

## "The Bead System" by Angela Powell

Excerpted and adapted from ["The Cornerstone: Classroom Management That Makes Teaching More Effective, Efficient, and Enjoyable"](#).



A former co-worker of mine came up with the idea to use beads for behavior management, and when I tried out the idea for myself, I realized the possibilities for adaptation were almost limitless. I experimented with the format for awhile and tailored it to meet the needs of my class, and ended up with the system outlined here. The photo shows what might be the most ridiculous-looking behavior modification prop you've ever seen, but trust me, this system is simple, fun, and the kids LOVE it!

### How the Bead System Works

#### Basic Principle

Students earn beads for demonstrating on-task, appropriate behaviors. A privilege is earned at the end of the week for children who have earned a pre-determined number of beads.

#### What You Need

- half a pipe cleaner for each child
- a small bag of identical beads (I use triangular ones that fit together)

#### How to Start the System With Your Class

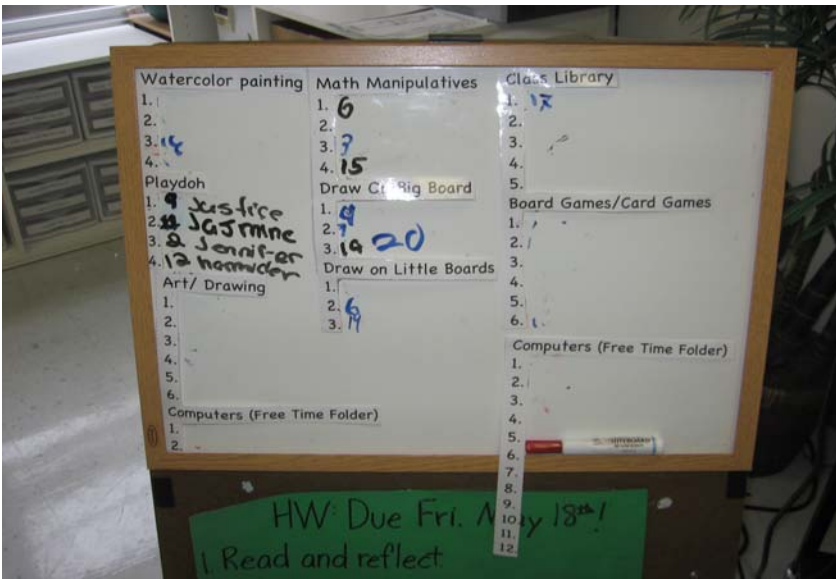
**1) Explain the basic principle of the system to students.** Have them suggest positive classroom behaviors that could earn beads (following directions, not talking when the teacher's talking, etc.) and list them on a chart for the children's reference. (The brainstorming process was explained in more detail in 'The World's Easiest Token System' section of this chapter and can be used with any reinforcement method you use.)

**2) At the bottom of the chart, write the reward for earning the set number of beads each week and explain it to the class.** 10 is usually a good number if you want all your kids to be successful. Possible rewards could be participation in Fun Friday or free time. One year I let my kids participate in centers such as play-dough, watercolor paints, math manipulatives, and board games. This was the ONLY time they got to do those things in third grade so it was a HUGE privilege.



- 3) **Allow the children to ask questions.** Make sure you cover all of the FAQs listed here (adapting the responses to your own teaching situation).
- 4) **Show students how you have taped one end of a pipe cleaner to each child's desk or desk tag.** Tell the children that they are each responsible for their own pipe cleaner and beads. You can attach desk tags to the front of students' desks so that they don't play with them. Tape only the top of the nametag, so that students can flip it up while seated to add beads to the attached pipe cleaner.
- 5) **Give specific verbal reinforcement and a bead to each child in the class.** This allows children to see firsthand how the system works and buy into it right away.

## What to Do at the End of the Week



At 1:00 pm every Friday (or the last day of the school week), I ask students to turn in their beads, starting with the child who has the most. I'll ask if anyone has 20 beads, then 19, and so on. The children bring them up to me in their open palms for me to 'check' (you know which children's beads actually need to be counted) and then they put them back into my bead box. After a child has returned the beads, he can sign up for a center on the wipe-off board chart. This way, the kids who earned the most beads get to pick first. (My kids can sign up using their name or their number, which is why you see names and numbers on the board.)

The children who did not earn the specified number of beads are to work silently and independently on an assignment of their choice.

## Frequently-Asked Questions

- **What type of things should I give beads for?**

ANY behaviors you want to reinforce can earn beads. Besides the obvious good behaviors, I give beads from time to time for: wearing the school uniform, being on time for school, walking quietly in the hall, getting a compliment from another teacher, lining up quickly after recess, and cleaning up materials when first asked (those who keep working or play around quickly learn that when you say time's up, you mean it). I often give beads to kids for using time wisely, staying on-task, and completing a pre-determined amount of work in a set amount of time. For example, I'll tell the kids they have 15 minutes to do the front of a worksheet, and after that amount of time, I walk around and give out beads to those who have done so, making accommodations for individual kids as needed.

- **Do kids get beads individually or do you give them to the whole class?**

Both. Sometimes only a few kids earn them, and sometimes I'll compliment the whole class for a job well done and give them to everyone.

- **What do you say and do when you give beads out?**

Sometimes when kids are working, I'll walk around quietly and slip beads onto their desks and whisper encouragement. Other times, I make a huge deal and reward them in front of the class. Having the teacher smile at and compliment them is a greater reward than the bead itself for most kids. Often, I'll give beads to everyone when the class is doing a good job and give two beads to those who needed no reminders to stay on-task or did an exceptional job. Once in awhile when the majority of the class is talking too much and there's a handful of kids really working diligently, I'll say, "Wow, thanks, Joe and Dara. You two are determined to get this assignment done even when there's noise and distractions all around you. Come up and get a bead." The most important thing is to GIVE VERBAL REINFORCEMENTS along with the beads. The kids need to know exactly what they did right so that they'll do it again. There should be no mystery surrounding how beads are earned.

**More resources for the bead system: Ways to incorporate other class rewards; handle potential problems such as stealing, trading, or losing beads (the solution is simple!); and involve special educators and other school staff in the bead system for greater student accountability. Available in [The Cornerstone book](#).**

