

Lesson One: ***What does compassion look like?***

Learning Objectives:

Students will:

- Demonstrate an understanding of the concept of compassion.
- Recognize the elements of compassion in images.
- Begin to develop a vocabulary of words related to compassion.

Introduction / Opening:

Engage students in a discussion about compassion to determine their pre-existing knowledge on the subject and to introduce them to a vocabulary of words related to compassion. Add your own definition to the examples given below. Ask:

- *What is Compassion?*
 - Compassion is understanding how another person feels.
 - Compassion is caring about others.
 - Compassion is showing concern through kind thoughts, words and actions.
 - Compassion is helping and giving.
 - Compassion is listening and being patient.

Highlight acts of kindness and caring. Give examples of compassion from your classroom, your school, and your community, like the ones below:

- Trevor was showing compassion when he helped Adrian tie his shoe on the playground.
- I felt compassion for my neighbor when her dog died.
- When the houses were flooded, compassionate people helped their neighbors to clean up.

Activity:

Using children's books that you have read to your class, select five to eight illustrations where emotional tension is portrayed. These selections may be the key event in a story, the climax or possibly just a subtle detail in an illustration. Refer to the bibliography for suggestions of books with content relevant to compassion.

1. Show each image to the class and engage students in a conversation using probing questions that match the image. Ask:

- *What do you see in this picture?*
- *How does it make you feel?*
- *What do you think happened?*
- *What would you do or say in this situation?*

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Grades K-2

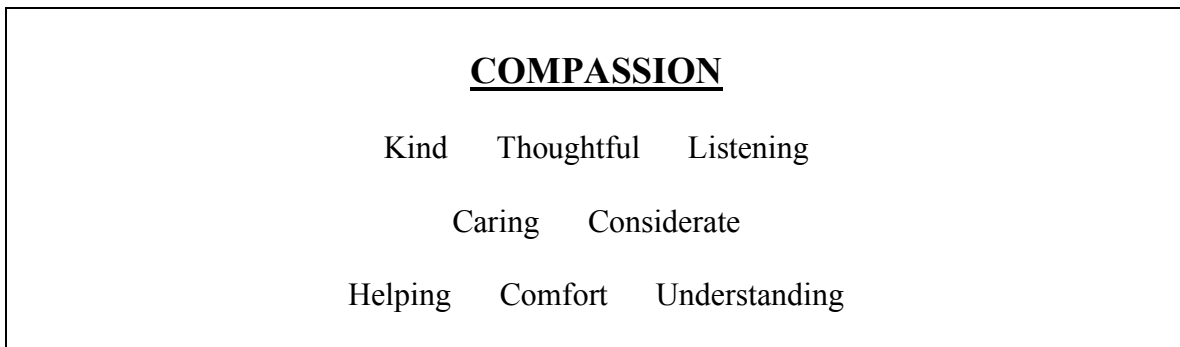
2. Distribute the images to small groups, with each group working with one of the images. Ask students to:

- Draw a picture of what they think will happen next.
- Write words that describe how they feel.
- Write a variation of the story explaining what they think should have happened.

3. Create a **Compassion Word Web**.

- Record the words your students use to describe compassion.
- Add to the web of words throughout your exploration of compassion.
- Encourage the students to help you build the web with new words.
- Use the activity as a language arts project working on vocabulary.

Example:



4. Make a **Compassion Collection**.

Choose one of the following formats in which to collect examples of compassion (or create your own format) and label it “*Watch Compassion Grow.*”

- Set aside some space on the bulletin board.
- Make a compassion notebook with blank pages.
- Bring in a large plastic jar or other appropriate container.

Ask your students to help find further examples of compassionate acts in their classroom and school. Record these, acknowledge them to the class when you add one to your collection, and from time to time comment on how many examples you are able to find in your day to day experiences.

Lesson Two: *Why is compassion important?*

Learning Objectives:

Students will:

- Learn that empathy is a fundamental component of compassionate behavior.
- Understand that compassion is being able to recognize when someone is suffering, and to respond to the suffering in sensitive ways that recognize the needs and feelings of the person suffering.
- Learn that compassion is demonstrating caring, comforting and supporting.

Introduction / Opening:

Engage students in a review of what compassion means. Highlight the examples they generated from their own experiences.

Explain that before we can behave in compassionate ways, we must understand how another person feels. This is called **empathy**.

Another way of understanding empathy is to talk about perspective. Sometimes we use the expression, “Walk a mile in their shoes.” Ask students what they think this means.

- *How would it feel to walk in someone else’s shoes?*
- *Where would the shoes take them?*
- *Where have the shoes been?*

Ask students to close their eyes and imagine what it would be like to walk a mile in the shoes of Mr. Carpenter, the bus driver. Think about what that would be like. Ask:

- *How would it feel to get up early in the morning to drive the bus?*
- *How would it feel to sit down in the cold bus before the heater warmed it up?*
- *How would it feel to be responsible for all the students who board the bus?*
- *How would it feel if a student said something rude to you?*

When you understand how another person feels you are experiencing empathy.

Activity:

Explain that you are going to read a story about a little boy who feels empathy and behaves with compassion towards someone he cares about. Write a list of some of the compassion words on the board or flip chart, or refer to your Compassion Word Web, and ask students to be listening for ways the characters in the story demonstrate these qualities:

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- Caring
- Listening
- Understanding
- Helping (etc.)

Read:

“Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge”

Written by Mem Fox, and illustrated by Julie Vivas

Engage children in a discussion about the story. Use the illustrations and review parts of the story as needed. Choose from among the following questions or create questions of your own based on the needs and interests of your students:

- *How do we know Wilfrid cared about the people next door?*
- *Why was Miss Nancy, Wilfrid’s favorite?*
- *What did Wilfrid’s parents mean when they called Nancy a “poor old thing?”*
- *In what way was Ms. Nancy suffering?*
- *How did Wilfrid respond to her suffering?*
- *Why would it be sad not to have your memory?*
- *Why did Wilfrid find things for Miss Nancy?*
- *How did the things help Nancy?*
- *What little things do you have that bring back memories for you?*
- *How did Wilfrid show his compassion for Ms. Nancy?*
- *How did listening help Wilfrid show compassion?*
- *How do we know that Wilfrid understands how Miss Nancy felt even if he didn’t understand what memory meant?*

Review the descriptions from the story and ask what else would describe a memory.

(Note: See the bibliography for examples of other stories you can read that have themes of compassion that can be developed through questioning and discussion.)

Lesson Three: *Who are the heroes of compassion?*

Learning Objectives:

Students will:

- Describe the characteristics of one who shows compassion.
- Understand what being a hero of compassion means.
- Learn about the 14th Dalai Lama and why he is recognized as a hero of compassion.

Introduction / Opening:

Engage students in a discussion about the qualities of a hero. Using a flip chart, write down some of the key points of the discussion.

- *What does it mean to be a hero? A hero is...* (give examples of ways to describe a hero)
 - Someone who commits an act of bravery, or shows courage, strength of character, or other admirable qualities.
 - Someone who is admired and looked up to for outstanding qualities or achievements.

Add your own words to help your students understand “hero.”

- *Who are the heroes they look up to? Why?*
- *What might it mean to be a “hero of compassion?”*
 - Someone who is brave enough to help someone who is suffering.
 - Someone who stands up for others.
 - Someone who listens with concern and acts unselfishly to help another.
 - Someone who can forgive.
 - Someone who always sets a good example for how to treat others.

Considering the heroes they identified, ask how a hero of compassion is the same and how a hero of compassion is different?

Activity:

Review the resources on His Holiness the Dalai Lama available at:

<http://www.dalailama.com/news.htm> and www.seedsofcompassion.org

Prepare an introduction and overview of his life, accomplishments or words of wisdom in a way that is appropriate for your students.

Explain that many consider His Holiness the Dalai Lama to be a hero of compassion.

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- He has received the Nobel Peace Prize.
- He received the top US civilian award - the Congressional Gold Medal from President Bush.

Review the key points from your discussion on the qualities of a hero of compassion and ask students to identify the ways in which His Holiness the Dalai Lama embodies these qualities.

Explain that His Holiness the Dalai Lama will be visiting Seattle in April. Although he has come to the United States many times, this is the first time the focus of his visit will be on children and compassion. Even though he is a very famous man, he sees himself as a simple monk. He believes that everyone can be compassionate.

- Ask your students to draw a picture of why they think the Dalai Lama is interested in children and compassion.
- Suggest students write a letter to the Dalai Lama describing a compassionate act.

Lesson Four: *When is it a challenge to be compassionate?*

Learning Objectives:

Students will:

- Recognize situations where it is difficult to be compassionate.
- Understand that forgiveness is an important part of compassion.
- Learn appropriate ways to apologize and learn words to use to say “sorry.”
- Recognize forgiveness as a strength.

Introduction / Opening:

Sometimes strong feelings can get in the way of feeling compassionate and children get stuck in feeling angry, resentful, hurt or afraid. There is new evidence that forgiveness can be beneficial not just to the recipient but to the person who offers forgiveness. For younger children, learning how to apologize and how to accept an apology are important first steps towards compassionate behavior when it seems inaccessible.

For background information go to the web site of Greater Good Magazine (<http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/greatergood/archive/2004fallwinter/>) and review their “Forgiveness” issue (Fall 2004, Vol I, # 2). Here are links to some of the key articles:

Truth + Reconciliation (PDF)

Archbishop Desmond Tutu explains how forgiveness allowed South Africans to imagine a new beginning for their country.

The New Science of Forgiveness (PDF)

Leading forgiveness researcher Everett L. Worthington, Jr. discusses the health and social benefits of forgiveness.

The Choice to Forgive (PDF)

Fred Luskin shares his research-tested method for helping people give up their grudges.

Making Peace through Apology (PDF)

Apology expert Aaron Lazare explains why some apologies encourage forgiveness and reconciliation and others only make things worse.

For more information visit: <http://theforgivenessproject.com/>

[Note: At the time of publication, this site is under construction.]

Activity:

Choose from the scenarios below, or create one from your own community that describes an act of unkindness that would call for forgiveness. Use the details of the story to lead a discussion about what it means to do something hurtful, and how to ask for forgiveness and how to give forgiveness.

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Scenario 1: Jordan and Trevor had been good friends since preschool. Their parents were friends and they often visited each other and spent long weekends together. In the second grade, they were in different classes but they still played together during recess and after school. Towards the middle of the year, Trevor started to become friends with Jeremy. During recess he tried to play with both Jordan and Jeremy but it was complicated for all three of them to be together. Gradually, Trevor started playing in a different part of the playground from Jordan and he and Jeremy would hide if Trevor came looking for them. One day they hid in a large tunnel near the climber when Jordan came looking for them. Trevor watched Jordan as he looked for him and called his name. When Trevor peeked out from the end of the tunnel, he saw Jordan quickly wipe a tear from his eye, hoping no one would notice.

Use the following questions to begin a discussion:

- *How did Jordan feel?*
- *How did Trevor feel?*
- *What would you do if you were Trevor?*
- *What would you do if you were Jordan?*
- *Would it be easy for Jordan to accept an apology from Trevor?*

Ask students to role play the interaction between Trevor and Jordan.

Scenario 2: Lucy moved to the neighborhood after school started and was new to the classroom. She was just learning to speak English and was quiet and observant throughout the day but she did not yet join in with the other children. At the end of each day, the teacher always sang a goodbye song using each child's name and a verse that had the words, "we are sad to see you go." Some of the students changed the words to "Goodbye Lucy, we are glad to see you go."

- *How did Lucy feel when she heard these words?*
- *How would you feel if you were in the class?*
- *What would you say to Lucy?*
- *What would you say to your classmates?*

It is helpful for younger children to have words that will help them through a difficult apology. Ask your students to brainstorm all the ways they can think of to apologize. Encourage them to be specific about what it is they are apologizing for. Ask them to role play giving and receiving an apology that begins:

"I am sorry that I..." (made fun of you, left you out, said mean things to you, etc.)

As opposed to an apology that begins:

"I am sorry that you..." (feel bad, were hurt, etc.)

Record their answers and keep the list of ways to apologize visible in the classroom for students to refer to when they need support. Offer a supply of note cards and envelopes and encourage students to write an apology if it is too difficult to deliver face to face.

Lesson Five: ***How can you be a hero of compassion?***

Learning Objectives:

Students will:

- Build on their understanding of compassionate behavior and heroes of compassion.
- Identify ways that they can become heroes of compassion in their day to day actions.
- Recognize compassionate acts when they occur within their circle of family, friends and schools.

Introduction / Opening:

Children often feel powerless in their ability to make valuable contributions towards change so it is important to help them understand how the smallest acts of kindness and compassion can make a powerful difference. Several books suggested in the bibliography can be used as a springboard for a discussion about small acts of compassion. Two examples are:

- ***“Ordinary Mary’s Extraordinary Deed”*** by Emily Pearson
- ***“Because Brian Hugged His Mother”*** by David L. Rice

Encourage children to think of themselves in three spheres:

- Family
- School
- Community

Give the children an example from your own experience about a compassionate act within each of these spheres and how it made a difference for:

- A day
- A year
- A lifetime

Activity:

Ask the students to participate in a project that results in each one developing into a hero of compassion. Challenge them to put compassionate thoughts into action in each of the three spheres.

Family: Ask children to draw a picture of what they can do in their family to show how they are becoming a hero of compassion. Suggestions:

- Offer to help with a younger sibling.
- Bring in the groceries without being asked.
- Ask if they can help with the laundry.

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School: Begin with a discussion about what a compassionate school would look like. Ask them to be specific. Identify what is NOT working in order to understand what needs to happen to make it better. As a class, tackle one aspect of the school environment that you will work towards improving. For example, if the lunch area is left strewn with litter every day, develop a plan for how your class can clean it up. Note what the effect is on the children who are not helping.

Document the projects you undertake and acknowledge success and effort.

Community: Consider local events where students can demonstrate compassionate acts (neighborhood clean-ups, food drives, etc.). Work with agencies, newspapers, and school PTA organizations to identify areas of need and appropriate contributions your students can make towards alleviating the suffering or problem.