

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

Learning Objectives:

Students will

- Explain the word compassion in a comprehensive way
- Create their own definitions of compassion and reflect on its meaning
- Share their new understanding of compassion with their peers.

Critical Question: *What is compassion?*

Discussion:

Student Hand-out: Photos of victims of Hurricane Katrina, Iraq, Darfur or other examples from recent history. (Note: A good source for photographic images is <http://www.time.com/time/photoessays/>)

Distribute these photos around the classroom or have students view them online individually or in groups. Instruct students to work in small groups to record their responses on paper.

After examining and journaling about their responses to these images, ask students to share their thoughts or feelings in the class. Ask:

- *What thoughts did you have as you were looking at these images?*
- *What is compassion? Did you feel compassion when you saw these images? What are some synonyms for compassion?*

Write the responses on the board. Next, as a class, come up with a class definition of compassion that incorporates the students' ideas. Compare this definition to the dictionary and adjust if you feel necessary to include all aspects of compassion.

(Note: Dictionary.com defines compassion as “a feeling of deep sympathy and sorrow for another who is stricken by misfortune, accompanied by a strong desire to alleviate the suffering.”)

- *Think about a time when you felt compassion for another person. What did you do in response?*
- *Does compassion always require an action? Why or why not?*

Activity:

- *What does compassion look like in our world today?*

Have students create a poster with a partner showing examples of compassion from recent history. They can use the internet, newspaper, or magazines to find images or headlines that exemplify compassion. Share these posters as a class, and ask students to respond to one another's examples on paper. Are there any examples of compassion that

Compassion Lessons
Grades 6-8

they disagree with? If so, ask them to explain why. If possible, find a place in your community to display and share these posters with others.

Wrap-up:

Create a monthly “hero of compassion” program in your school or classroom. Have students vote on classmates who they feel have set positive examples of compassionate action, and reward them with a special privilege or honor.

Create bulletin board space for the examples of compassionate action in your school.

Lesson Two: *Why is compassion important?*

Learning Objectives:

Students will

- Understand the characteristics of a just society
- Understand the role of compassion in valuing diversity
- Understand the role of compassion in defending human rights
- Identify societies past and present that are considered “just”

Critical Question: *What role does compassion play in a just society?*

Discussion:

Prior to discussing this question as a class, have students consider the value of each of the following to society through mind-mapping these concepts in small groups:

- Equal opportunity
- Freedom of speech
- Freedom of religion
- Helping those in need
- Access to health care
- Equality of wealth

Ask one representative from each small group to record the group’s ideas in a mind-map (for an example, see: <http://www.mymindmap.net/>). Post these visuals around the classroom, then engage students in a class-wide discussion to determine what, in their view, is a just society.

Activity:

Have students research a society of their choosing, using the following questions as a guide. Next have them work in pairs or individually and report their findings in a presentation to the class.

- *Do people in this society have enough to eat, adequate housing and access to health care? How does this society provide adequate food, housing and health care?*
- *Do people in this society have equal access to education? What is the educational system like?*
- *Is medical care costly, universal, accessible, etc? What is the medical care system like in this society?*
- *Are there adequate employment opportunities? What kinds of jobs are available and who gets those jobs?*
- *Are all people able to participate in political decision making? How is the government decided?*
- *What are some of the challenges this society faces in maintaining justice for all?*

Compassion Lessons
Grades 6-8

Note: Suggested links for students' research. The following web sites may be helpful to identify and guide research on a variety of world societies:

- A guide to global education:
<http://www.globaleducation.edna.edu.au/globaled/page1.html>
- The world fact book from the CIA:
<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html>
- Library of Congress country studies:
<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/cshome.html#toc>

Ask students to describe examples and non-examples of “valuing diversity” and “defending human rights” that they learned about in their classmates’ final products.

Wrap-up:

- *What would a world without compassion look like?*

Ask students to journal on this topic then write a short story set in a world without compassion.

Have students create an illustration or collage that represents a world without compassion.

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

Learning Objectives:

Students will

- Think critically about society's heroes, and examine who demonstrates compassion.
- Recognize the qualities of compassion in an individual.
- Produce a profile of the Dalai Lama.
- Demonstrate an awareness of the Dalai Lama's qualities.

Critical Question: *Who is compassionate?*

Discussion:

- *Who are your heroes? Do these people show compassion in their words or actions? If so, how?*
- *In the newspaper or other current events resource, find examples of prominent people in our society today. Do these people exhibit compassion in their words and actions?*
- *Who are some of the heroes of compassion that you know about? How have they been recognized? How have some of them been either rewarded or persecuted for their words and deeds?*

Activities:

Student Handout: The article on compassion by His Holiness the Dalai Lama can be found online at: <http://www.dalailama.com/page.166.htm>

1. Do a KWL¹ exercise with students about the Dalai Lama before reading his article on compassion.
 - *What do they know about the Dalai Lama?*
 - *What do they want to know about the Dalai Lama?*

2. Ask students to explore the web site of the Dalai Lama and record their observations and questions.
Ask them to consider these questions:
 - *What is a Dalai Lama?*
 - *Where does the present Dalai Lama live?*
 - *Where did he live?*
 - *What does he represent?*
 - *Is he easily recognizable?*
 - *What makes him recognizable?*

¹ KWL is a strategy in which students manage their learning by mapping out what they Know, Want to know, and Learned. KWL charts help students access prior knowledge and help teachers assess where students are in their learning.

Compassion Lessons
Grades 6-8

3. Have students read the Dalai Lama's words on compassion.* (Depending on the reading level of your students, you may prefer to divide the essay into sections and break students into small groups to each read a small section of the reading.) They should record their thoughts and observations as they are reading and, in pairs, discuss their responses before sharing with the class.
4. Ask students to share what they think of the Dalai Lama's ideas about compassion. Ask:
 - *Is the Dalai Lama a hero of compassion? Why or why not?*
5. Revisit the KWL exercise and have students reflect on and share what they now know about the Dalai Lama.

Wrap-up:

Anne Frank was a young Jewish girl who hid from the Nazis during the Holocaust and eventually died in a concentration camp. She wrote in her diary before she died, *"I keep my ideals, because in spite of everything I still believe that people are really good at heart."* Ask students to reflect this quote and write an essay explaining how Anne Frank is considered by many to be a hero of compassion.

(Note to Seattle teachers: The Intiman theatre is running a production of **The Diary of Anne Frank** in their 2008 season. Another good resource for Holocaust education is The Holocaust Education Resource center: <http://www.wsherc.org/>)

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

Learning Objectives:

Students will

- Demonstrate and awareness that scientific research has ethical implications.
- Identify challenges that a scientist might face.
- Defend or oppose a scientific investigation.
- Understand the concepts of ethics and scientific investigation.

Critical Question: *What are the ethical implications of scientific investigation?*

Discussion:

Identify what students already know about scientific investigations and the implications they have had to the world. Draw students' attention to things that they use in their daily lives that are a result of science and research. Share with students several scientific advancements such as the Internet, pasteurized milk, soda pop, and ask/discuss:

- *How has this advancement improved life?*
- *Were there any ethical implications during and after the research stage?*
- *What are some possible concerns that people still have?*

Have students research and read information about the Manhattan Project (this can be found online at: <http://www.atomicmuseum.com/Tour/manhattanproject.cfm>), and discuss the implications of nuclear research as a class.

Activities:

Have students work in small groups to discuss one of the following questions and prepare a presentation for the rest of the class on the various implications of their chosen scientific advancement.

- *What are the implications of:*
 - *getting and using stem cells for research?*
 - *a person donating their body to science?*
 - *the methods of getting hydrogen to fuel the Hydrogen fuel cells?*
 - *researching racial differences?*
 - *using pesticides like DDT?*
 - *killing animals to be used in research?*
 - *using animals for research?*
 - *diverting a river to construct a hydro dam?*
 - *genetically modifying foods?*
 - *copyrighting medicines?*

Compassion Lessons
Grades 6-8

Wrap-up:

Have a student-moderated discussion on the implications of being a scientist. Be sure to address some of the following questions:

- *Would a compassionate person encounter challenges working as a scientist?*
- *Should a scientist be personally responsible for the aftermath of their work?*
- *Is science truth?*
- *Does a scientist need to consider social issues and concerns?*
- *Does a scientist need to be as ethical and compassionate as another human being or does the pursuit of science allow them to ignore their ethical side?*

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

Learning Objectives:

Students will

- Reflect on what it means to be a global citizen.
- Demonstrate an awareness of how one's choices have local or global consequences.
- Present a plan for action to create change in their local or global community.

Critical Question: *How do our individual choices affect others?*

Discussion:

Have students discuss the following questions in pairs or small groups, then share their thoughts together with the whole class.

- *Do we have a responsibility to work for the betterment of our society? Why or why not?*
- *What happens when we don't consider the repercussions of our consuming choices?*
- *How can our choices about the food or clothing we purchase make a difference in the world?*
- *What is an example of one change you could make today that might help to make a positive difference in the life of another individual in your school, local or global communities?*

Activities:

Visit the Facing the Future web site (www.facingthefuture.org) and have your class take their "60 second tour" to help them understand the connection between population growth, consumer choices and world poverty: <http://www.popinfo.org/>

Ask students to create a journal of their consuming choices for a week. Have them write down the food they eat and where they think the food came from. Ask them to write down any purchases they make and where that item came from. Next have students research the labor practices in these countries and what efforts are being made locally or globally to help to improve these practices. Next, ask them to choose one of the following projects to present their findings:

- Create a poster or PowerPoint to share your findings with the class in a short presentation.
- Reflect on what it means to be a global citizen and write an essay about it. Think about the role of compassion and what it means to be a compassionate consumer.
- Make a plan to organize in the school community to make a positive impact by increasing your school's awareness on this topic. Choose one

Compassion Lessons
Grades 6-8

thing you can do immediately to increase awareness in your school and organize your classmates to carry out this goal.

Wrap-up:

Have students calculate their carbon footprints throughout the year and make small changes to help decrease it: <http://www.carbonfootprint.com>