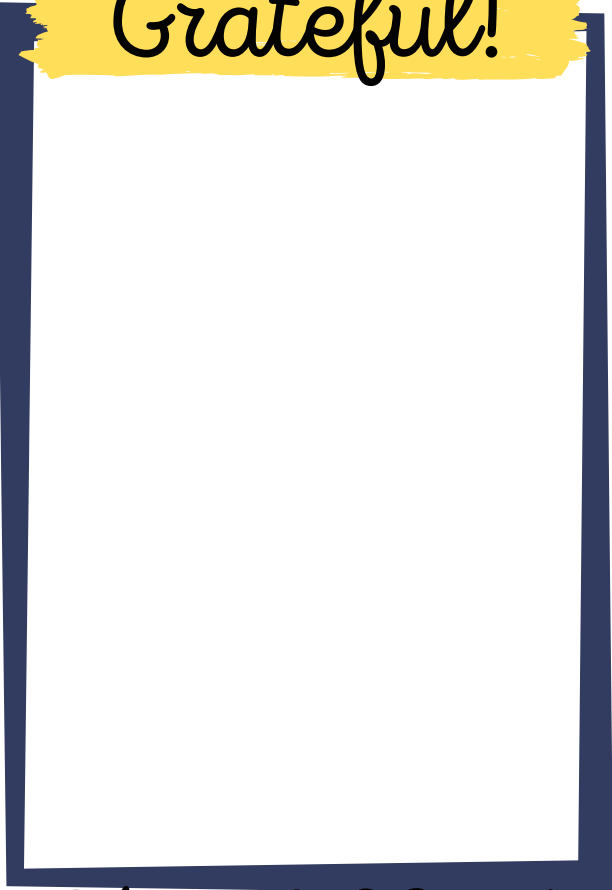


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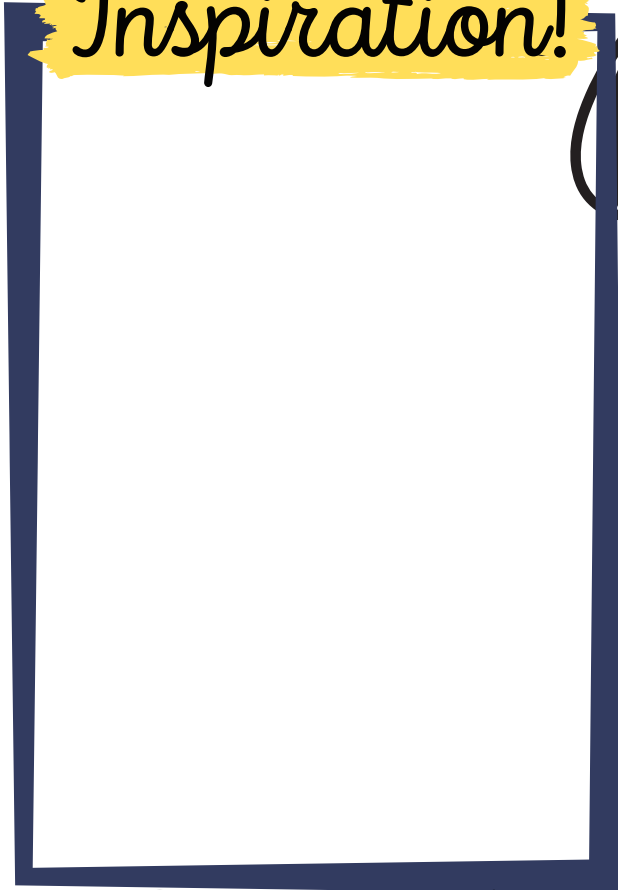


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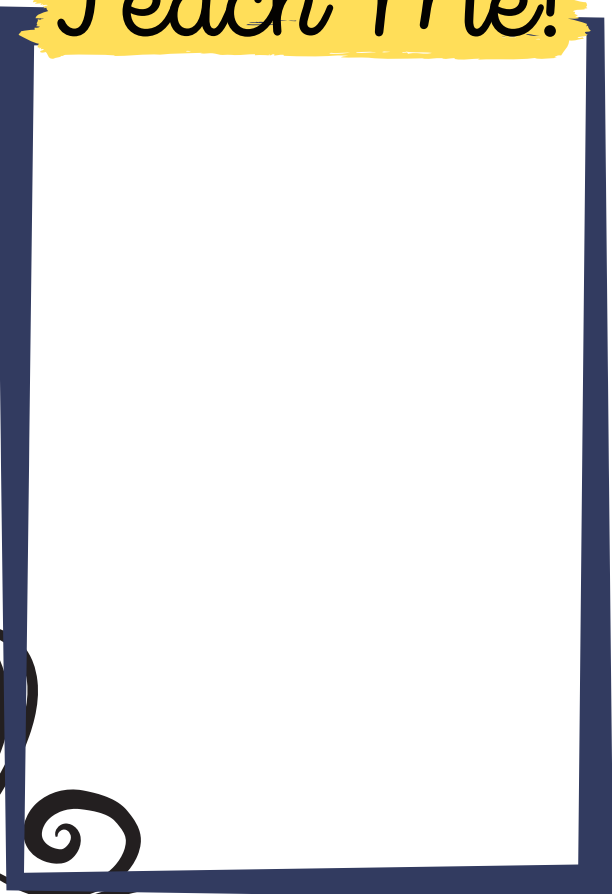
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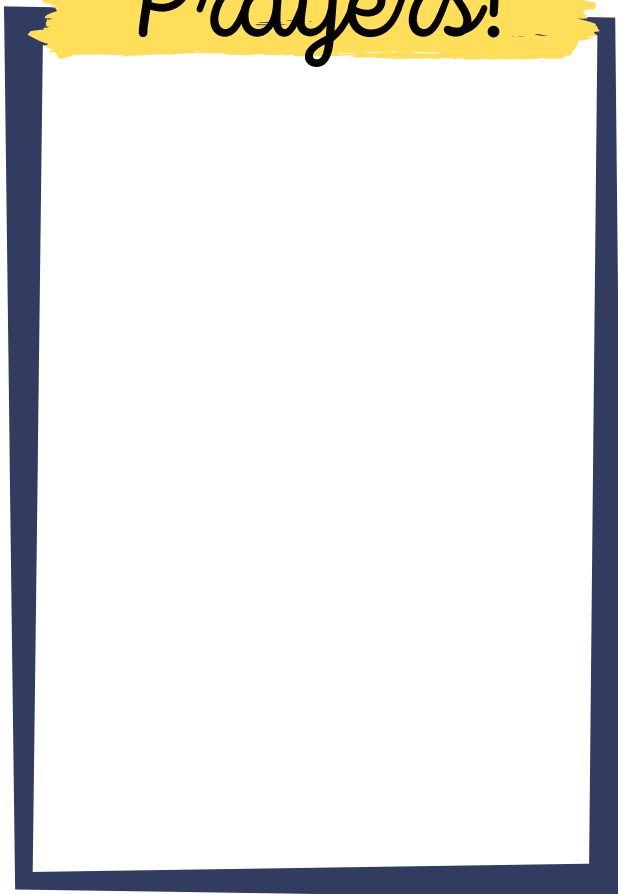
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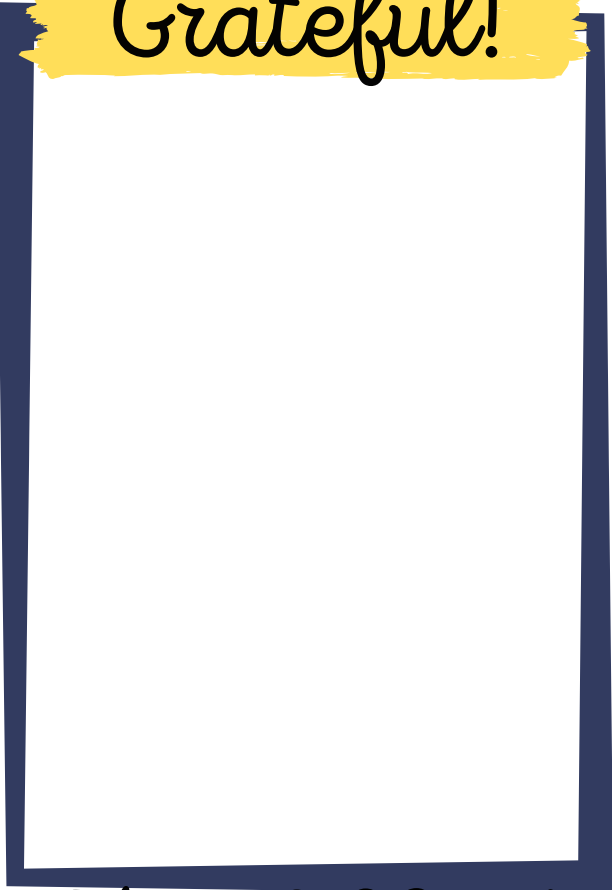
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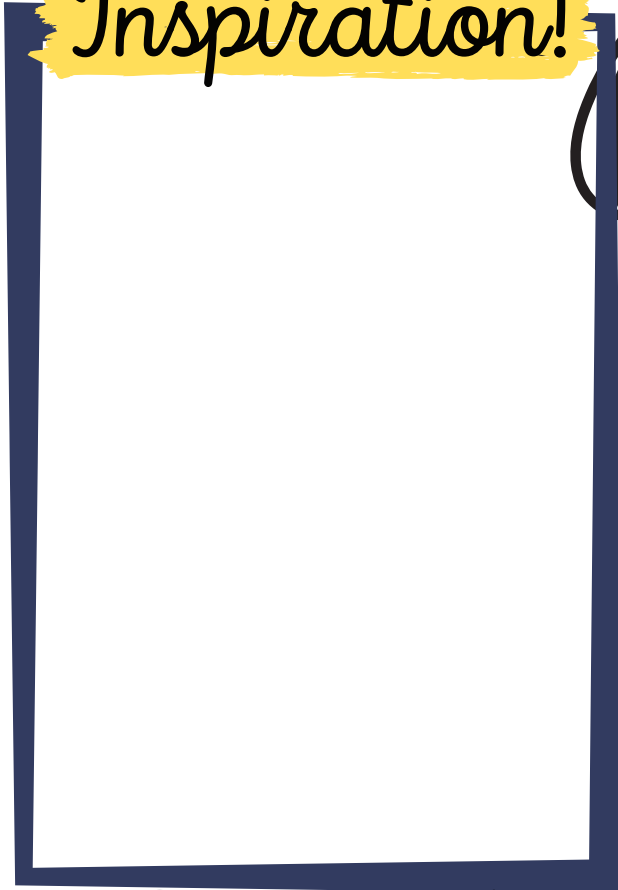
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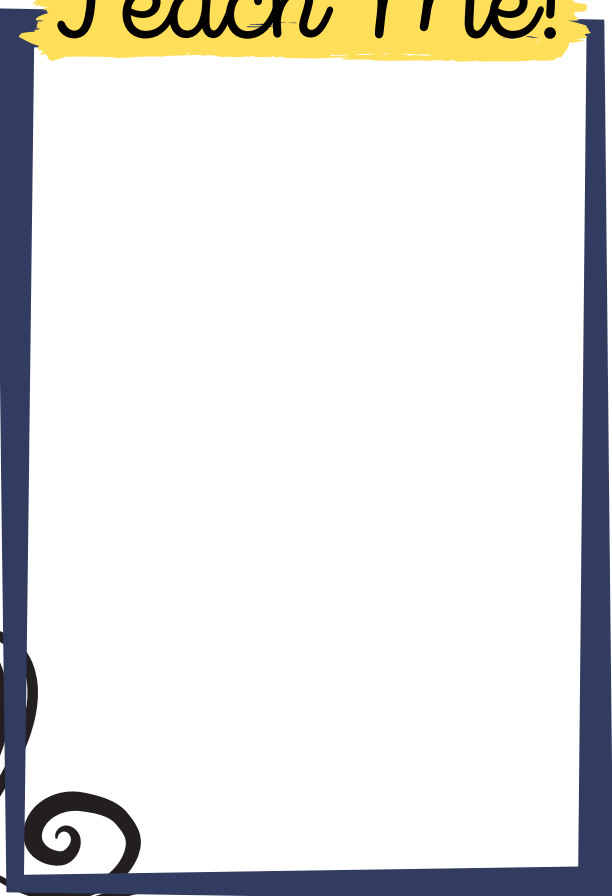
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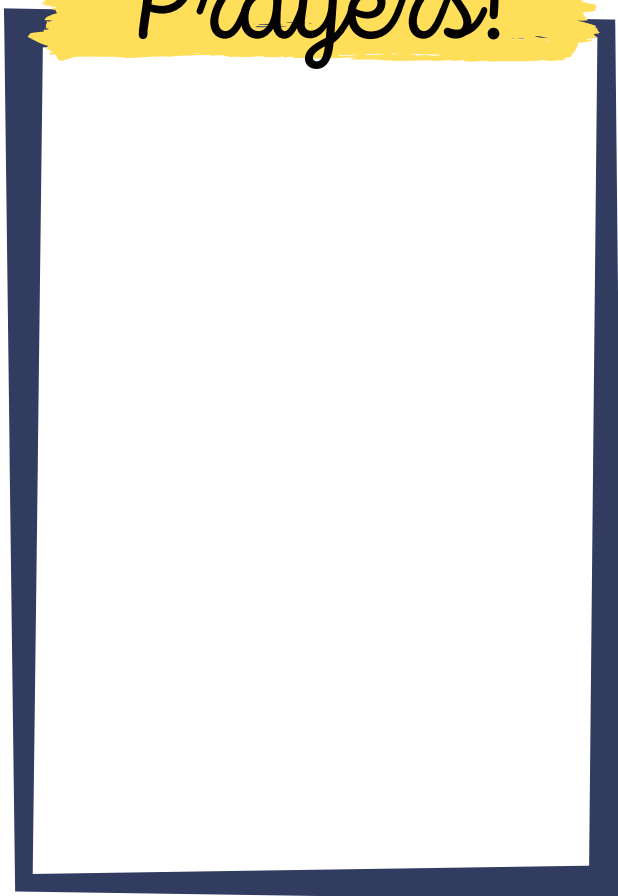
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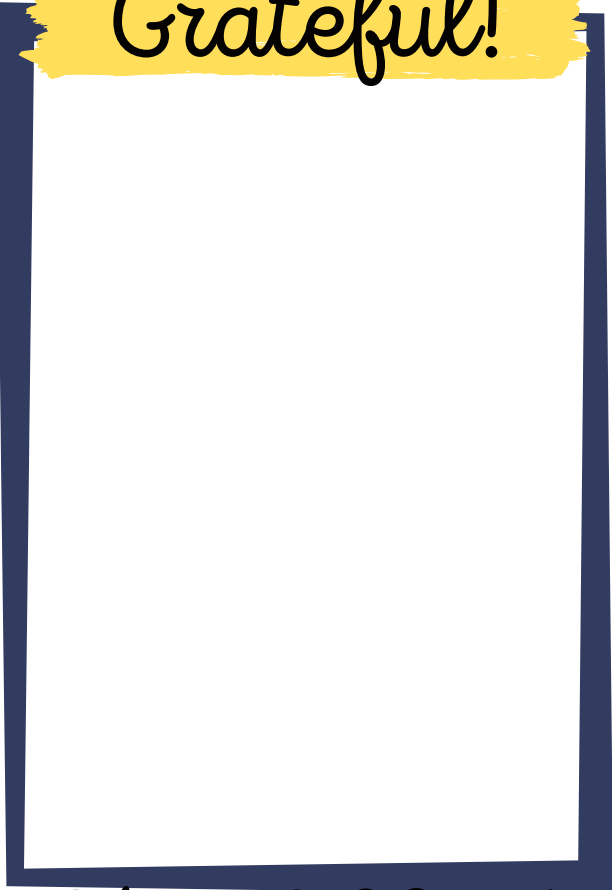


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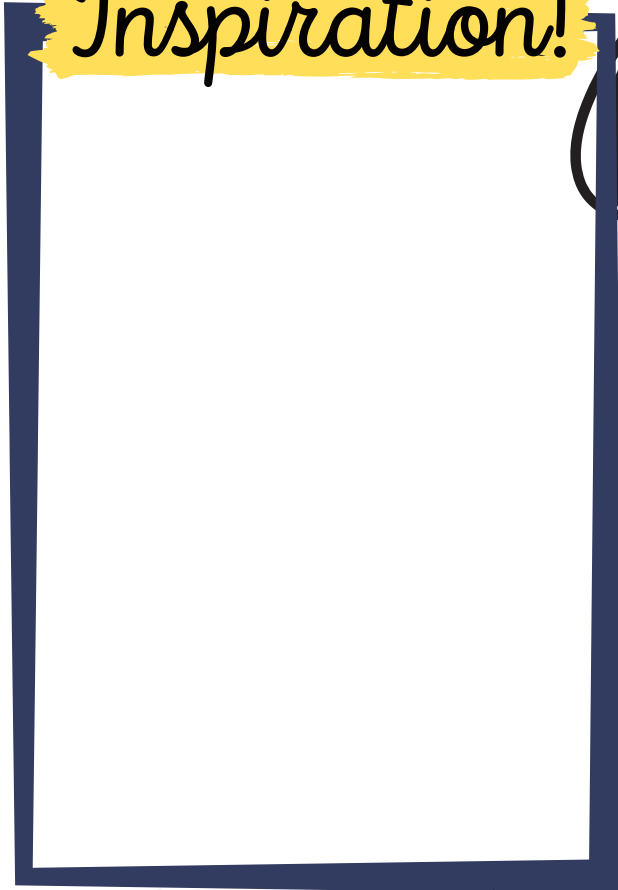


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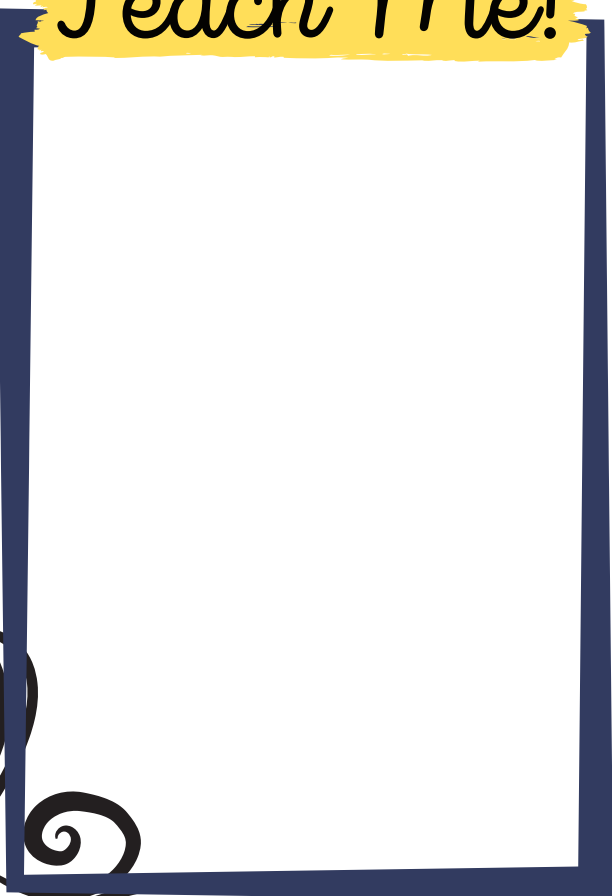
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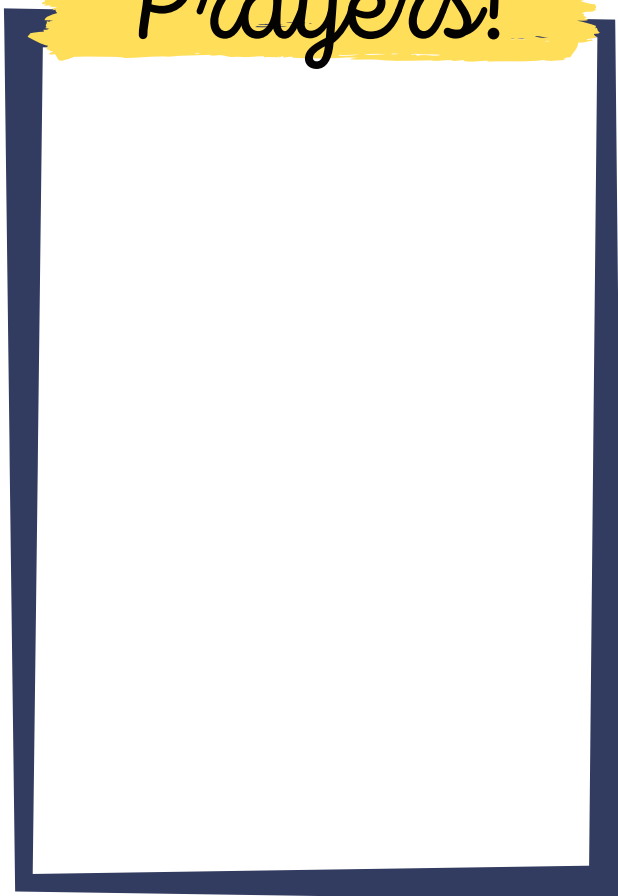
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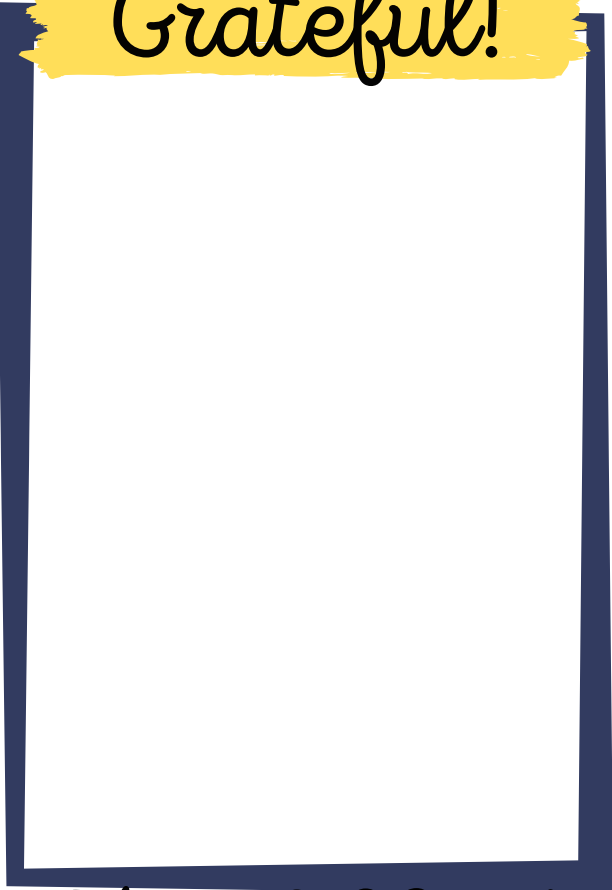


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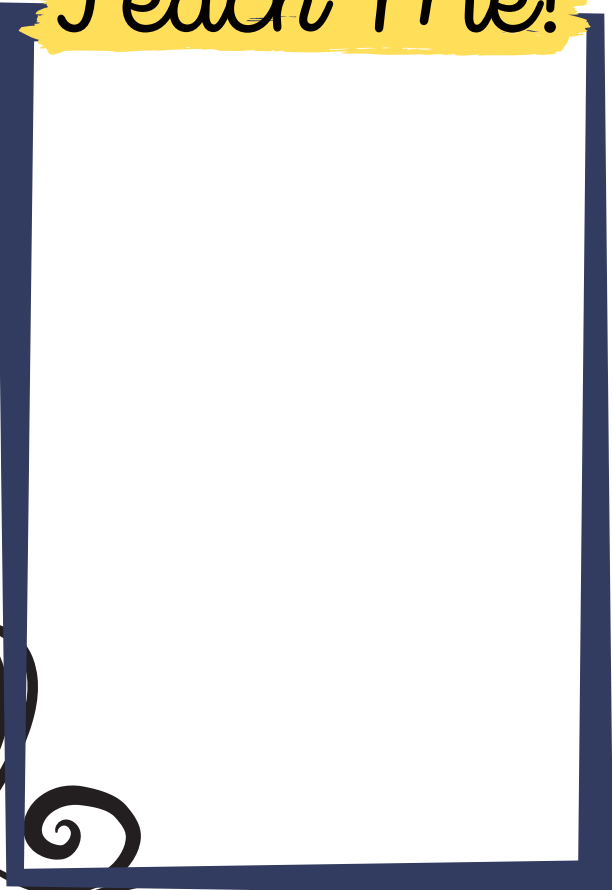
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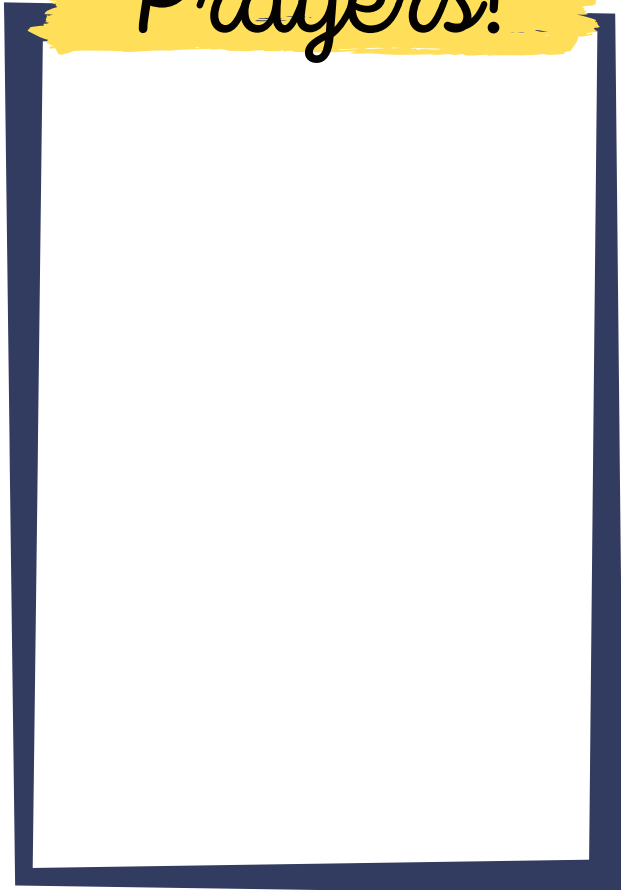
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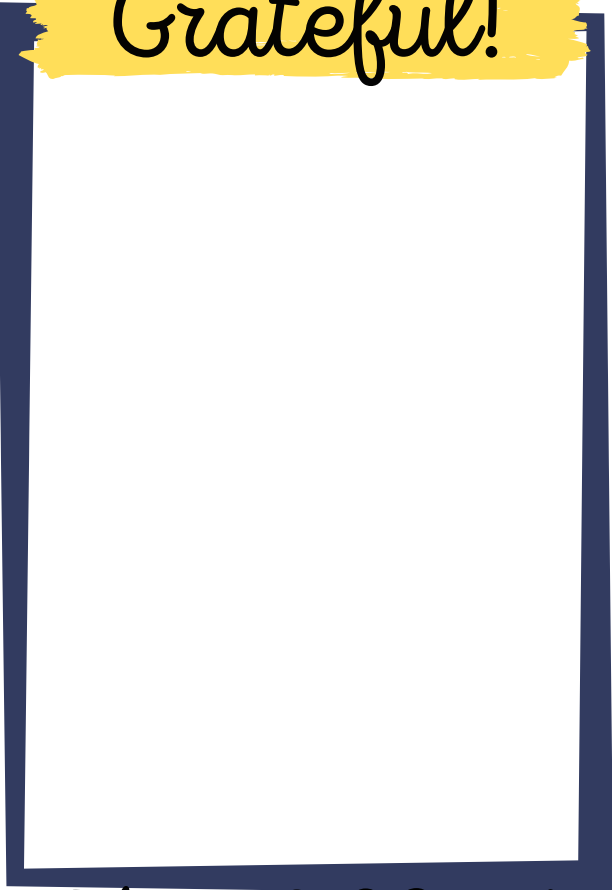


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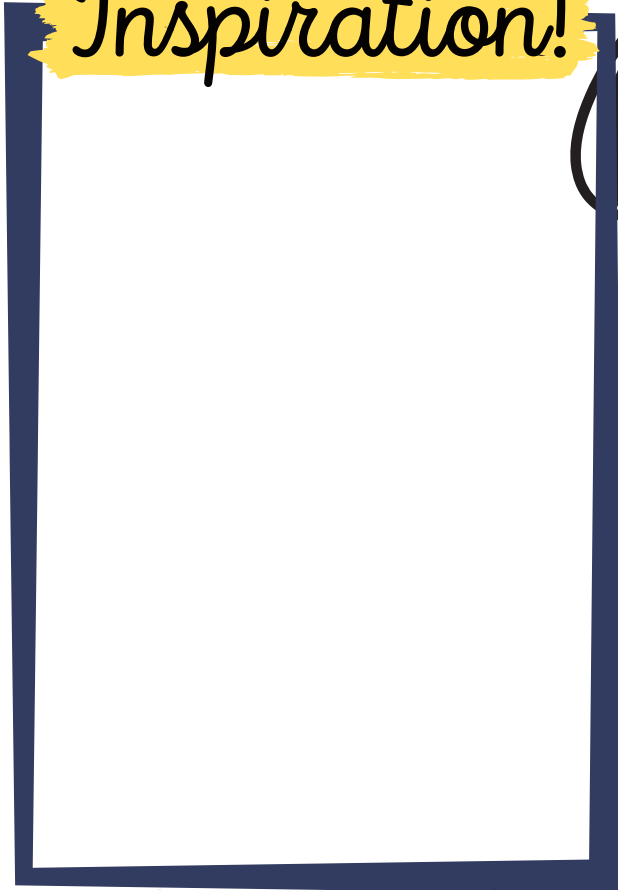


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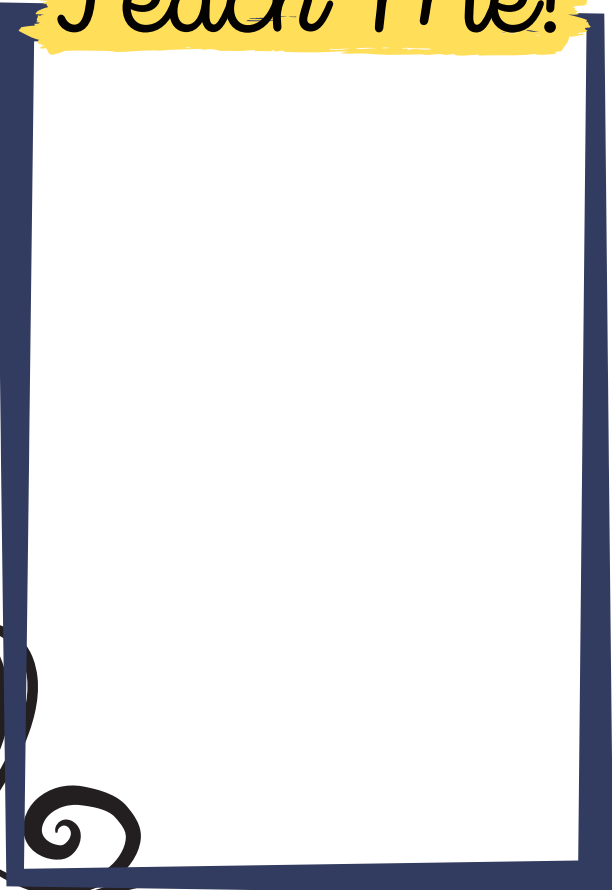
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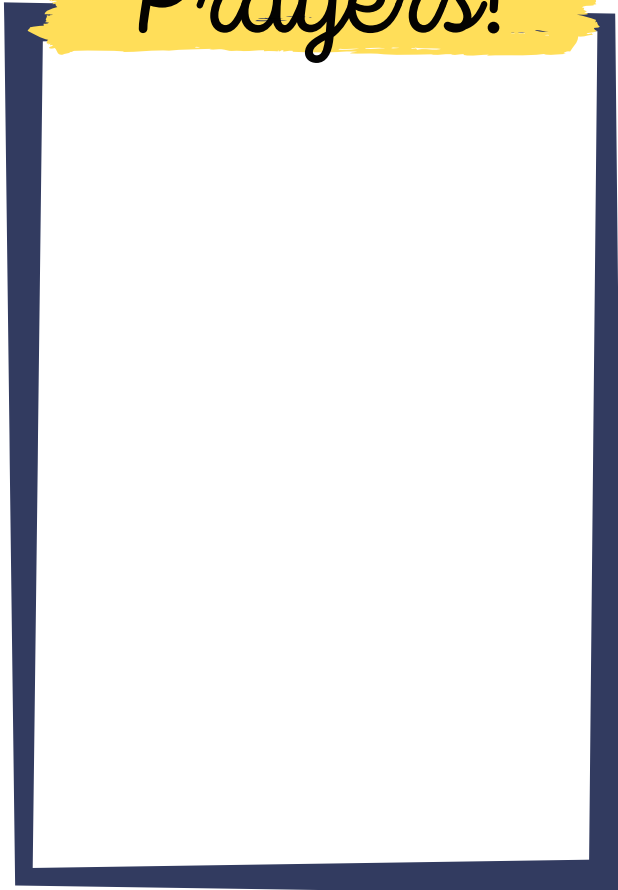
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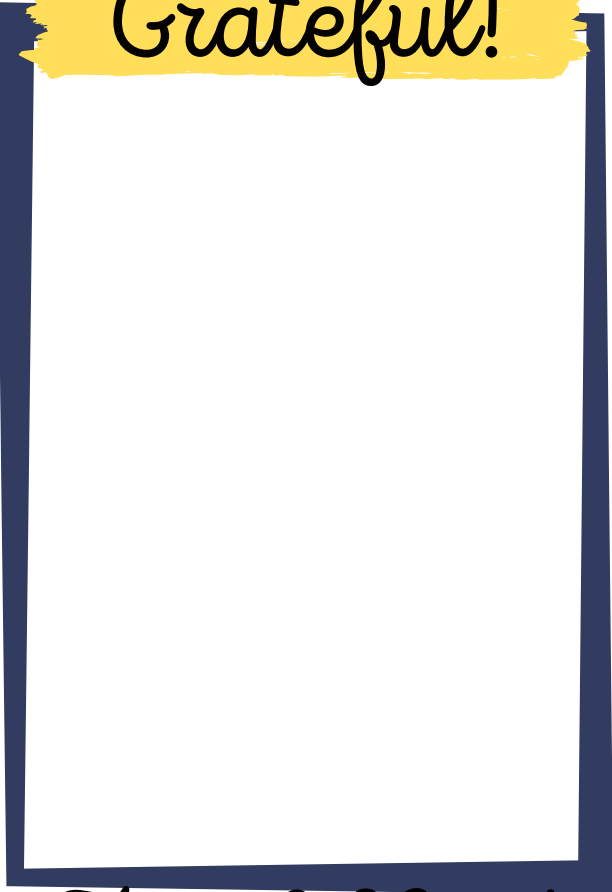


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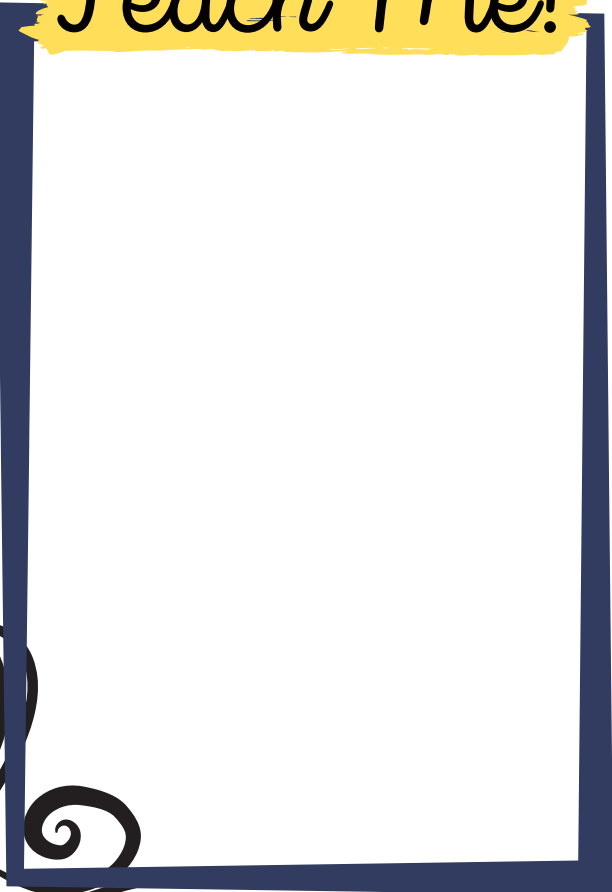
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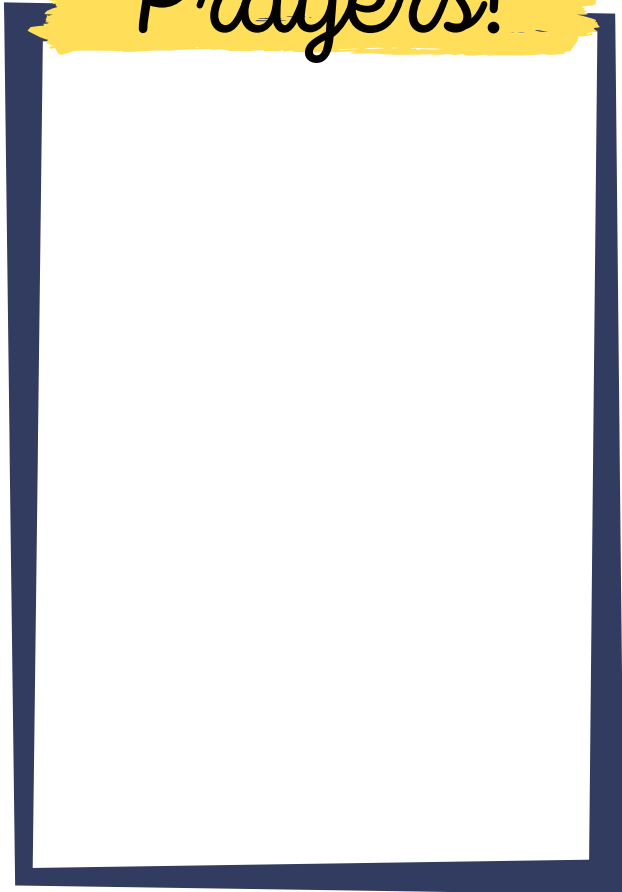
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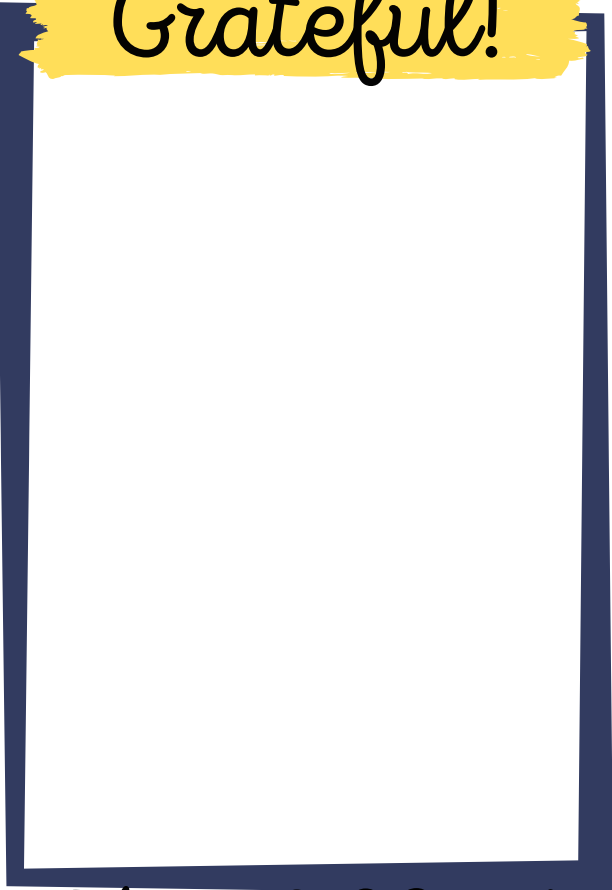


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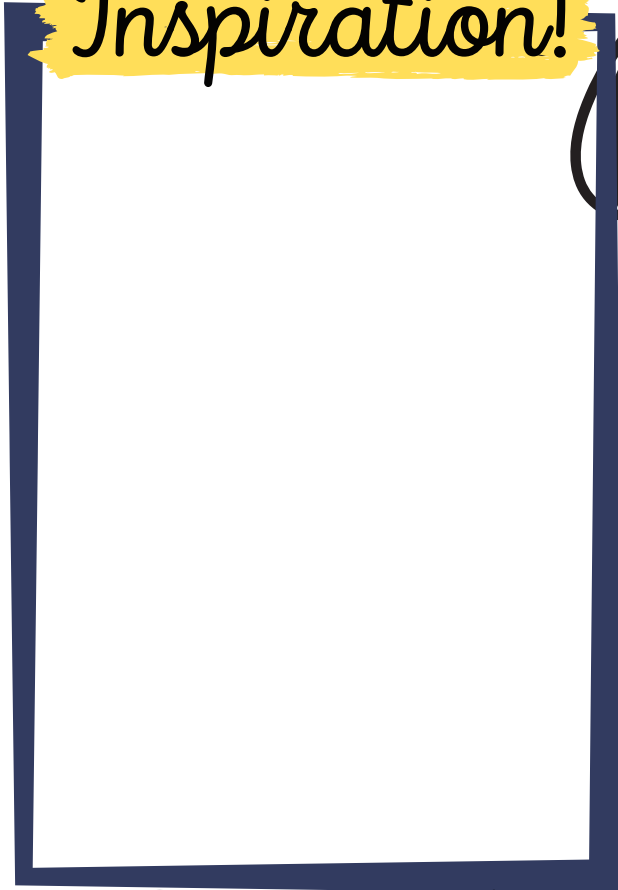


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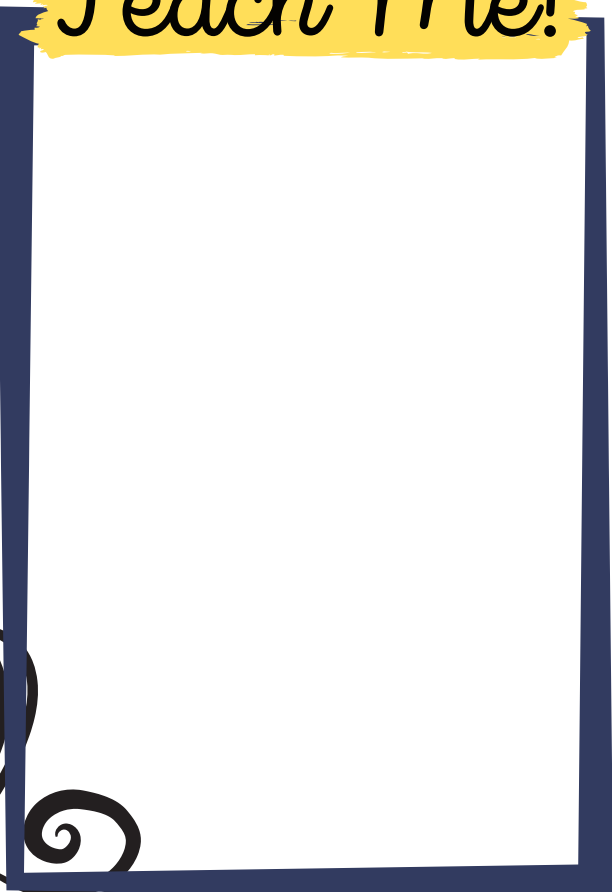
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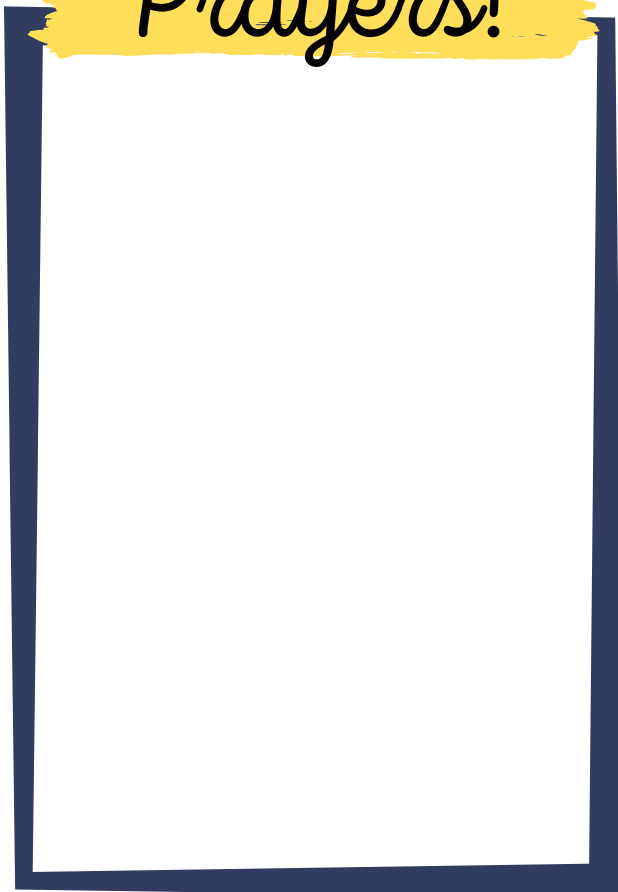
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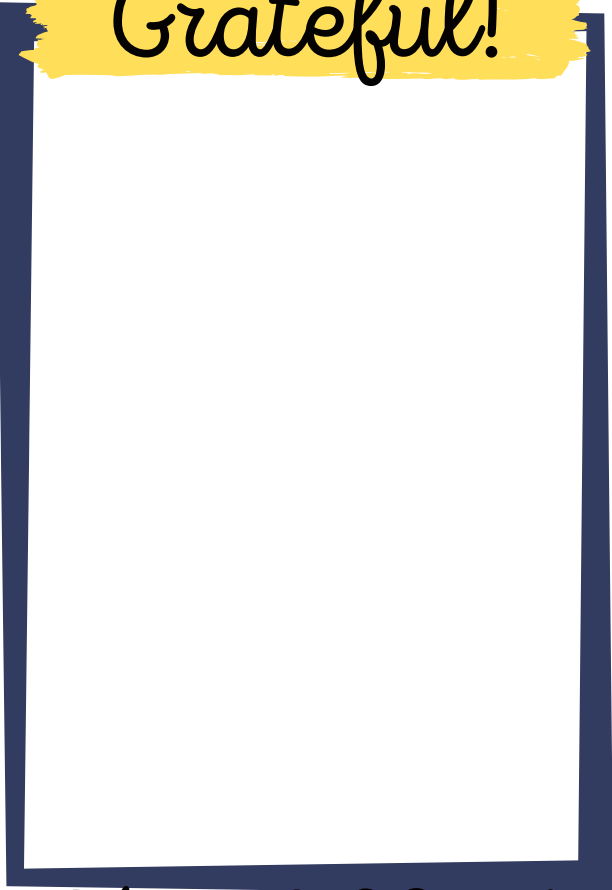


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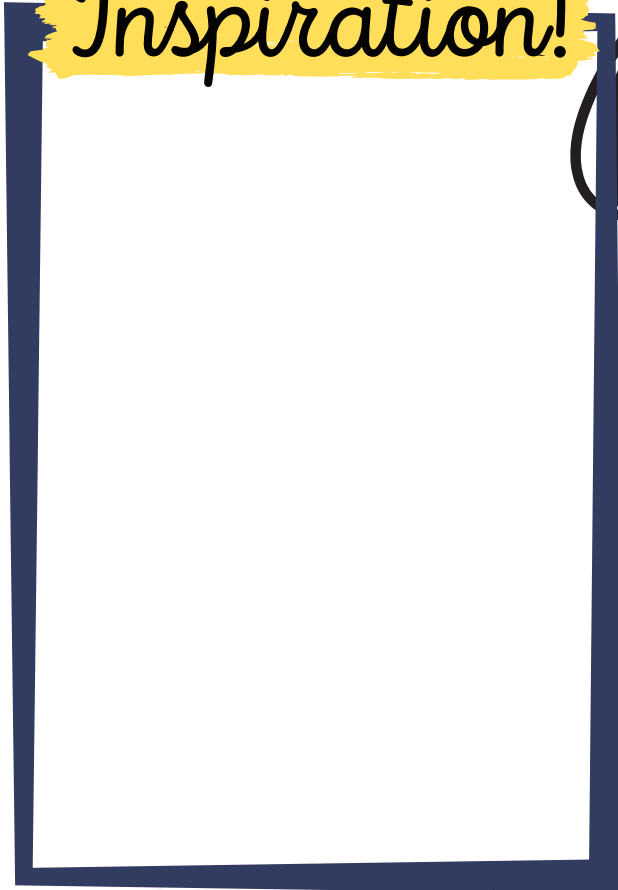


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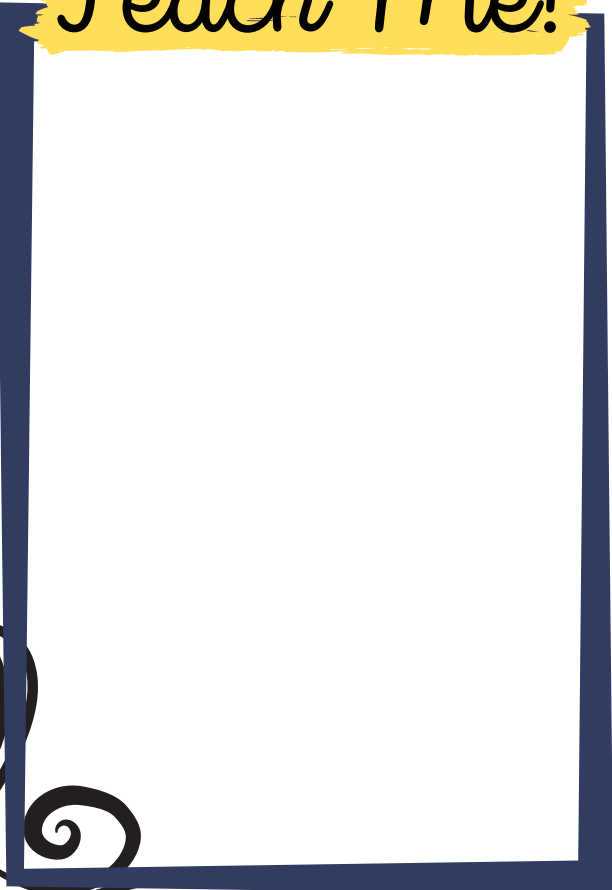
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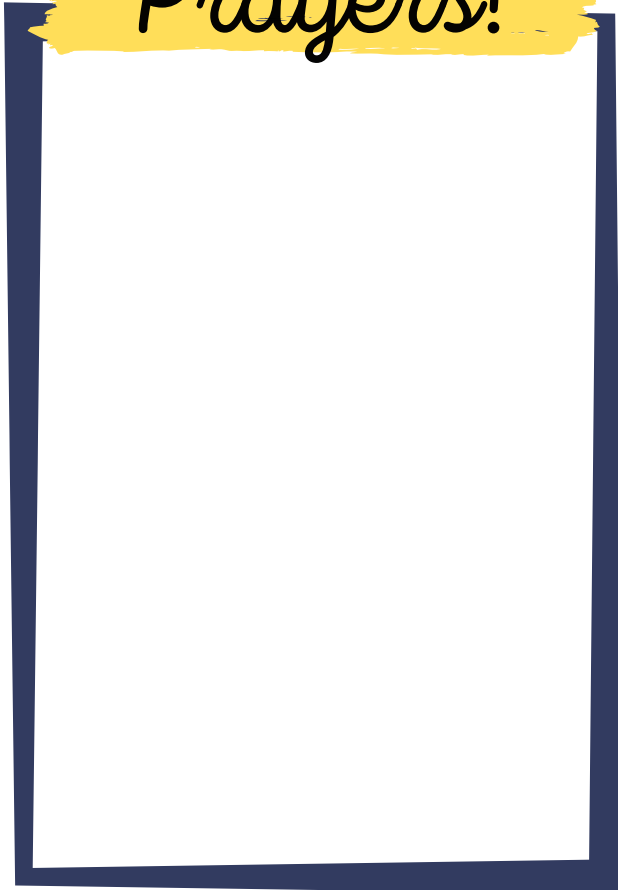
Inspiration!




Teach Me!



Prayers!





*So with you: Now is your
time of grief, but I will see
you again and you will
rejoice, and no one will take
away your joy.*

John 16:22, NIV

Finding Your Happy

It wasn't some grand moment. We weren't on vacation or taking part in a celebration. It was just a regular weekend morning. The music was playing while we were brushing our teeth. The little one stood on a stool so he could see his face in the mirror. He was doing his best to be like Dad.

We sang a favorite song. The two-year-old jumbled the lyrics, making the moment even sweeter.

"And a little bit of chicken fried, cold beer on a Friday night..."

I knew I had won.

I had found my happy again.

I don't even remember what we were getting ready to do that morning. Probably just going to grab some lunch. All I remember is this overwhelming feeling of joy and contentment – like my heart had settled back into its proper place.

Months of depression tried to break me down and there were times it certainly did. When despair came knocking at my door again -- and it sure did -- I would pray. Then I would sing the same song until I pictured the three of us in the bathroom mirror.

"A pair of jeans that fit just right, and the radio up..."

This insignificant memory became my focal point to use to take my thoughts captive when needed. The lyrics would dance in my mind until they poured out of my mouth.

"I like to see the sunrise, see the love in my woman's eyes..."

And I would win again.

"Feel the touch of a precious child, and know a mother's love..."

In thirty-three years I had experienced some sad days, bad weeks, and tough years. There were losses and failures. It took a while to find real friends. You know, just life in general swings different ways.

But nothing prepared me for hour upon hour of darkness. I had never truly understood other people living with depression. It made no sense to me why they couldn't take a few days to lament and then dust it off – just snap out of it.

And then I experienced it for myself. It was the hardest fight I'd ever endured.

There were times I thought it would never end.

The heaviness. The hopelessness. The feeling of being unworthy. The emotional baggage. Being a burden to others. Not looking forward to another day. Dreading another sleepless night.

I thought it would never end.

But slowly – I mean slowly – a weight would lift. It was like shedding a pound here and there, lightening my load of despair. Until one day, I saw the reflection of myself and our little family singing in the mirror.

I saw my happy in an ordinary, nothing special about it day. It was just like the words of the song we sang.

“It's funny how it's the little things in life that mean the most, not where you live, what you drive or the price tag on your clothes...”

A couple of years after the dust had settled for me, I sat in a restaurant booth with my laptop and a coffee. I had finally caved into writing on a regular basis. As I typed words and began to relive the journey through my mental illness tsunami – I paused on the verge of crying.

I simply asked God, “Why?” Now I had asked this question many times over, but I decided to ask one more time.

“Why God did I have to go through it – all of it?”

This time I prayed with expectation. I didn't expect an answer right away. I certainly wasn't looking for an angel to sit across from me and share a coffee, because that would warrant a trip to the therapist or hospital.

I wanted understanding. I needed closure. Glancing around at the people eating their breakfast and taking notice of the buzz of conversation surrounding me – I wondered “what's their stories?”

You know everyone has one, some harder than others. Other stories might be a little on the crazy, wild side – not speaking from experience or anything.

Maybe they are still waiting on their defining story. The one where He refines you.

I smiled as I turned my attention back to the laptop screen. My fingers froze and I took a sip of coffee. Looking up, I noticed a picture of a little boy running around at a camp, obviously having the time of his life. He was surrounded by bubbles when they snapped a picture mid-laugh.

Then I read the wording at the bottom of the poster.

Experiential Learning.

It certainly was an experience, I thought. Experience being the best teacher – teaches you more in a lifetime than taking a class or reading a book. Looking back, in the course of less than three years it was like taking a crash course in humility and compassion. And a humbling of the soul.

I now understand what it is like to stand on the other side of light and bargain for the darkness to give way. Extending grace to others and myself was a lesson in itself. Grace taught me to listen to people's stories first. This lent knowledge of the cause which resulted in the side effect of mental illness.

"What happened to you?" instead of "What's wrong with you?" became a more relevant question in most cases.

As I relived the stories with my friends, I understood the resentment they held. I experienced the sting of holding resentment myself, especially towards our amazing Father in Heaven.

All of it was living out pages of a story. A story where I experienced the shackles of solitude and captivity. But also a story of breaking bondage and crawling towards freedom. Feeling pain so deeply only led way to embracing joy ever so tightly. Then there was the celebration and the delectable taste of victory served at the party afterwards.

So coming from someone with experience, nothing lasts forever especially what you think is impenetrable darkness. God is bounded by nothing. He owns the dark and can lift you straight from the pit of despair – if only you will let Him.

One day you will find yourself singing a song or holding someone's hand. Maybe it will be a moment spent holding a long awaited miracle. You may simply be sitting on a park bench by yourself. The time may come at the midnight hour or while sipping a cup of coffee.

And you will think to yourself, I've won. Hello my happy. I've been missing you. And maybe you will sing a little song. "There's no dollar sign on a peace of mind, this I've come to know..."

And you will think to yourself, I've won.

Hello my happy. I've been missing you.

And maybe you will sing a little song.

"There's no dollar sign on a peace of mind, this I've come to know..."

*Forever Sold,
Darcie*

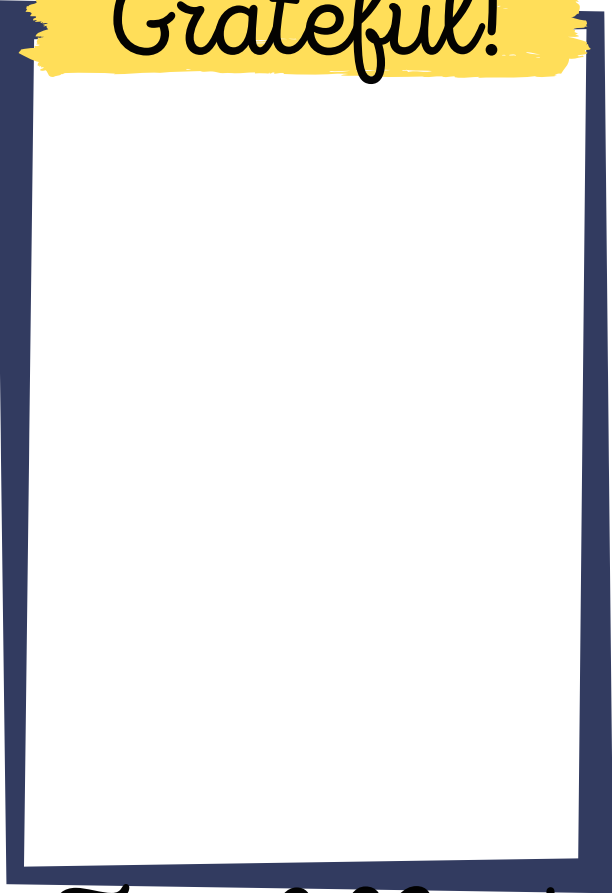
Song Lyrics: Chicken Fried by Zac Brown Band

*What do you need to do to find your happy
again or keep your happy?*



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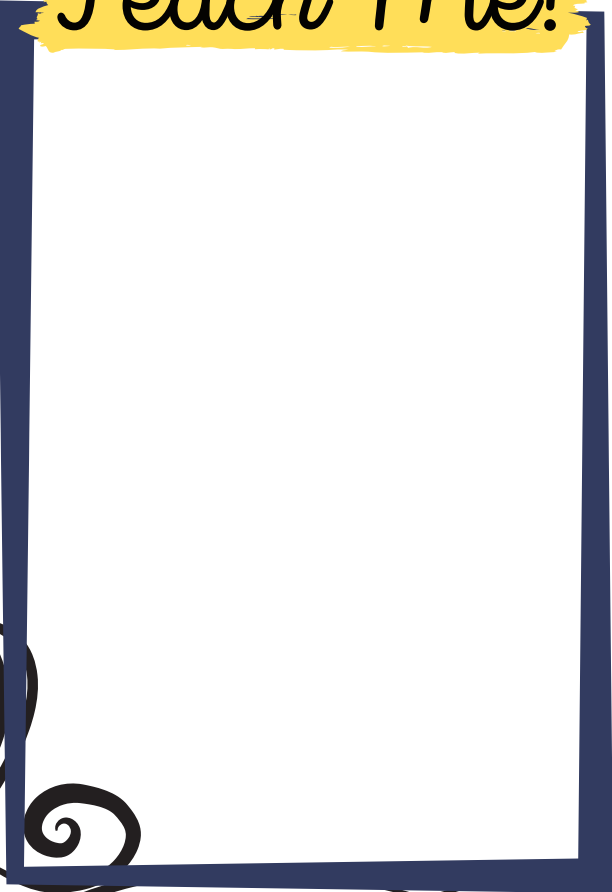
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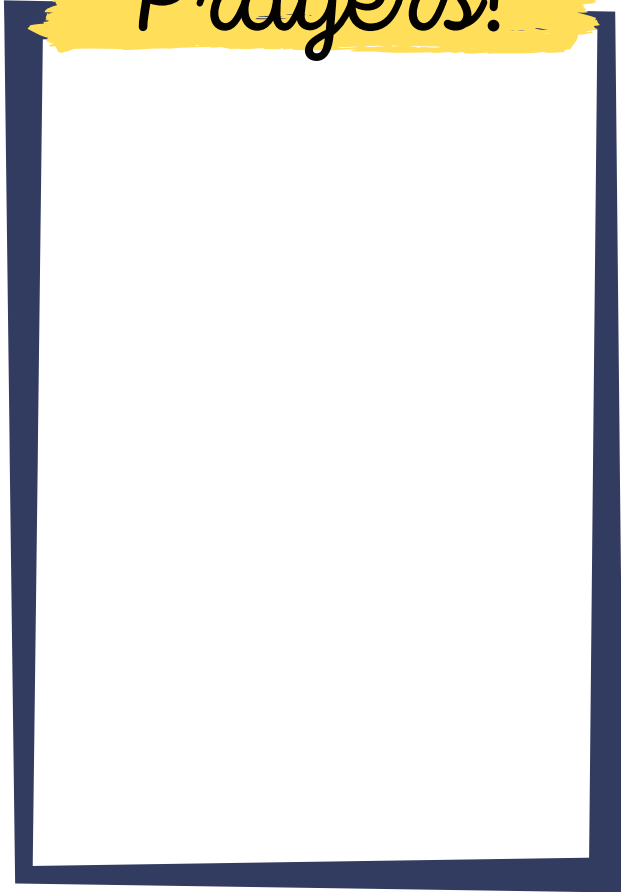
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Teach Me!

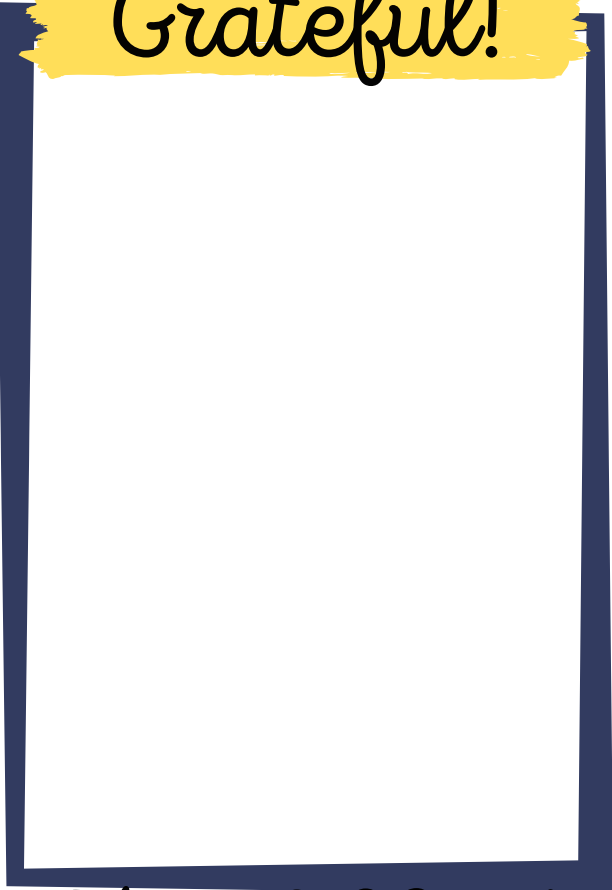


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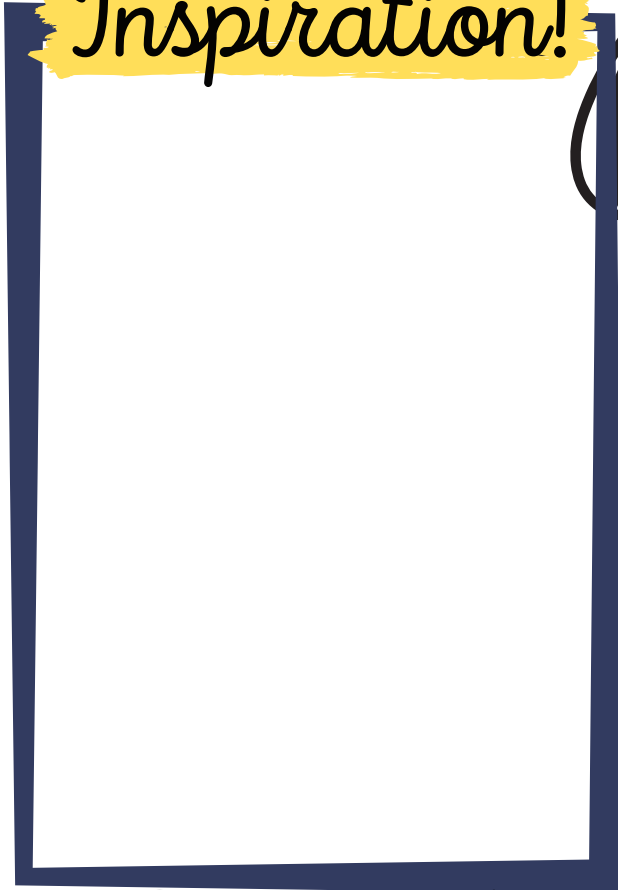


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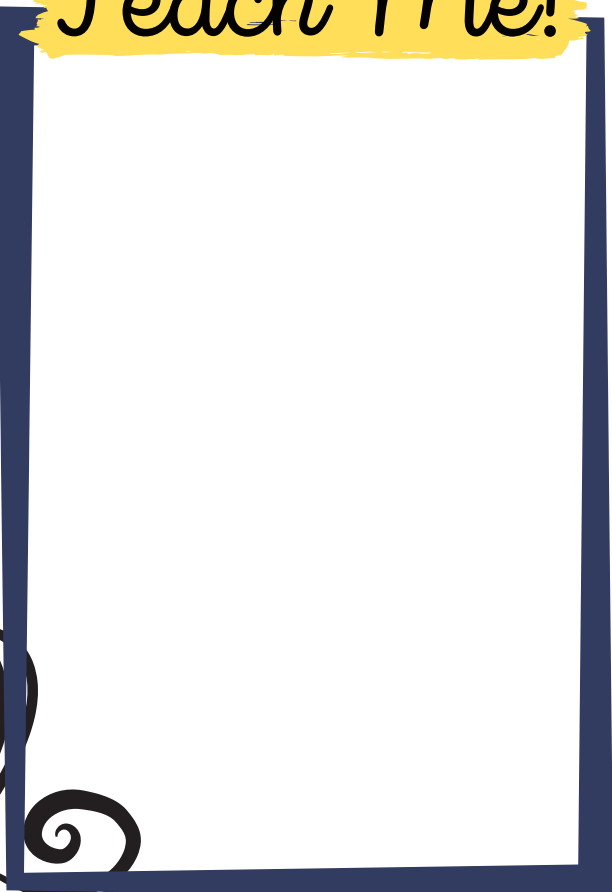
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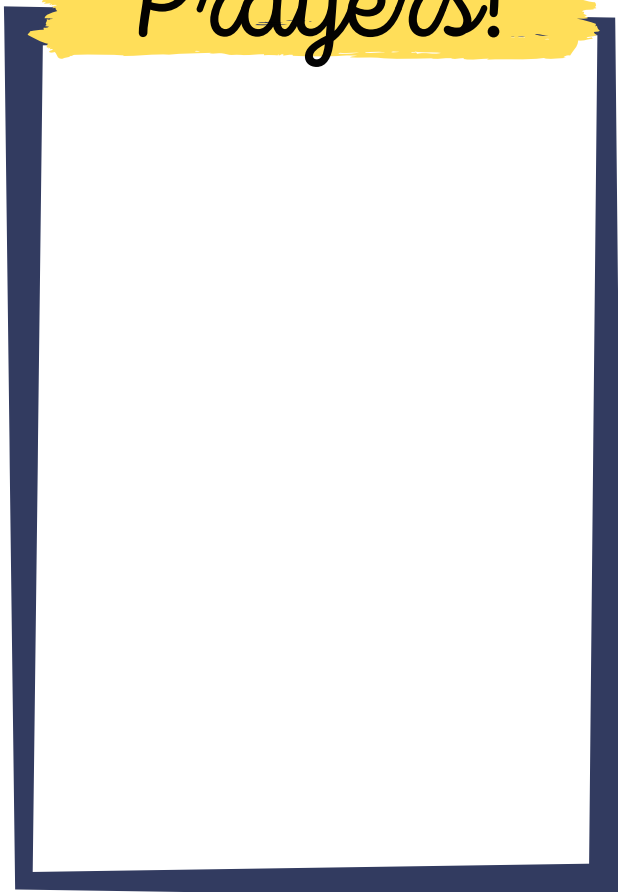
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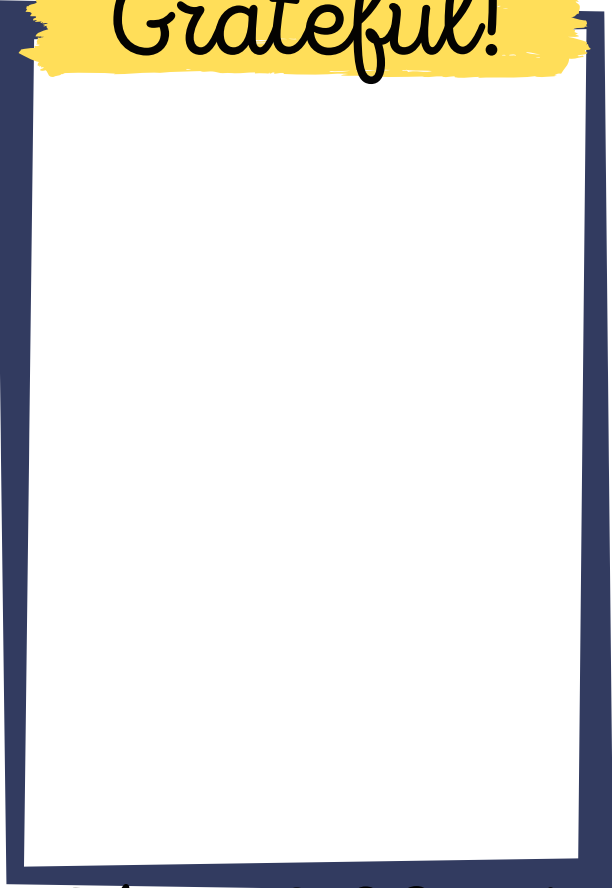


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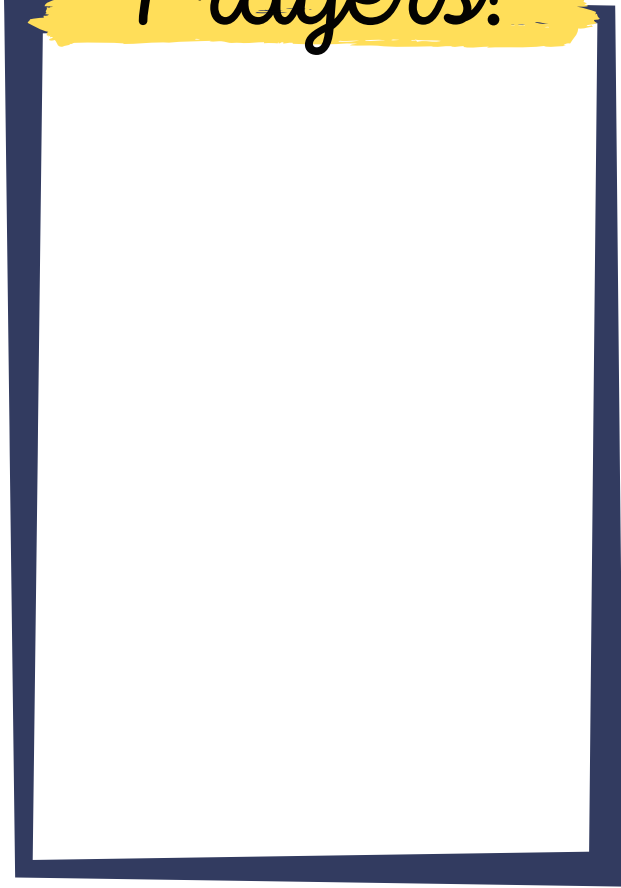
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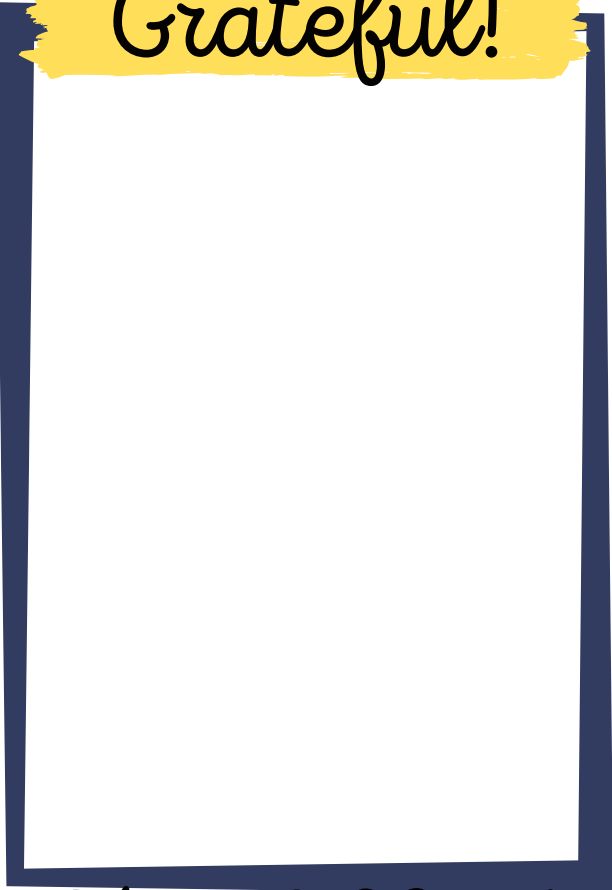


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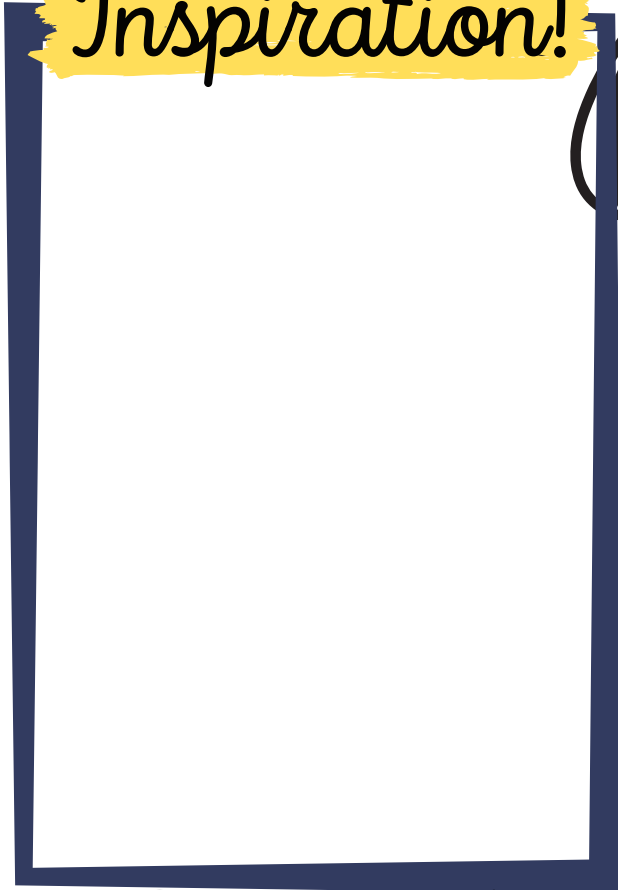


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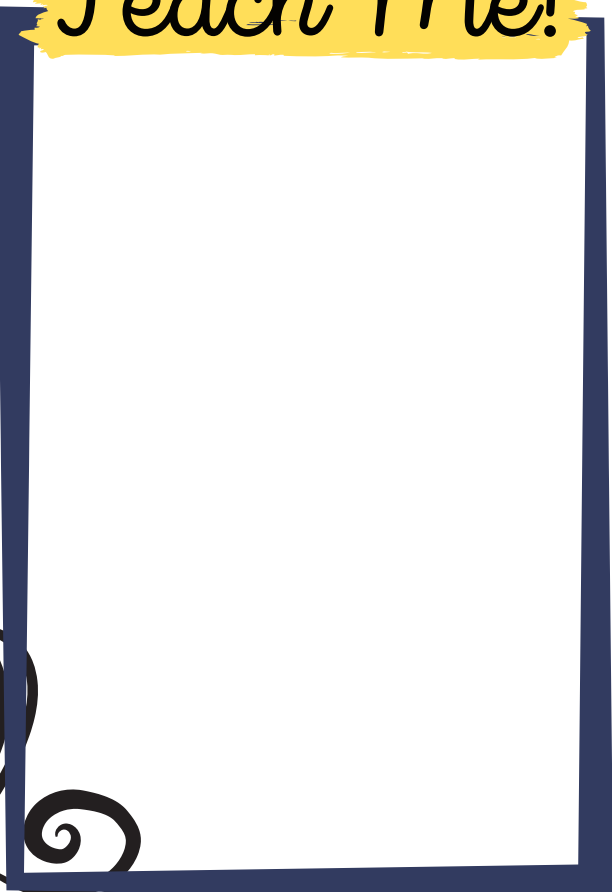
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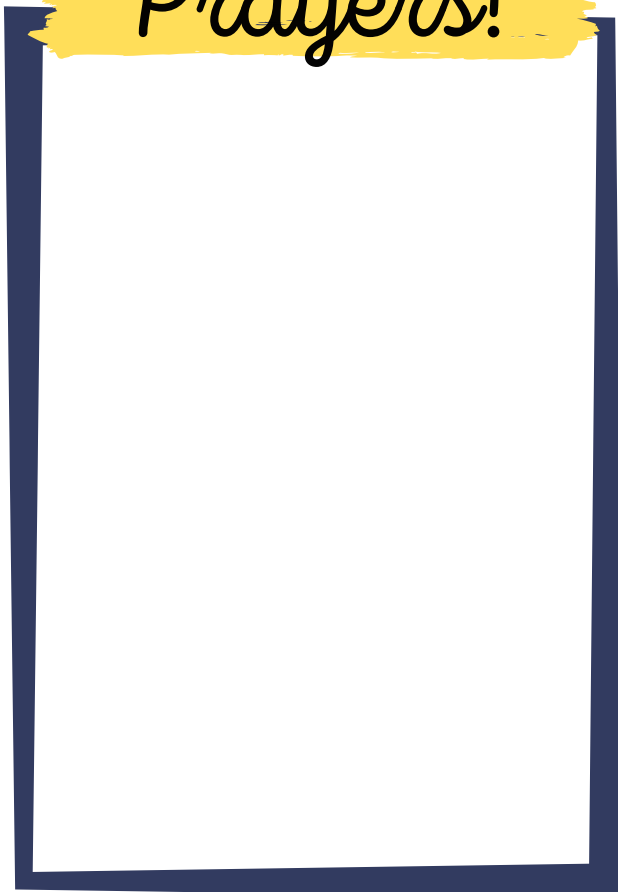
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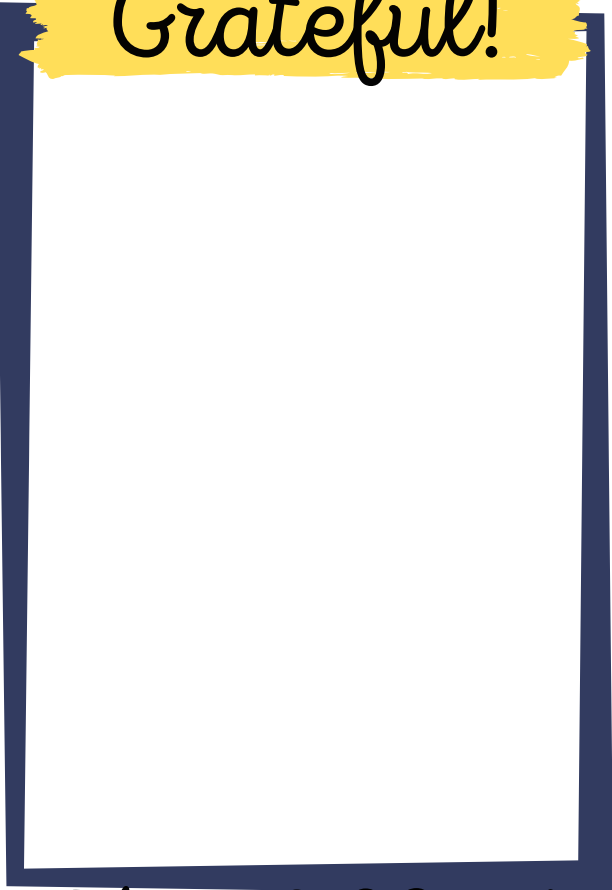


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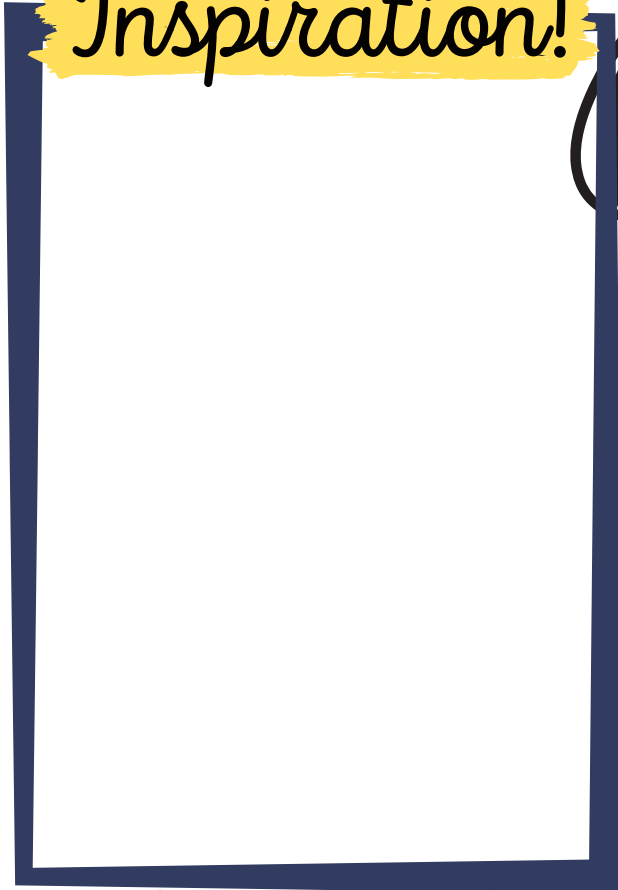


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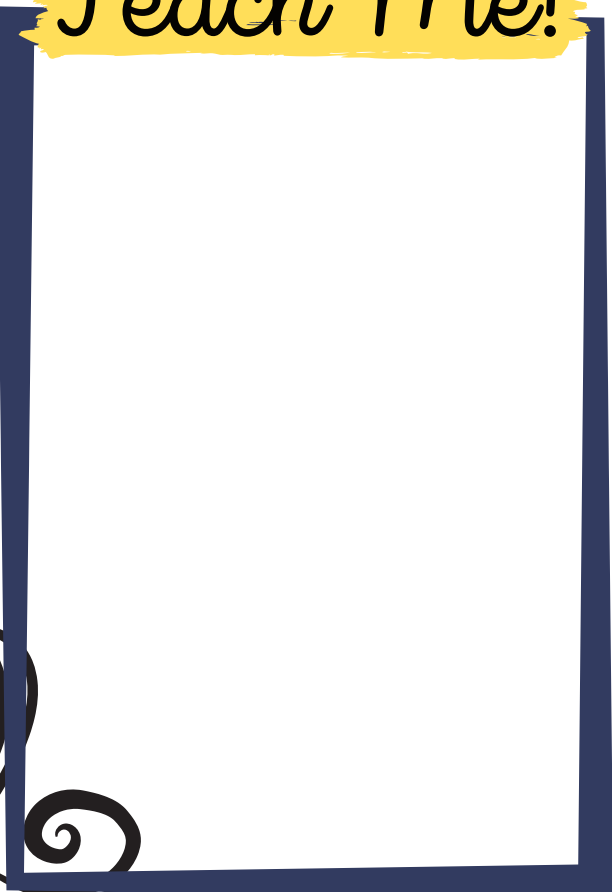
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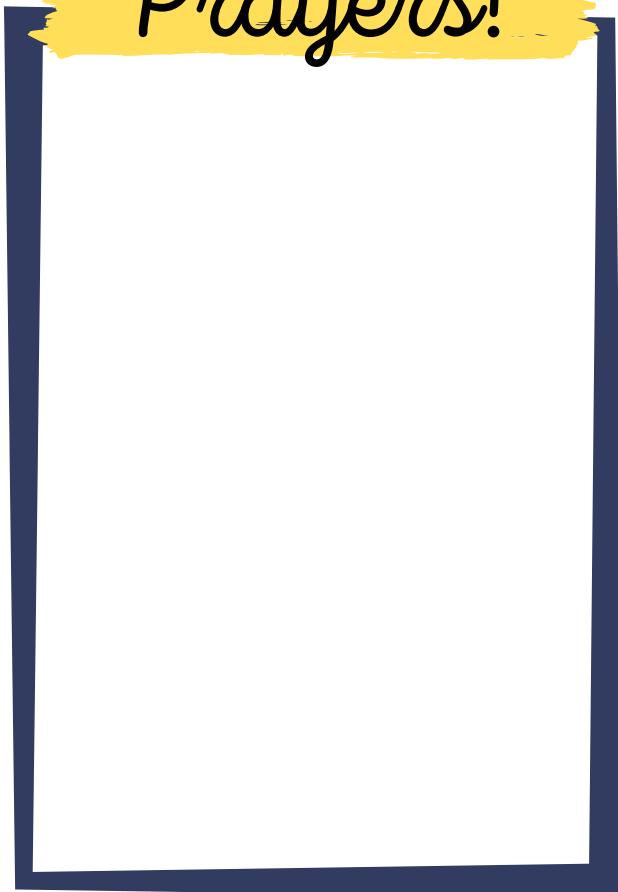
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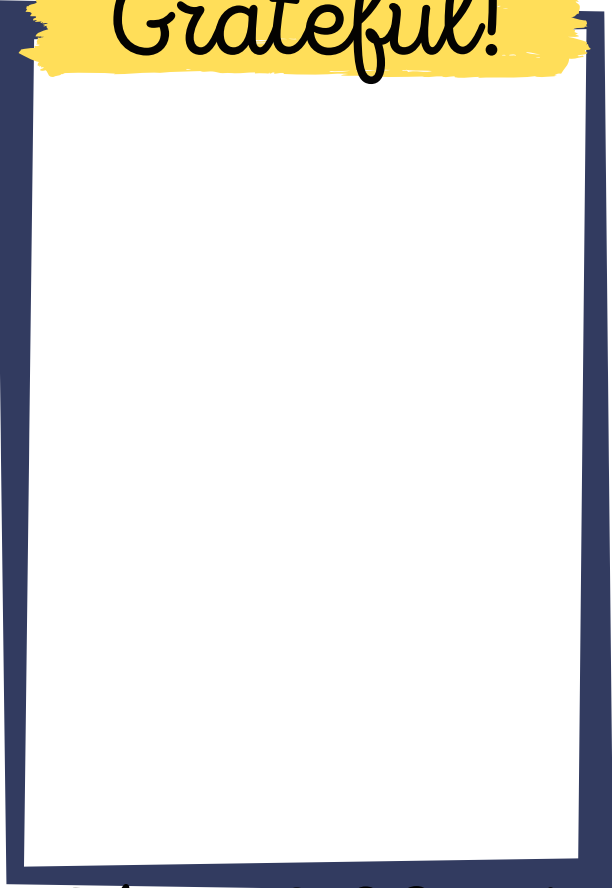


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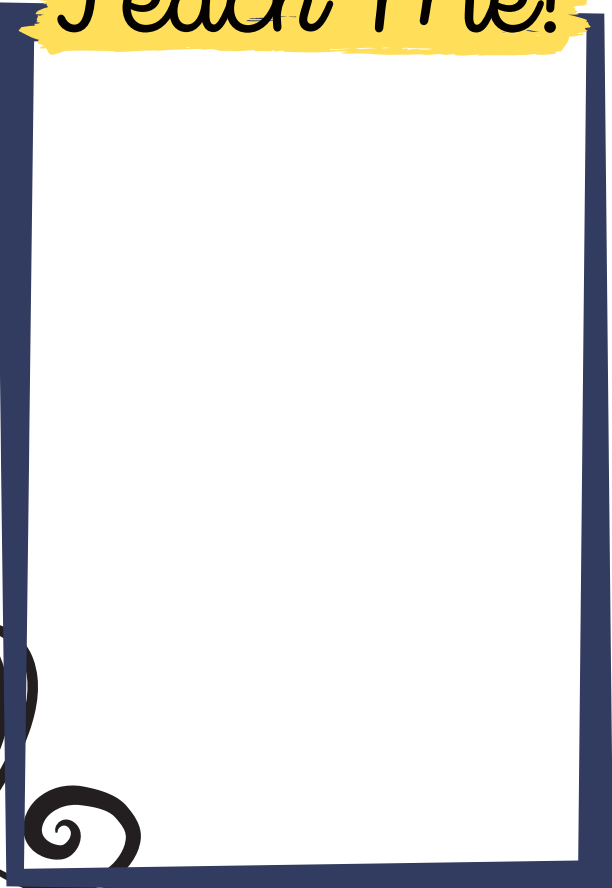
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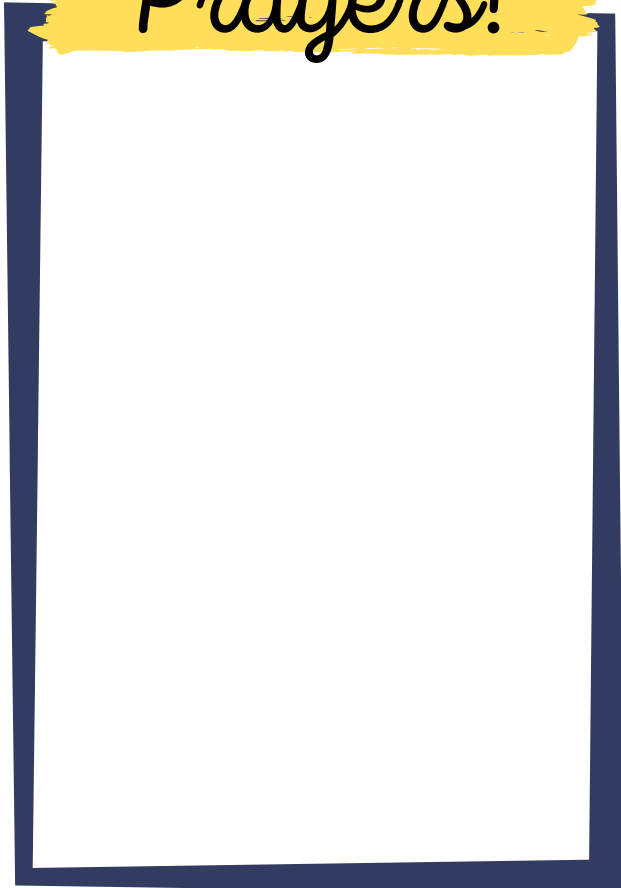
Inspiration!



Teach Me!

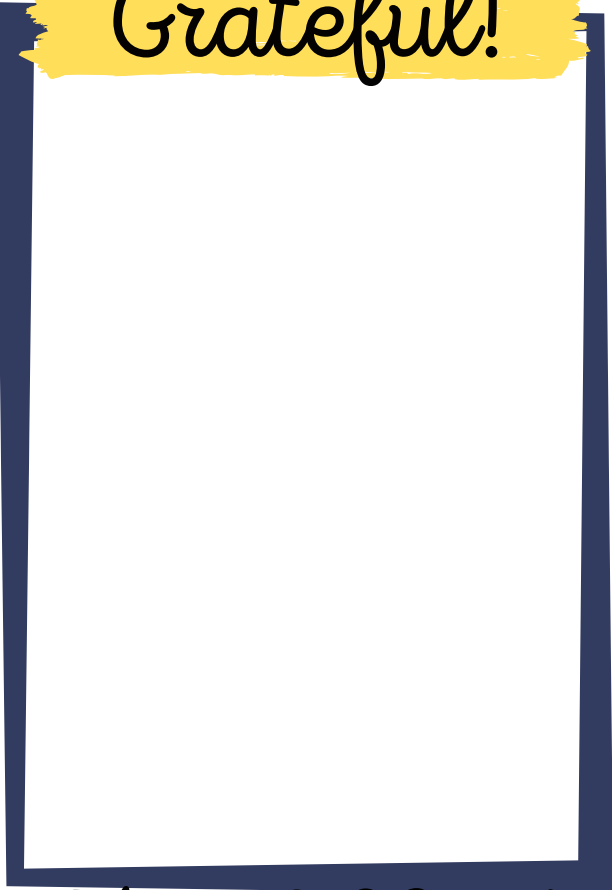


Prayers!



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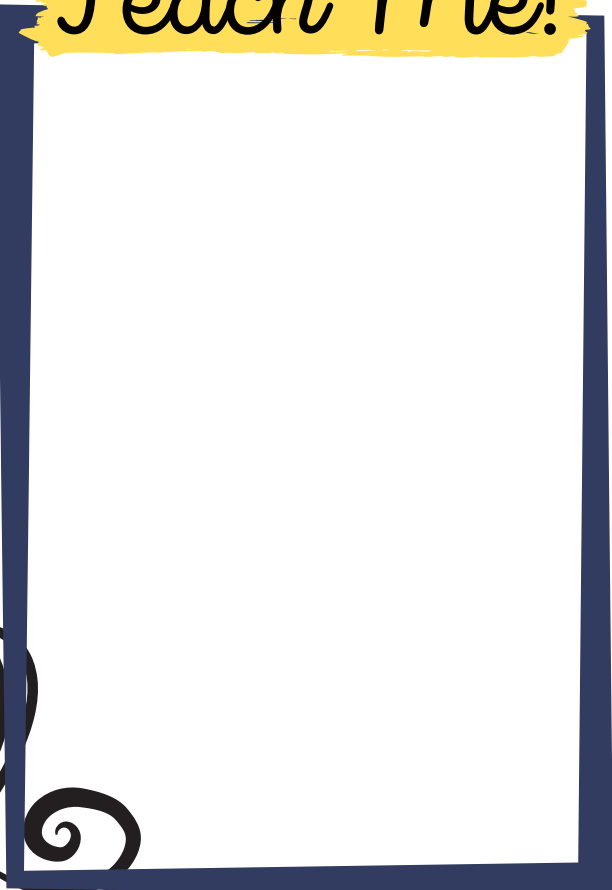
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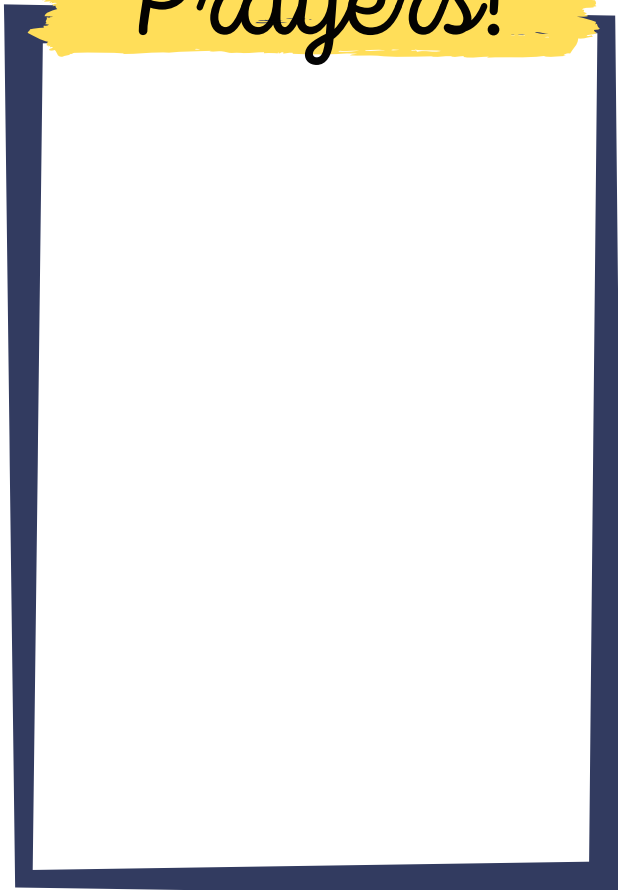
Inspiration!



Teach Me!

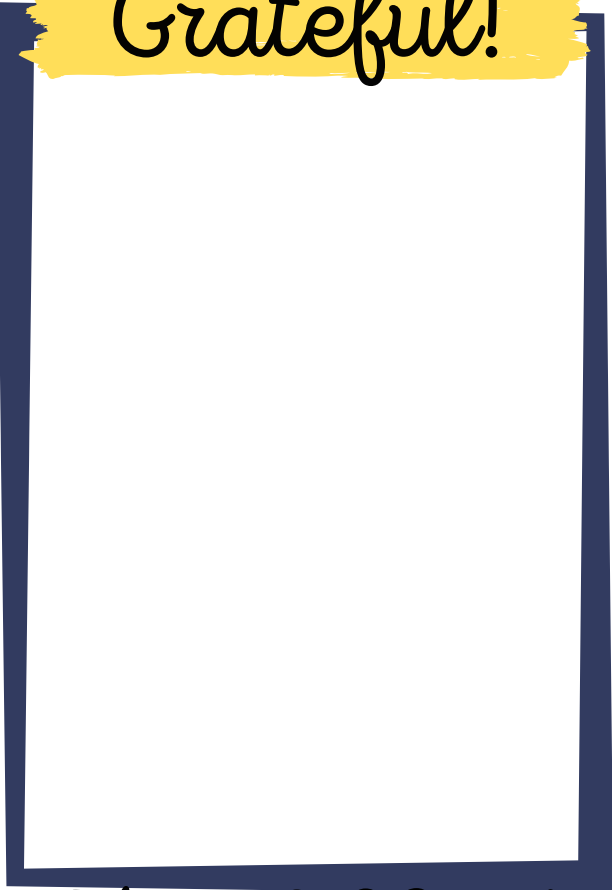


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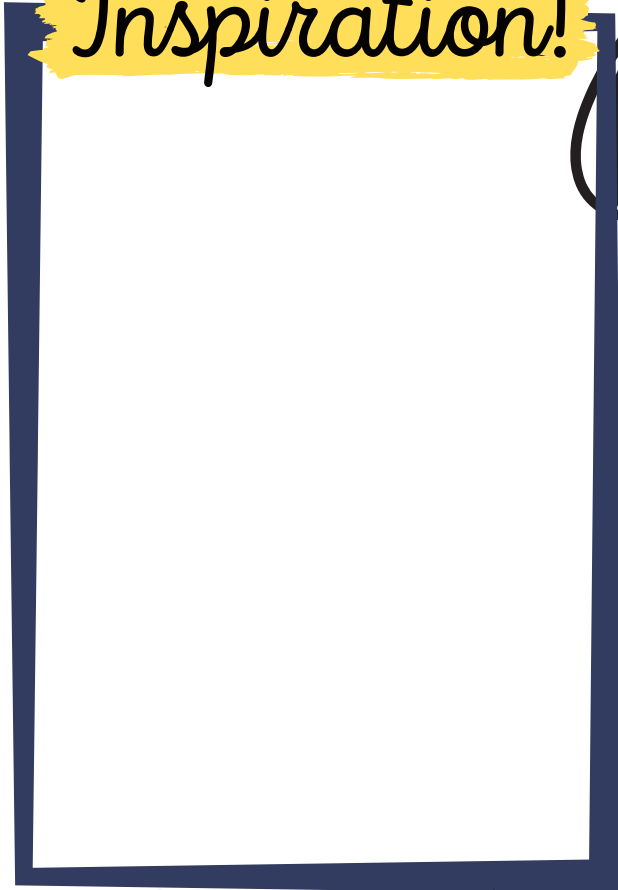


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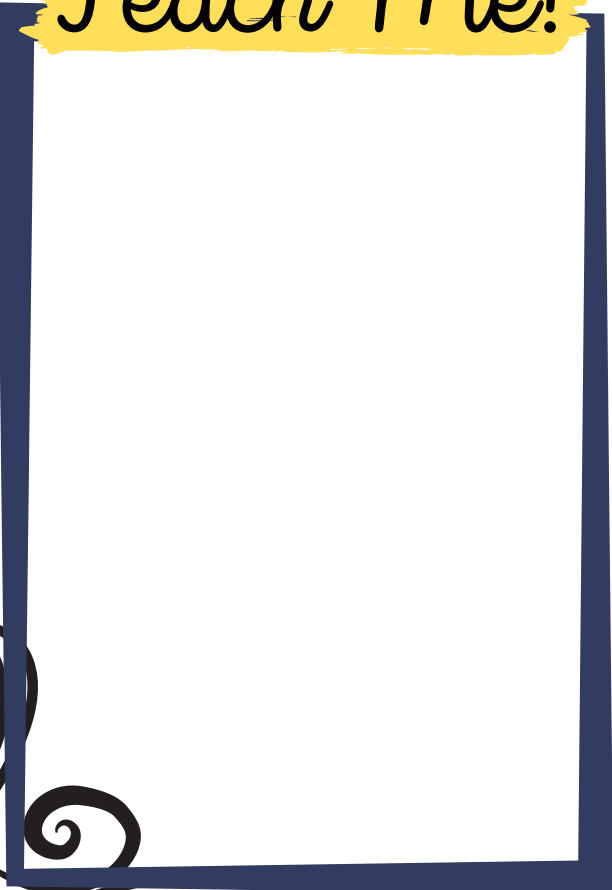
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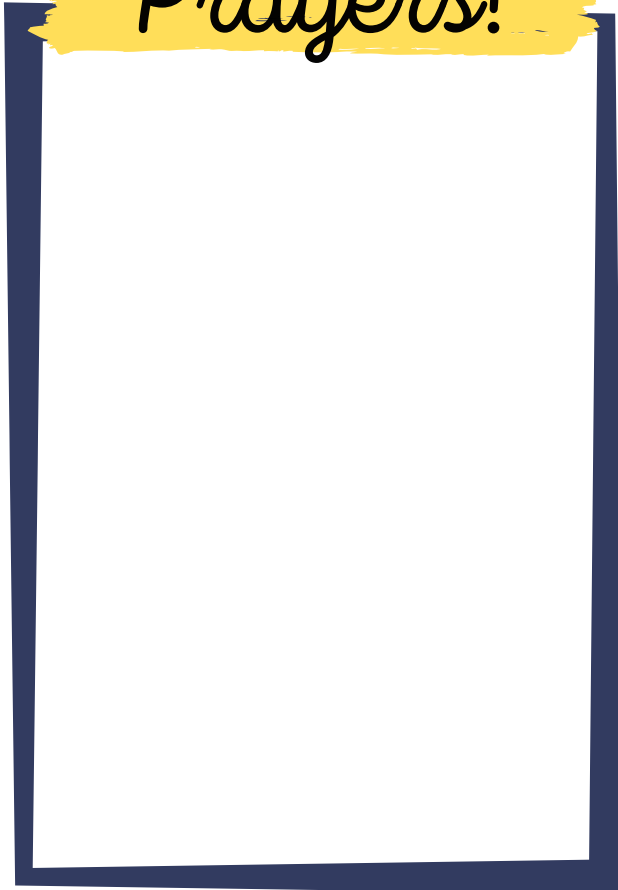
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Teach Me!

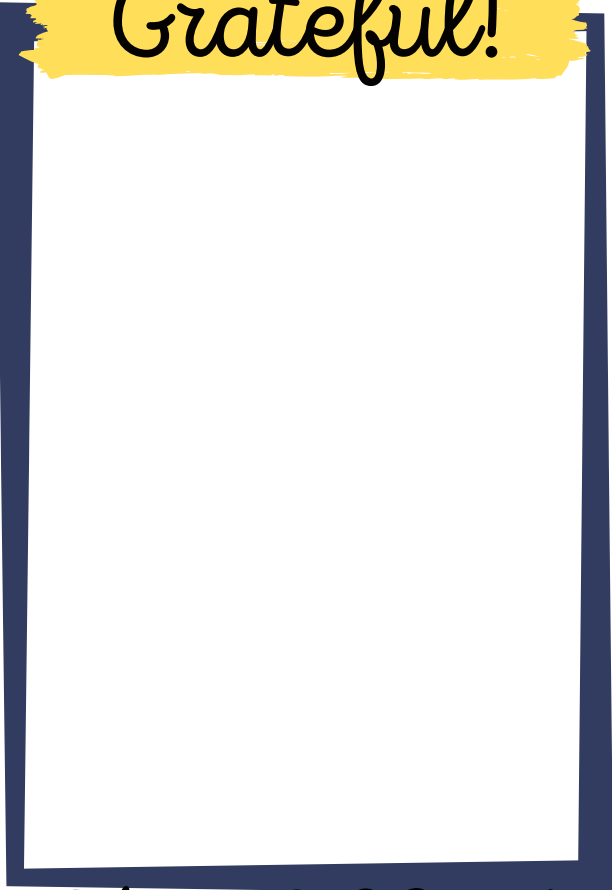


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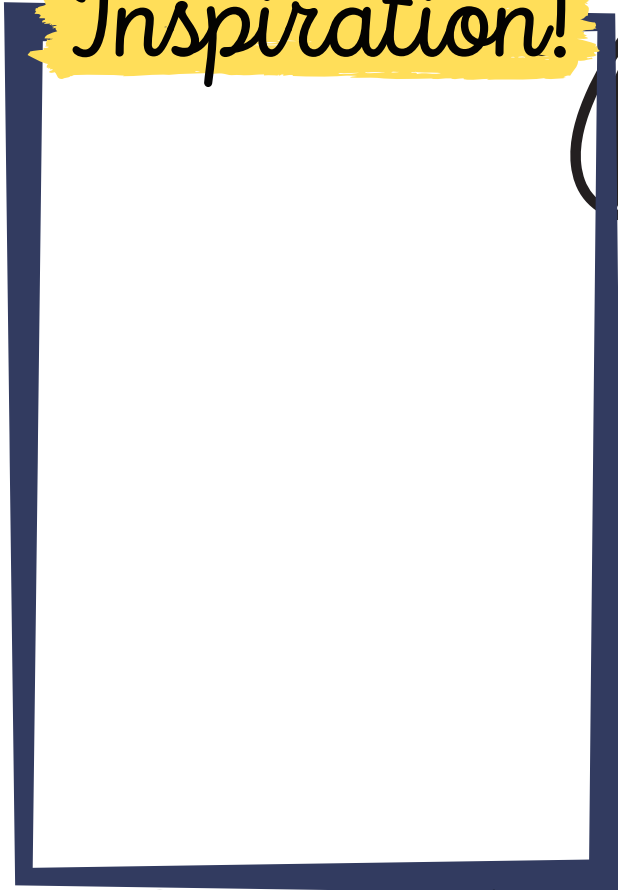


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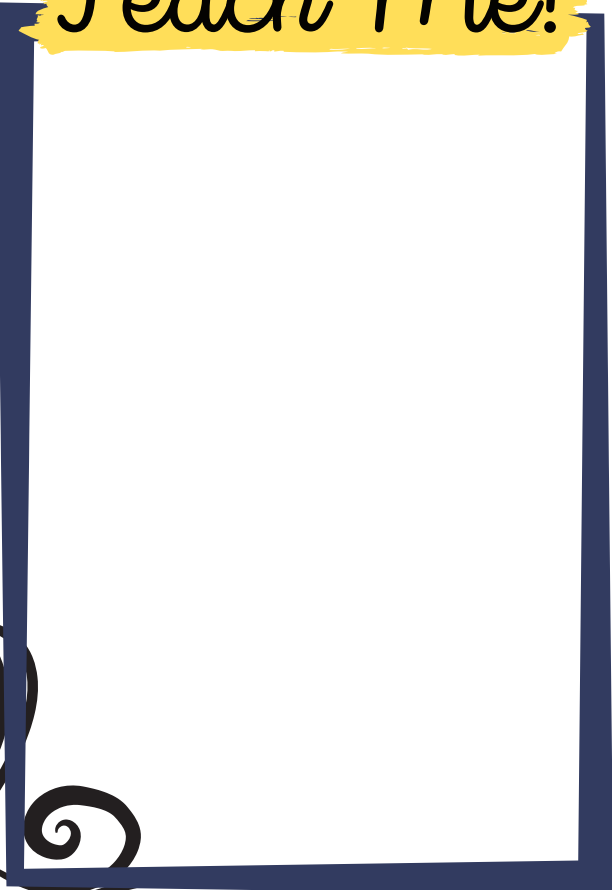
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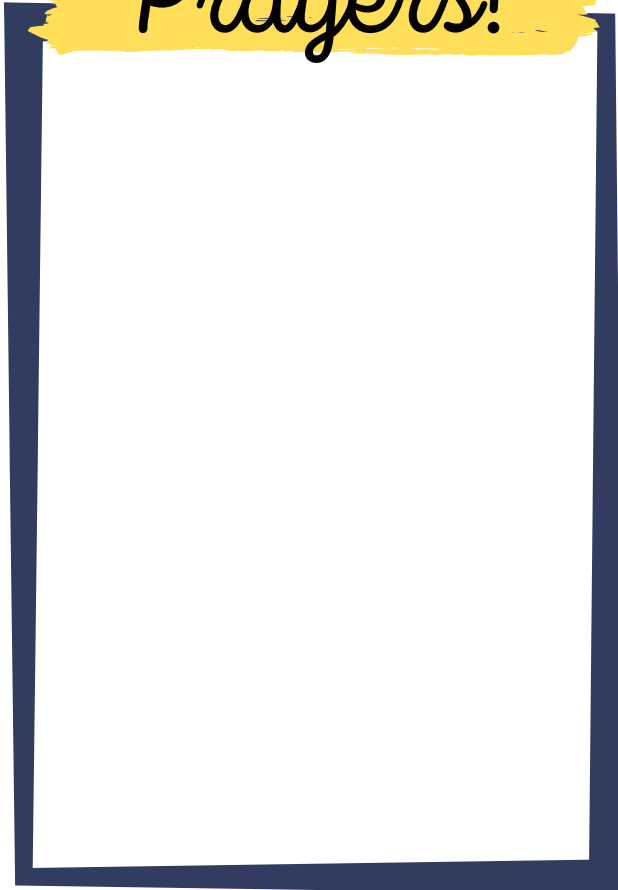
Inspiration!



Teach Me!

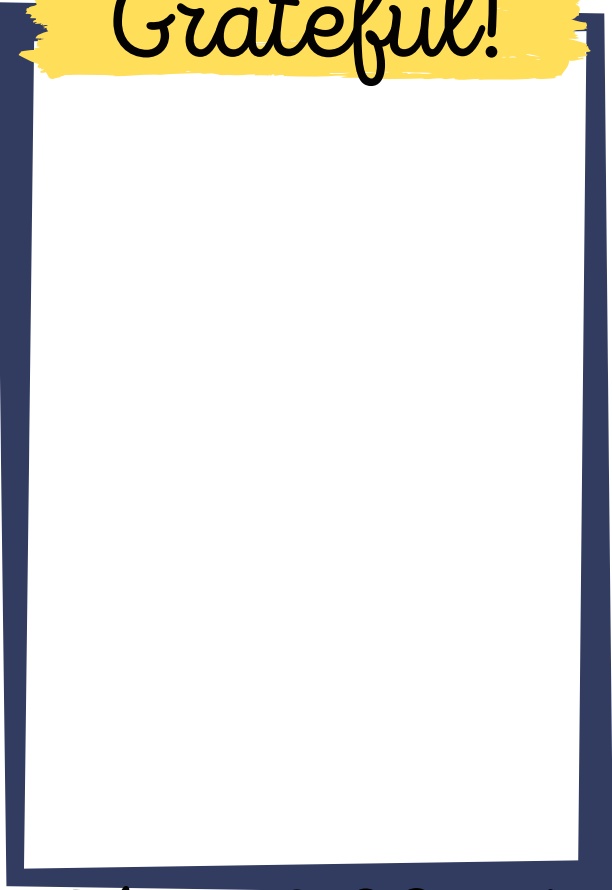


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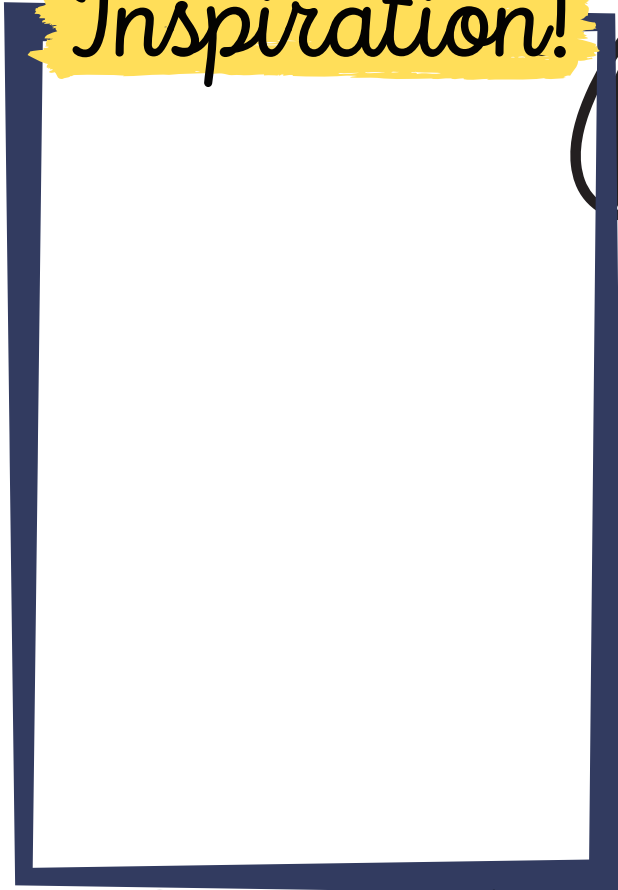


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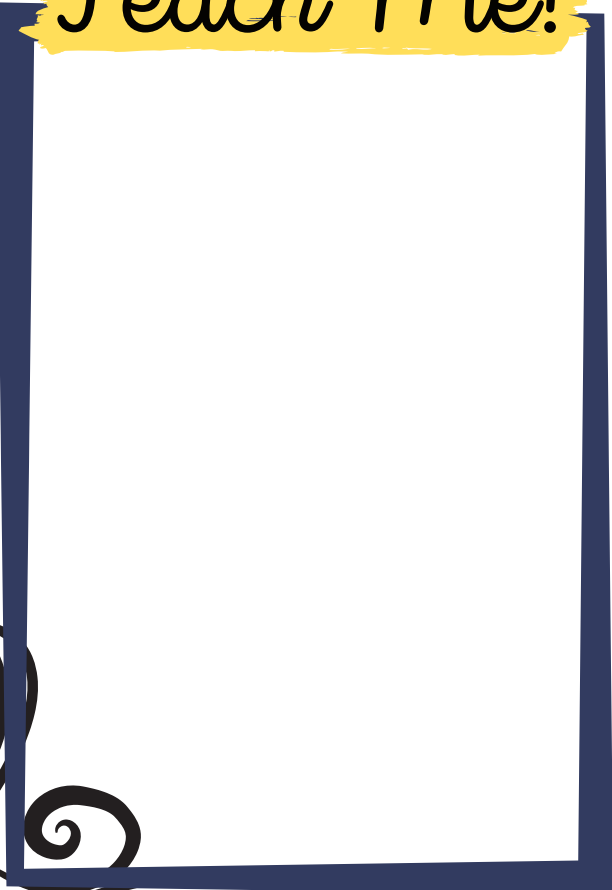
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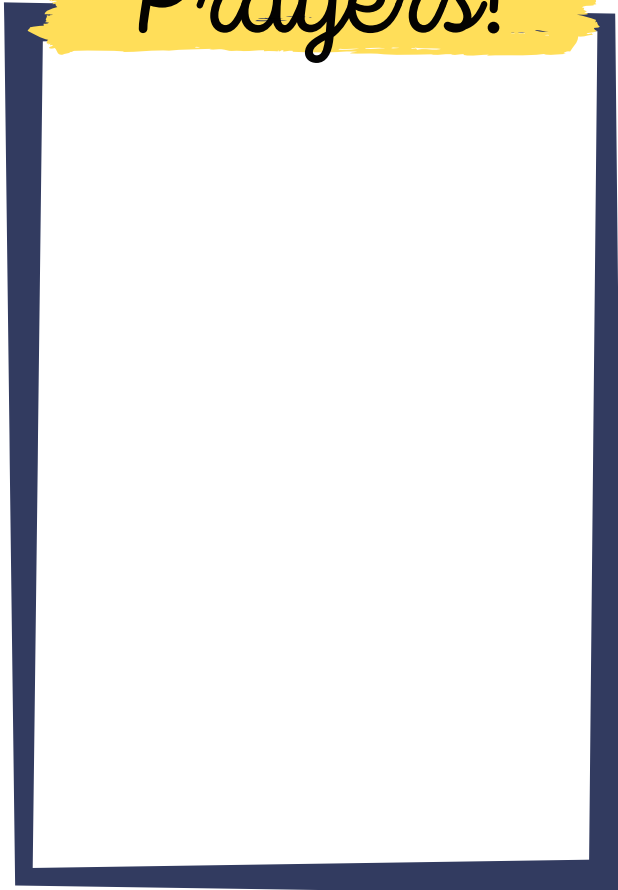
Inspiration!




Teach Me!



Prayers!





*You make something
sweet out of
something rotten.*

Darcie@LeightonLane

Banana Bread

You can make lemonade out of lemons and you can make banana bread out of over ripe bananas.

I hate to waste food, especially overripened bananas. More often than not there is exactly four bananas left that have turned black. It's a strange coincidence that occurs at our house, considering my banana bread recipe calls for exactly four bananas.

The boys in the house plead the fifth.

"That's the sweetest thing I've ever seen," my friend said.

In the warm light of the kitchen, my husband and son sat across from each other at the worn kitchen table. They were eating banana bread fresh from the oven and giggling about something.

It was a picture of pure joy. It was an answered prayer.

"Yeah, there is nothing like banana bread straight from the oven," I responded.

It was a hot, sticky summer night in the South. My best friend and I sat in the dark on the back porch to avoid attracting the bugs. She had stolen my spot – the bench where I worked out a lot of things with God a couple of summers past. I let her have it. She needed the bench more than me at the time.

I looked at her and wondered how could I be more like her. It had been a tough year for her. She had lost something that I still had and yet she was genuinely happy for me. You could tell by the way she looked through the window.

It seemed like we were swapping bad years back and forth. She had been there for me and it was my turn to reciprocate. So, we sat in silence quite a bit. From my own experience, I realized sometimes quiet is the best advice.

Just being together speaks loudest.

This year, she had lost and I had gained. And that night I had gained something from her. I learned what it looks like to be happy for others despite our own circumstances.

I saw her as a teacher of resilience and compassion.

And I am a better person because of her.

It had been a good day. We had breathed in salt air and increased our Vitamin D. And then we ended it with some warm banana bread.

You learn to soak up the good days. You linger a bit, so those days get you through the bad ones. We lingered a while on the porch.

Before sleep that night, I asked God, "How do I do that?" "How do I become more like her?" "How do I look at what someone else has, maybe something I don't have, and genuinely smile about it?"


"How do I bleed compassion so I become a teacher of it?"

He said, "Banana Bread."

"You make Banana Bread. You make something sweet out of something rotten."

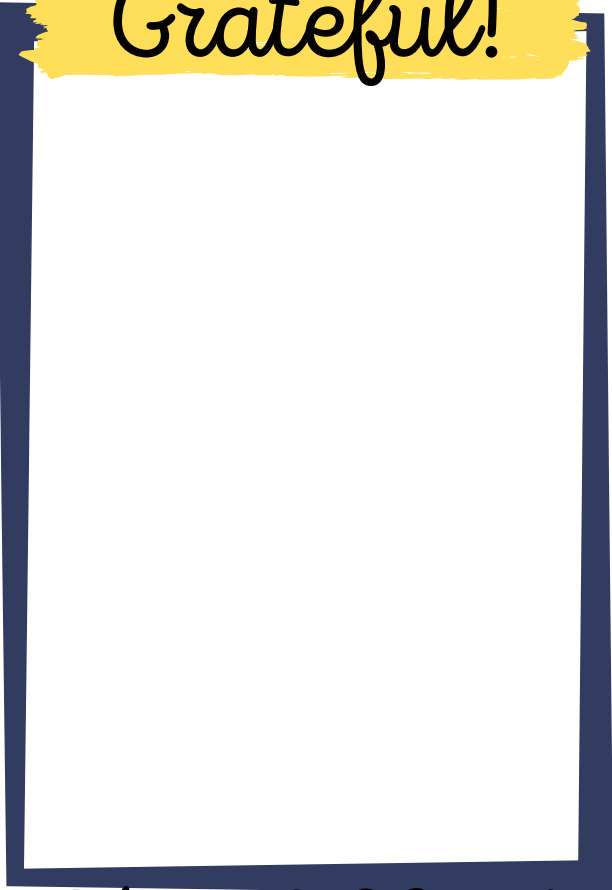
*Forever Sold,
Darcie*

*Who can you be a light to? What simple
things can you do to shine?*

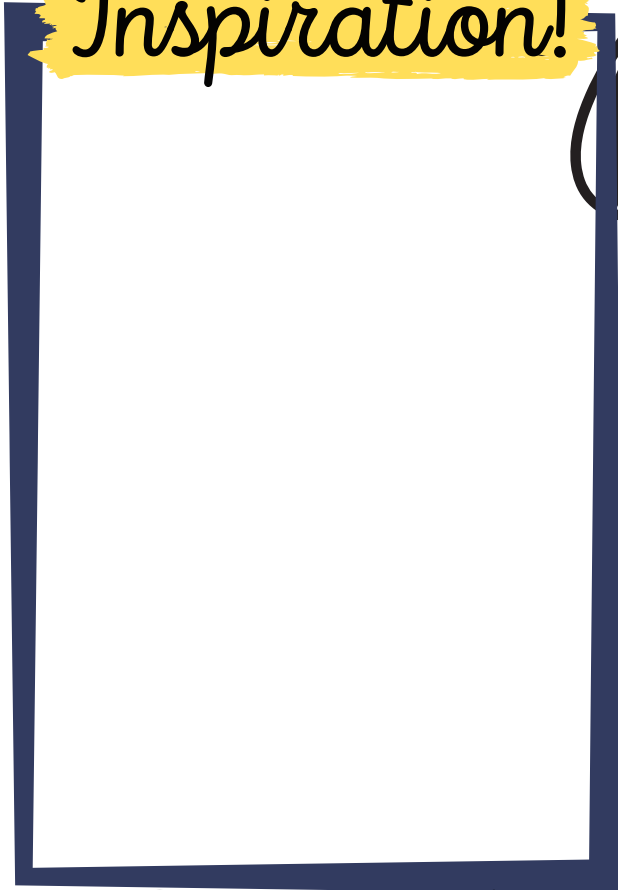


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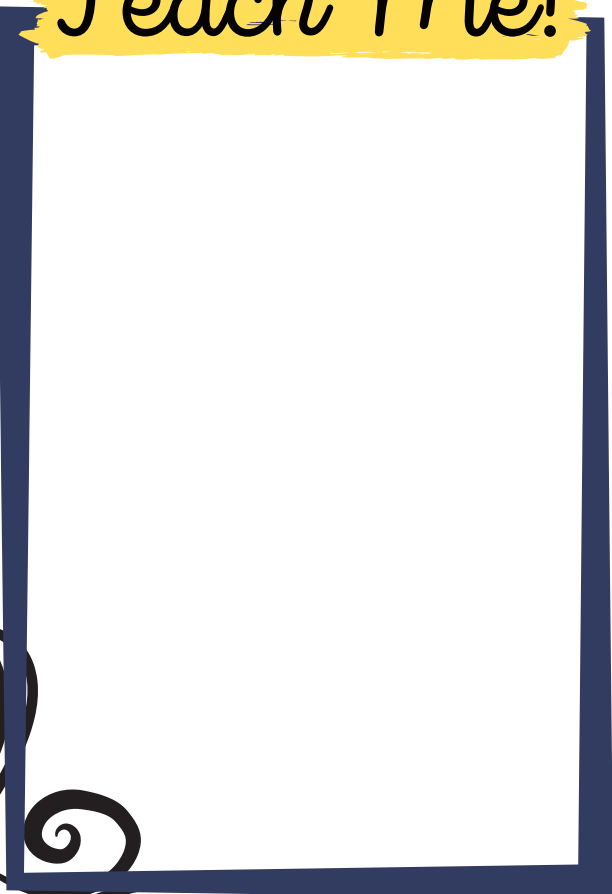
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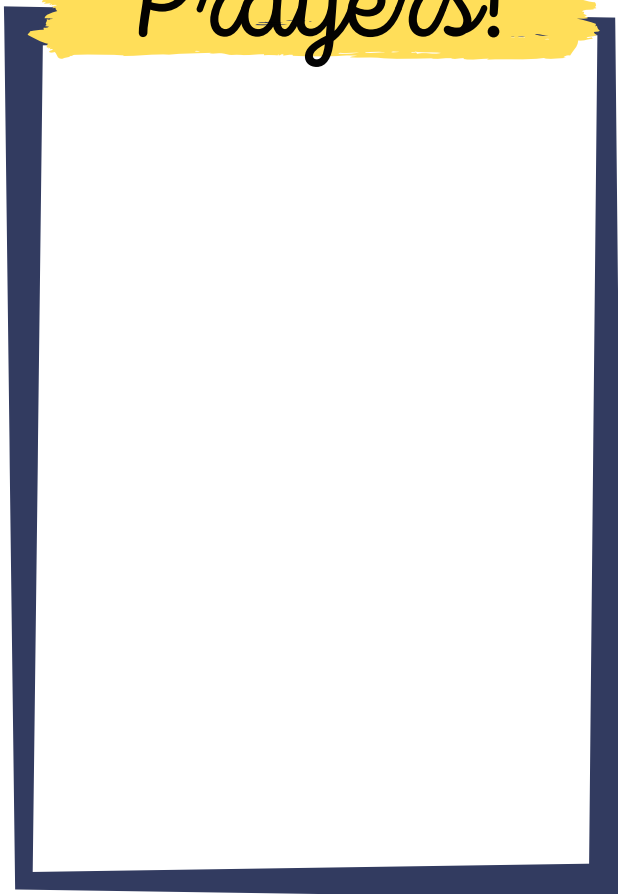
Inspiration!



Teach Me!

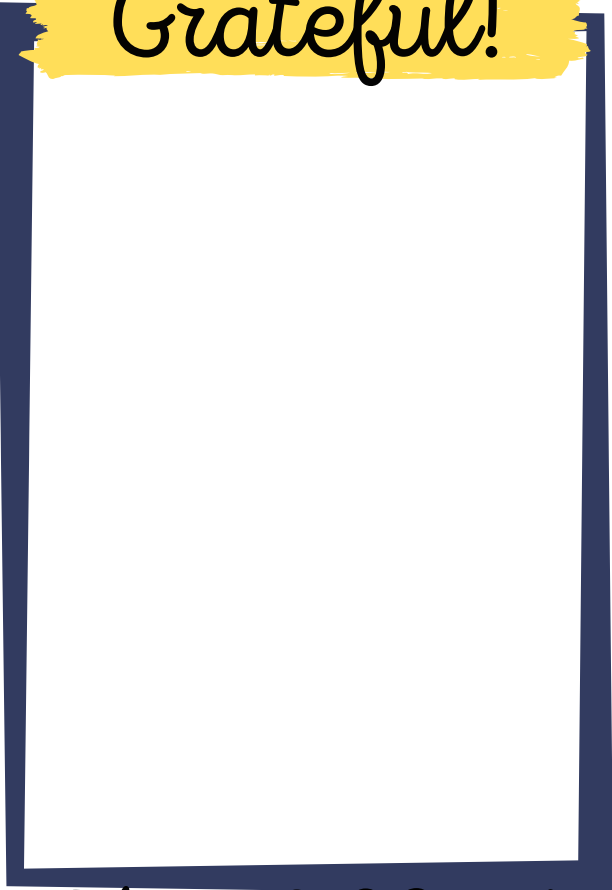


Prayers!

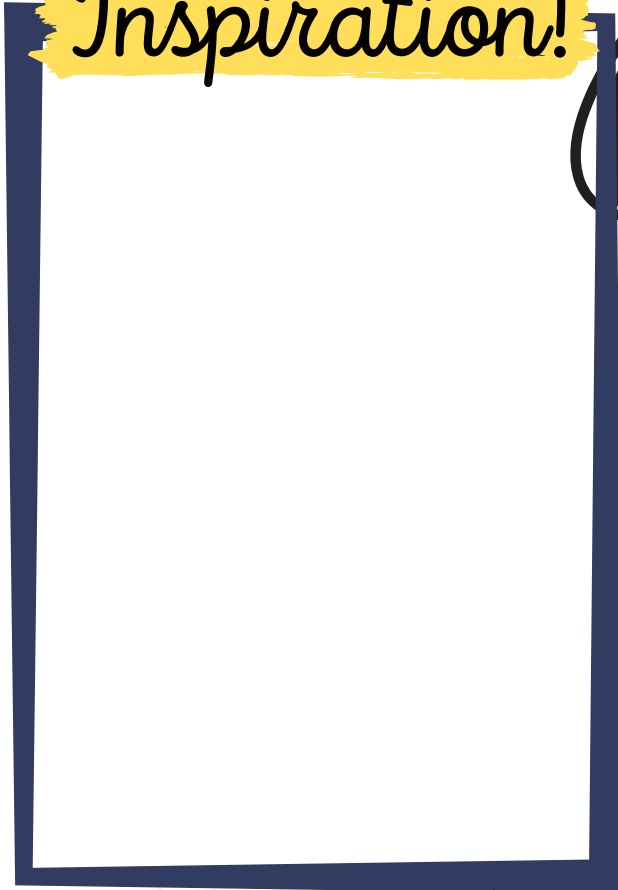


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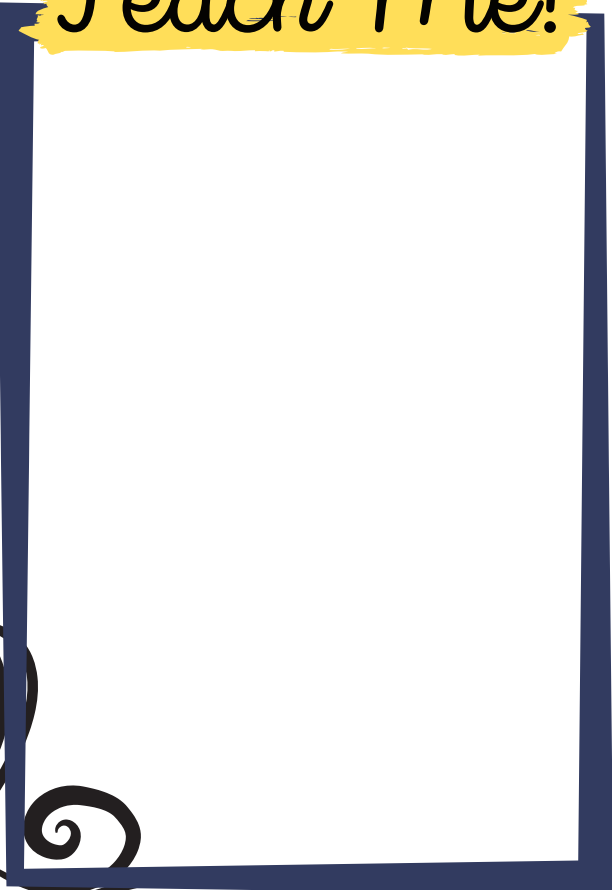
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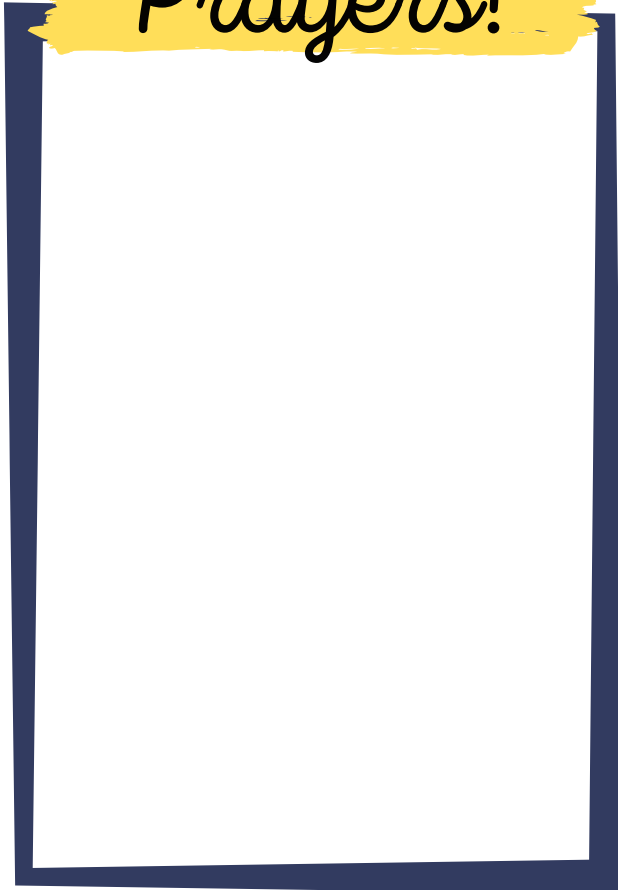
Inspiration!



Teach Me!



Prayers!



date:

Grateful!

Inspiration!

Teach Me!

Prayers!

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Teach Me!

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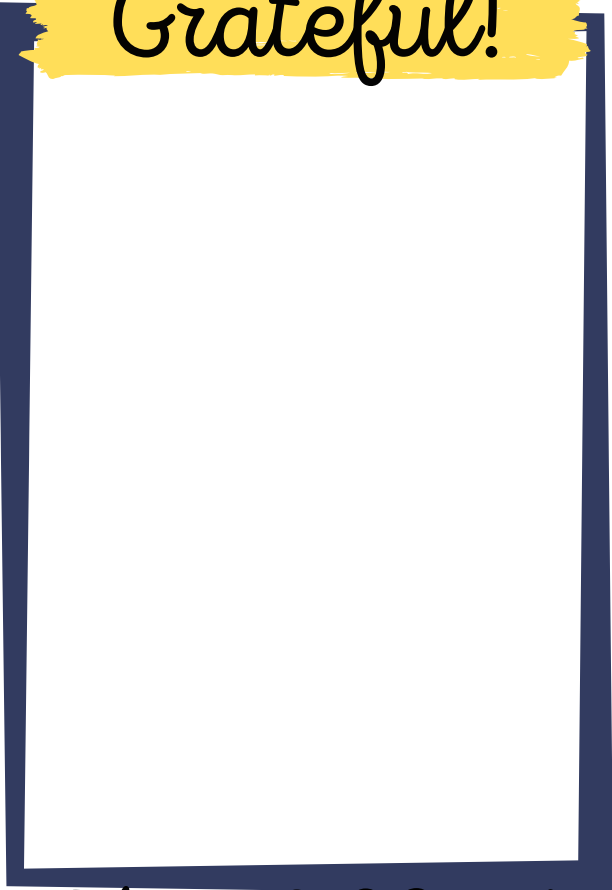
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Teach Me!

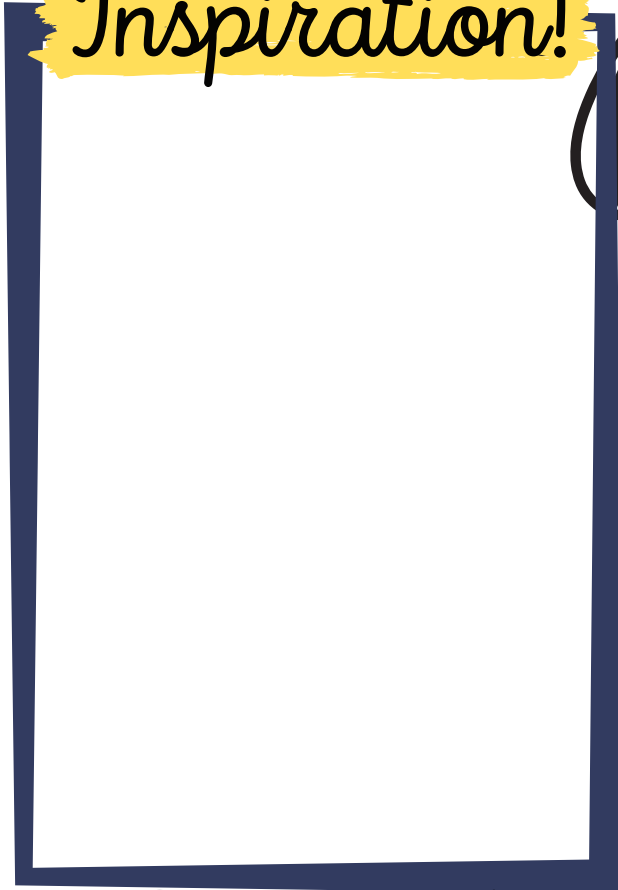
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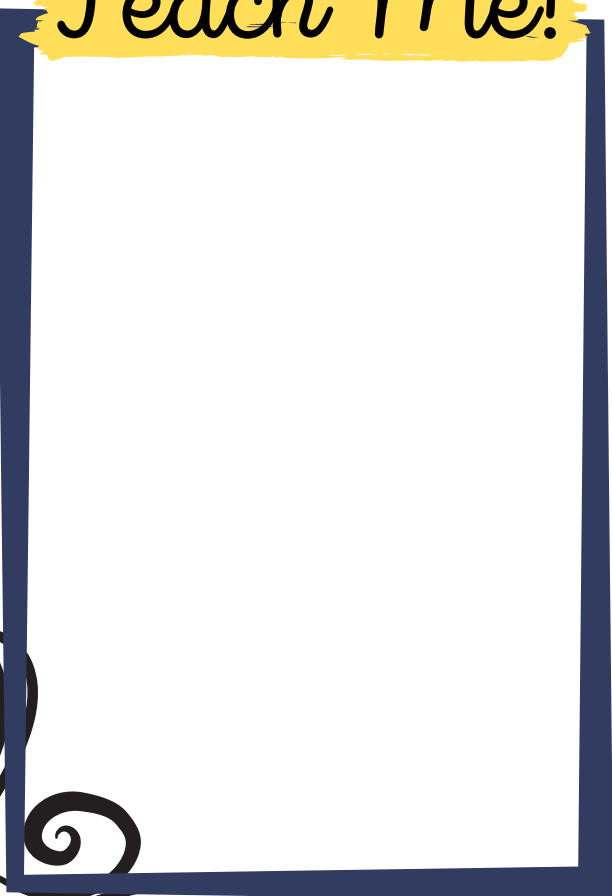
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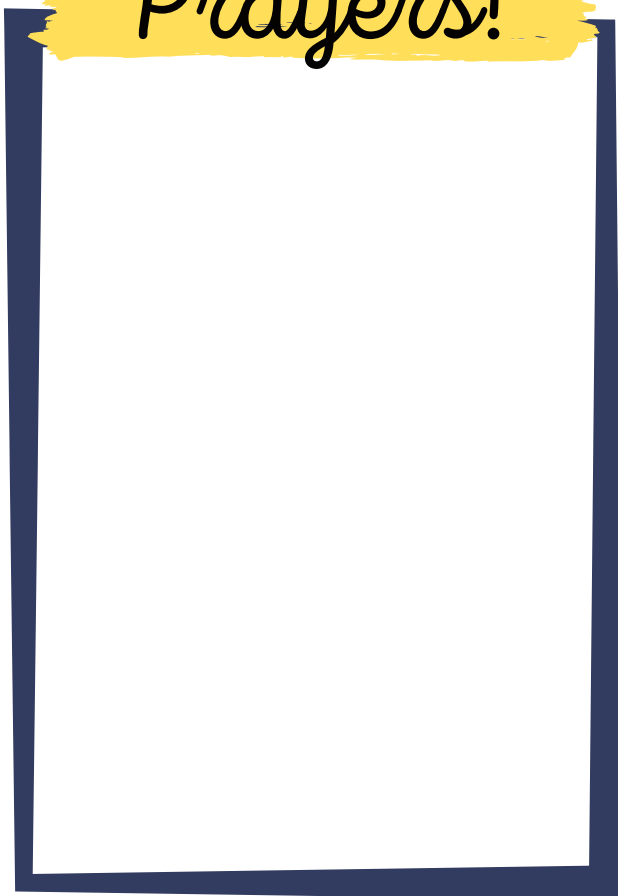
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Teach Me!

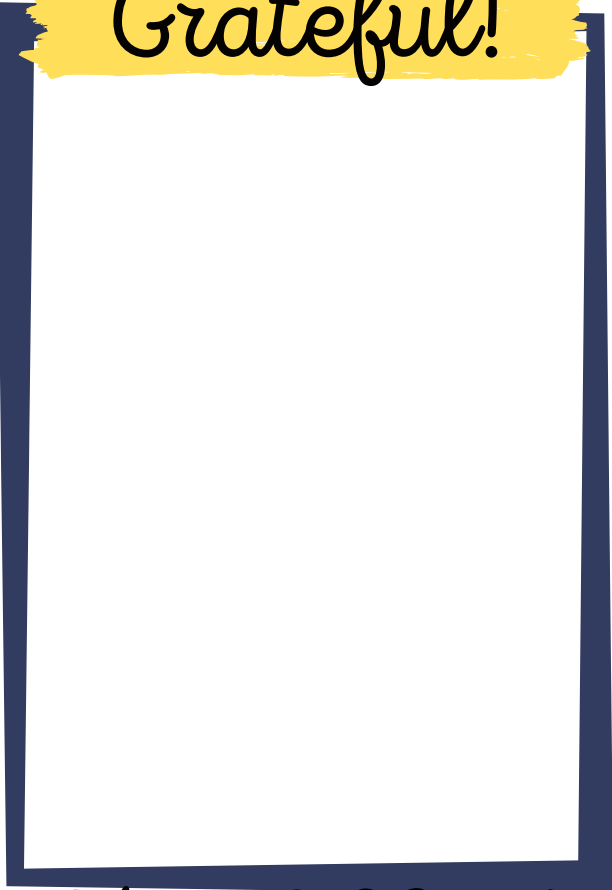


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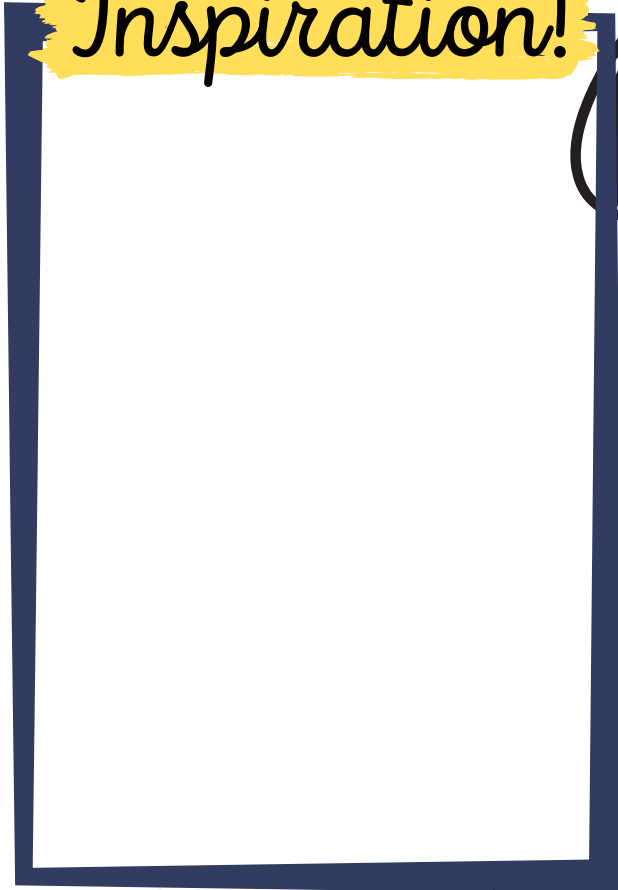


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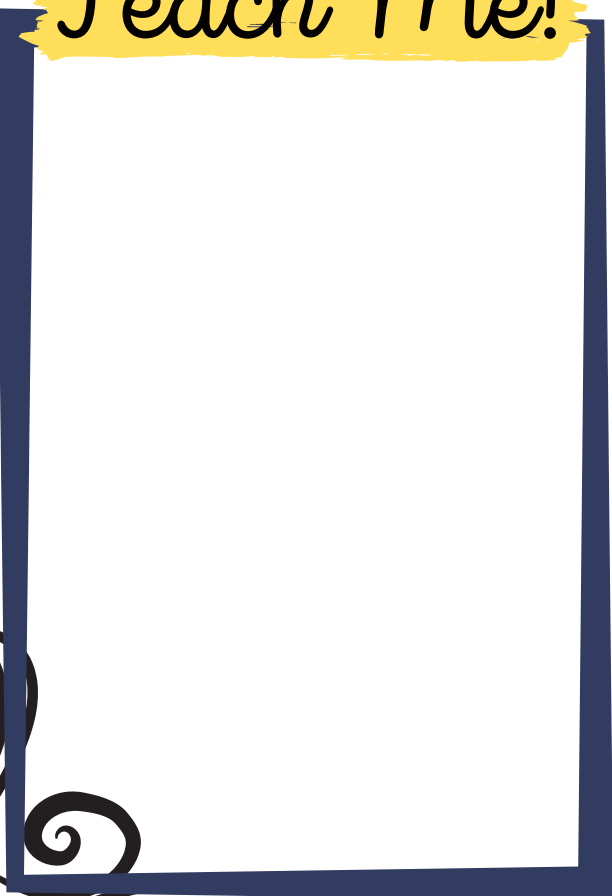
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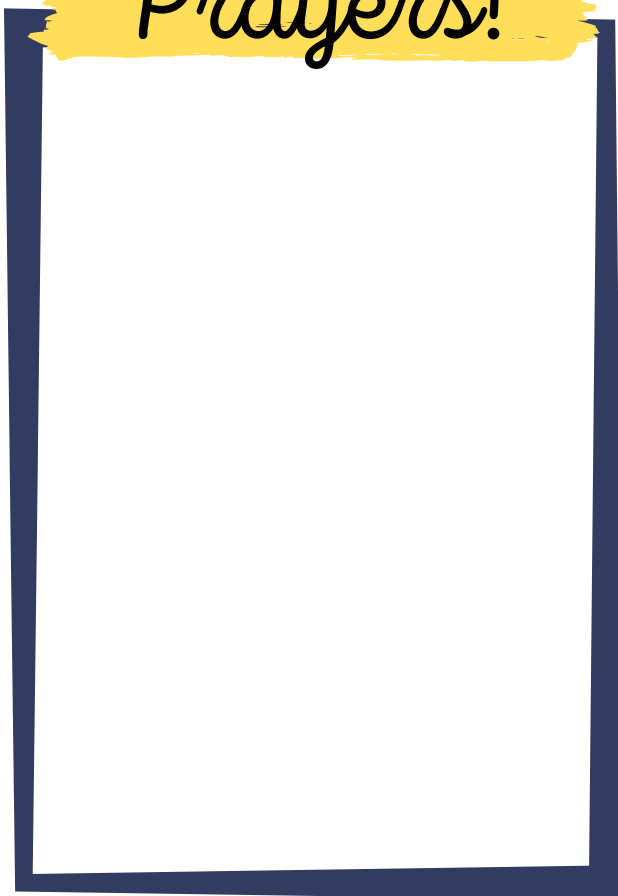
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Teach Me!

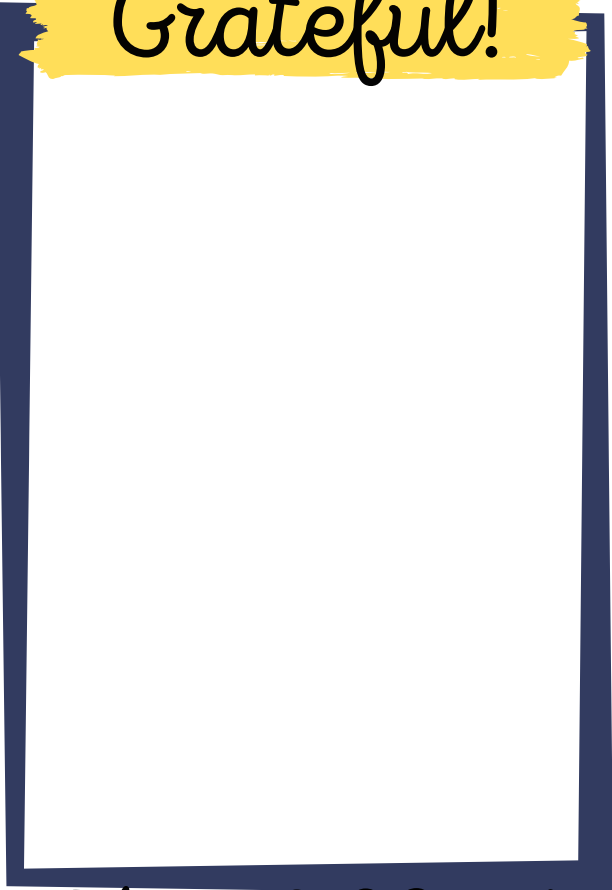


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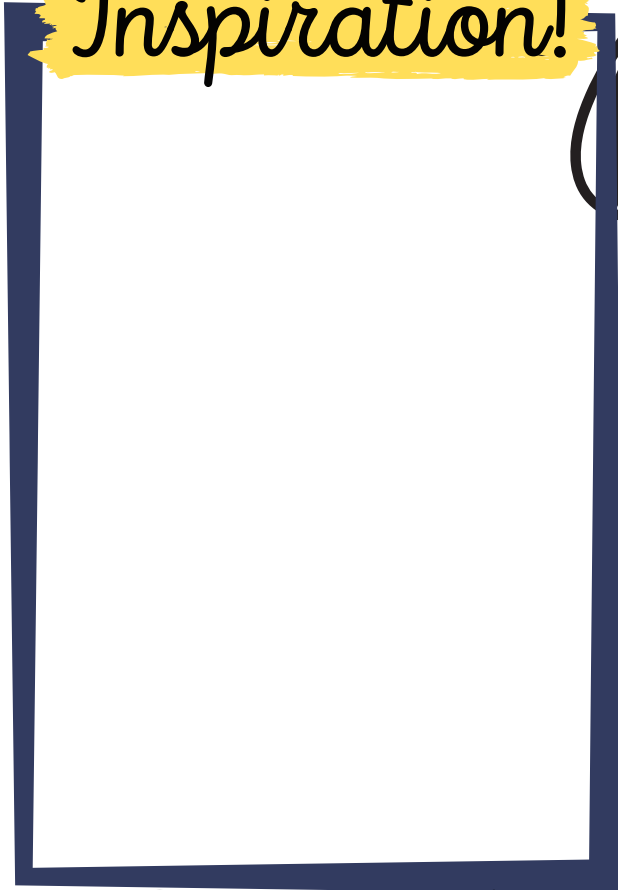


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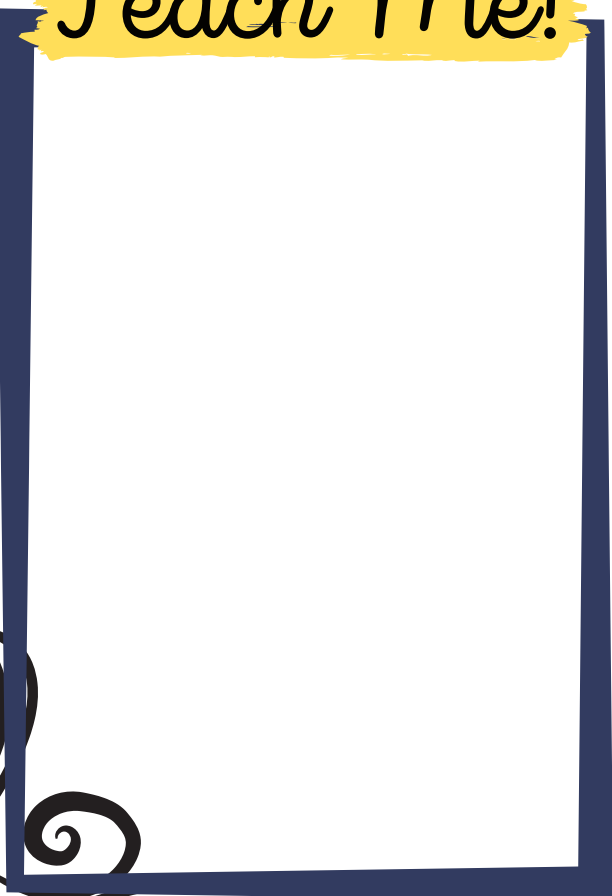
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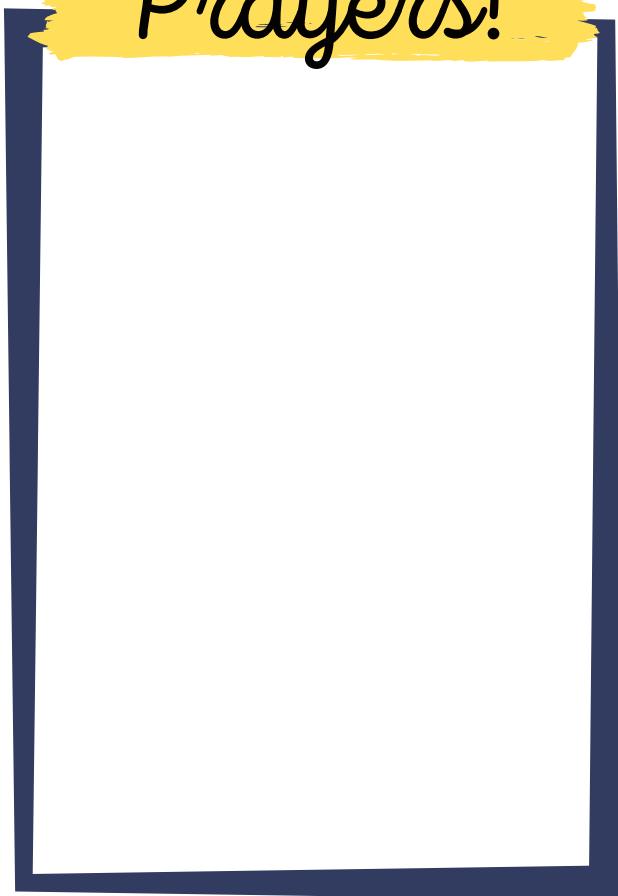
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Teach Me!

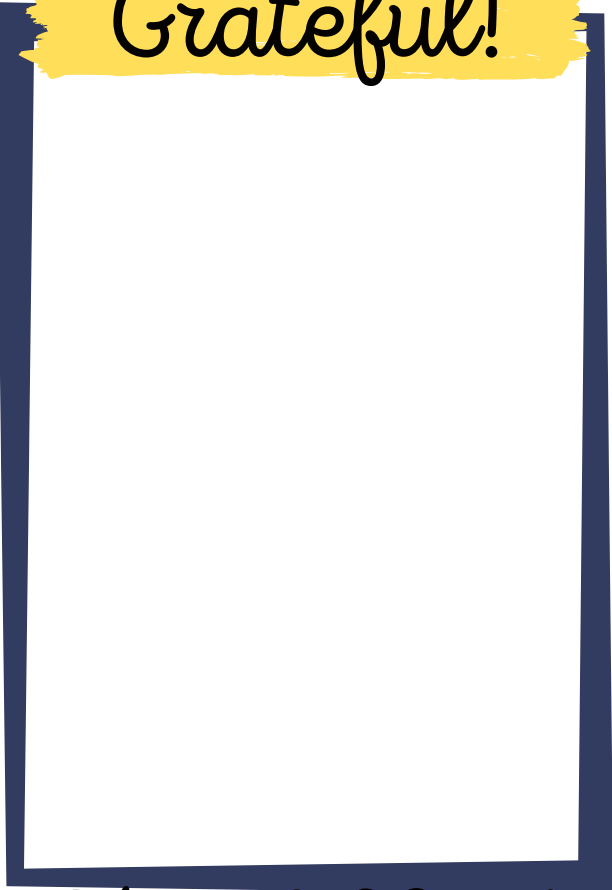


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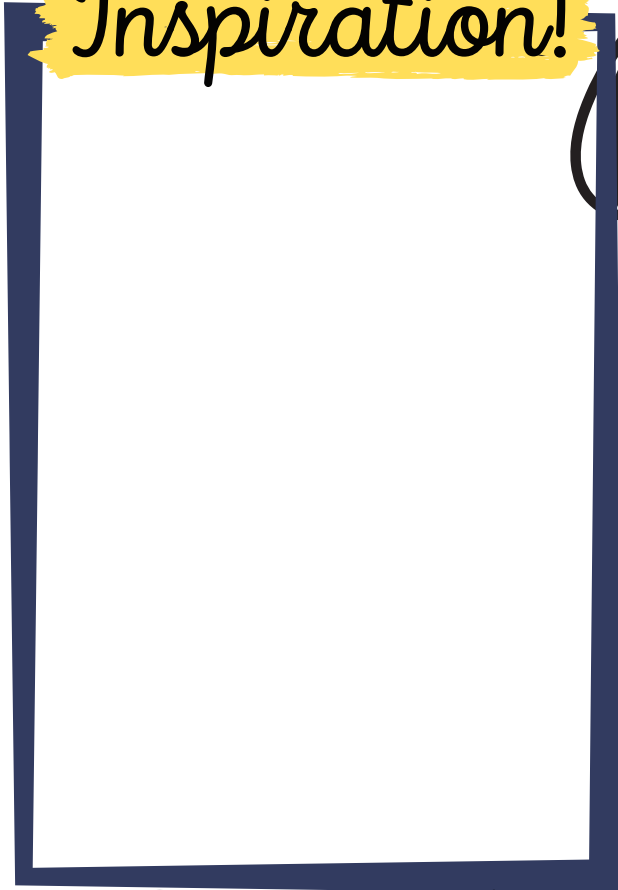


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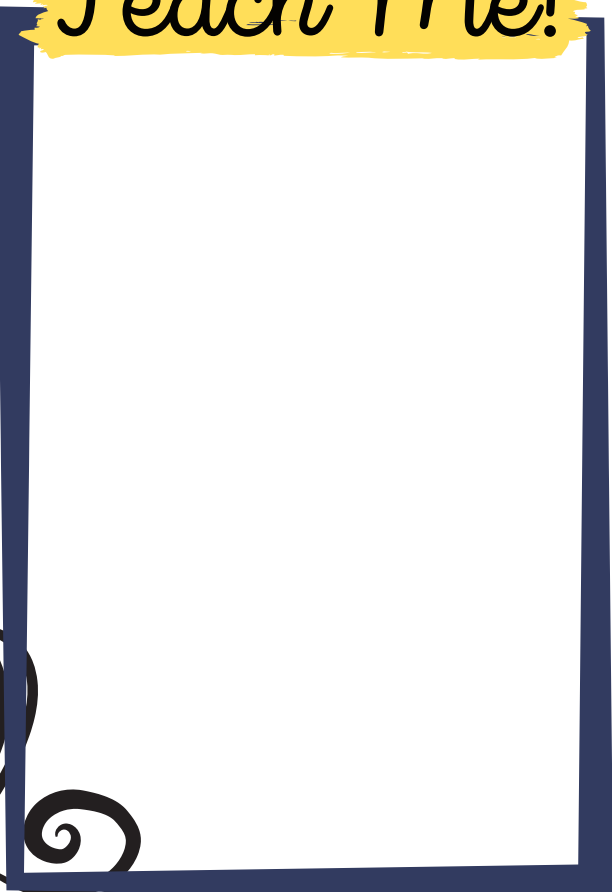
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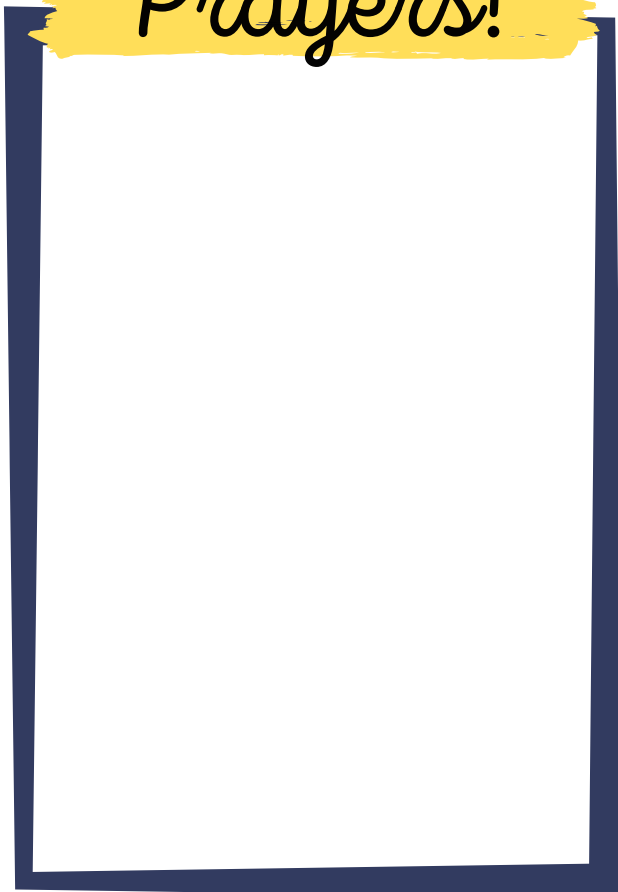
Inspiration!



Teach Me!



Prayers!



date:

Grateful!

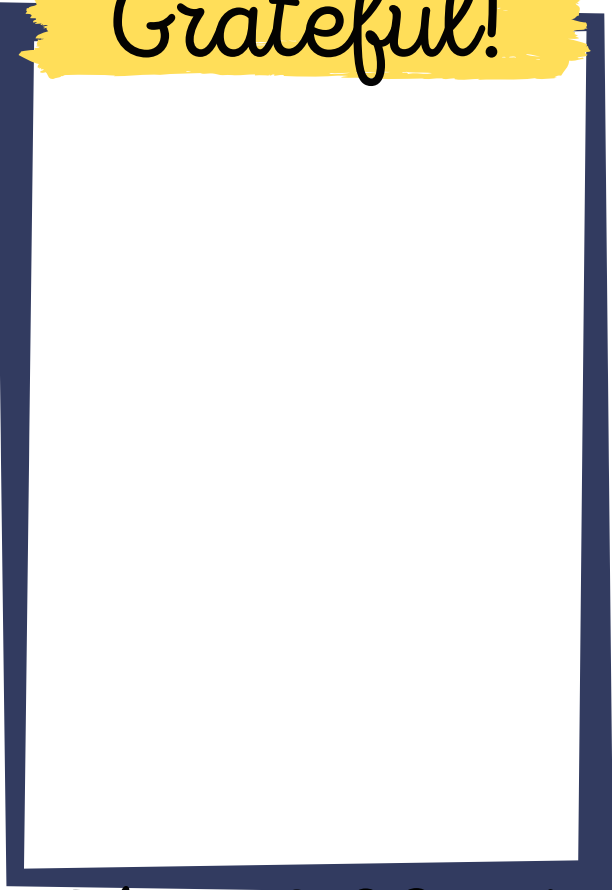
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Teach Me!

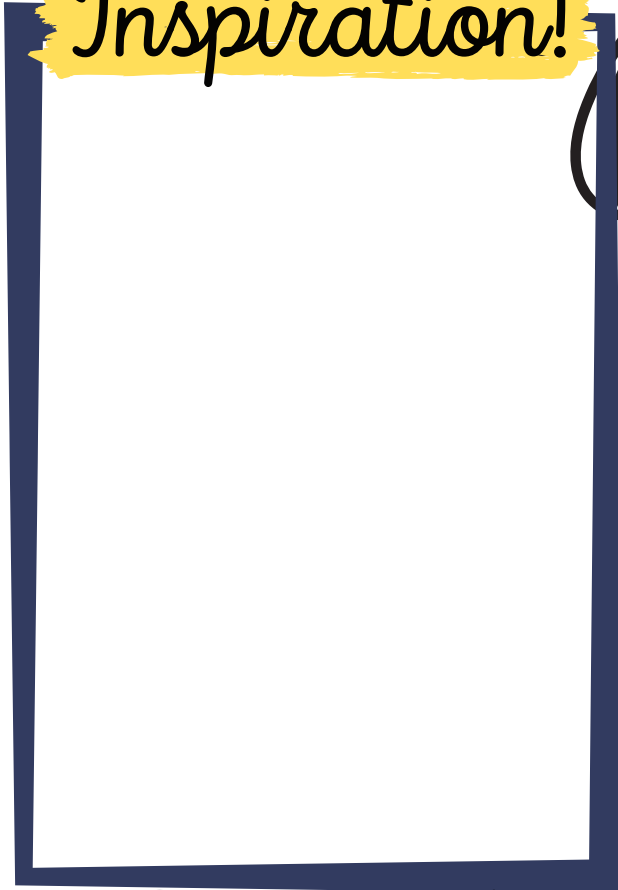
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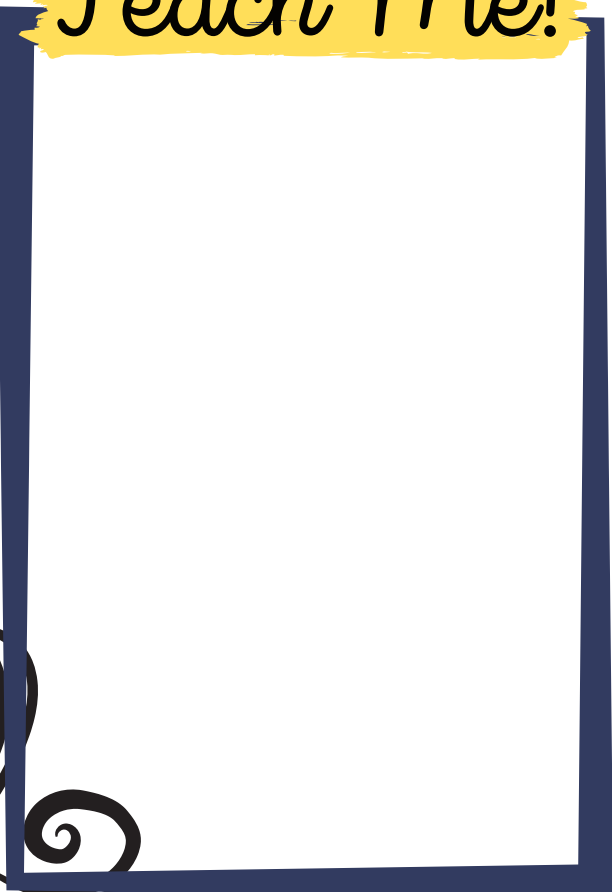
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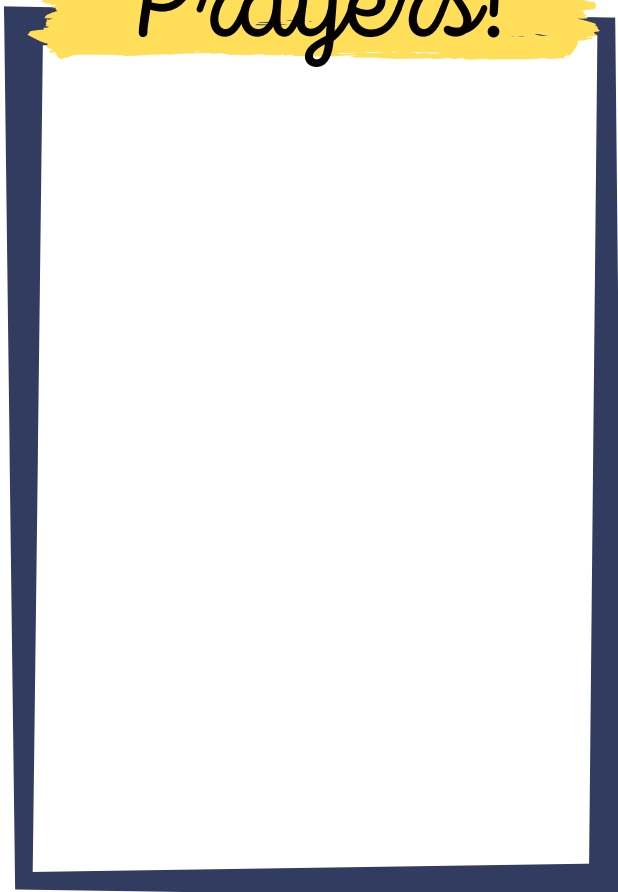
Inspiration!




Teach Me!



Prayers!





*Trust in the Lord
with all your heart
and lean not on your
own understanding.*

Proverbs 3:5