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COMPASSION IS TAKING ACTION

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How can we connect our concern for the world around us with acts that meaningfully impact those in need?

OVERVIEW

After being introduced to the concept of compassion, students will be challenged to think about how much they express it in their everyday lives and how to find opportunities to practice compassion meaningfully in the world around them.

OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to...

- Define *compassion*.
- List people, animals, groups, and places for whom/which they have demonstrated compassion.
- Apply what they understand about challenges faced by others to create opportunities to practice compassion.
- Identify ways to demonstrate compassion.

1. Warm Up (10 min.)

- Ask students if they are familiar with the word compassion. Allow for responses. Then, provide the following definition: *having concern for the needs of others and wanting to do something to help.*
- Next, tell your students the following story. *On the way home from the park one evening, a family saw a young, frightened dog walking in the street. She tried crossing the road and was nearly hit several times. The family put a leash on the dog to get her out of harm's way and eventually adopted her.*
- Explain that this is an example of someone acting with compassion (or being aware of the suffering of another and taking action to help). Others may have walked by and not helped, but this family chose to show compassion. Luckily, many people choose to demonstrate compassion every day to help people and animals in need.

GRADE LEVEL 3-5

TIME NEEDED 50 min.

SUBJECTS Social Studies,
English Language Arts

STANDARDS

Common Core
ELA-Literacy: SL.3.1, SL.4.1, SL.5.1

ISTE: Standard 3–
Knowledge Constructor
Standard 6–
Creative Communicator

MATERIALS

- Circle of Compassion* Handout
- Compassionate Kid Stories*

VOCABULARY

- Compassion

LESSON NOTE

This is a modified version of HEART's *Circle of Compassion* activity from the Humane Education Resource Guide, which can be downloaded for free at: www.teachheart.org/library.

ACTIVITY NOTE

The *Compassionate Kid Stories* are fictional stories written to inspire and teach youth about effective ways to demonstrate compassion.

- Ask students to think about a time when someone showed them compassion (allow them to share with a partner and for a few to share with the whole group). Allow the group to reflect on what it feels like when someone shows compassion.
- Ask students to think of a time they acted with compassion. Encourage them to think of examples that include not only people and animals, but also the environment. Explain how our natural world is also deserving of compassion. Allow a few students to share.

2. Compassion Activity (25 min.)

- Explain that most of us make choices every day that are compassionate, but we could probably find ways of adding even more compassion into our lives.
- Explain that they will be creating their own *Circle of Compassion*.
- Give each student a copy of the *Circle of Compassion* Handout. Explain that they are to add (with pictures or words) any people, groups, animals, or natural places they have compassion for. This means that they have done something to help that person, animal, or place (and do not harm them by their current actions). Challenge them to only add to their circle of compassion if they have been compassionate toward that person, place, or animal. If, for example, they really love tigers but have done nothing to help them, have them put tigers on the outside of the circle.
- Ask students to share an example of who or what they have compassion for, emphasizing the acts that demonstrate that compassion (e.g., if students have compassion for trees, encourage them to explain how they conserve trees by recycling their paper).
- Encourage students to share additional ways that they can show compassion to each other, to family, and to people and animals in our global community.
- Encourage students to think about ways that they can express compassion in their everyday lives related to the things they use, eat, and buy, and to the people, animals, and environments with whom or which they interact. Hand out the *Compassionate Kid Stories*.
- Organize the students into small groups, and have them read the *Compassionate Kid Stories*.
- Ask students what the kids in the stories have in common, and allow for a short discussion about any ideas or inspiration the stories may have given them as they try to bring more elements into their own *Circles of Compassion*.

3. Wrap Up (15 min.)

- Explain to students that even though this lesson is ending, this stage is when their real work to become compassionate can begin. Ask them to look at the list of people, places, animals, and groups outside of their circles. Ask a few students to share what is outside of their circle and brainstorm, as a group, what actions they can take to bring those elements into their circle.

EXTENSION PROJECT

• Research and Technology:

Allow students to choose something they placed outside of their circle of compassion (see the *Circle of Compassion* activity in the Warm Up) to research and to consider how they can help that person, animal, or place. Allow students to use the internet to do an online research project with a safe internet search engine like www.kidrex.com. Using their research, ask students to create a presentation or digital poster that describes the person, animal, or place that they want to help, and make a call to action with ideas for how to show more compassion. If students are working in groups, we recommend using Google Slides or Padlet, and if they are creating a digital poster, we recommend Glogster. For presentations, students can do a gallery walk to see their classmates' presentations. To save on printing paper, use QR codes or create a simple classroom website with links to each student's presentation.

EDUCATOR SPOTLIGHT

Kristina Hulvershorn

I use this activity to really challenge students to think courageously about their own actions. I think that the core of humane education is not only about understanding the issues affecting other people, non-human animals, and our natural world, but also pairing that with an interest and a willingness to engage with those issues positively. This activity asks students to think of themselves as part of the real life action that unfolds before them every day and encourages them to be active participants by aligning their actions with their beliefs. There is an incredible thing that happens with this activity. You will have students opening up about what they care for in the world around them and searching for ways they can make a difference. Seize these moments and allow your students to harness this care and good will. This lesson can be the launching point for some poignant and meaningful projects and units of study.

COMPASSIONATE KID STORIES**Trey and the Birds**

Trey loved birds and he really enjoyed watching them. He was devastated when he saw how many flew into the glass windows at his school and injured themselves or died. He researched solutions and helped install nets around the windows prone to bird collisions. The netting helped the birds see the solid surface better, and fewer flew into the windows as a result.

Maria and the Bees

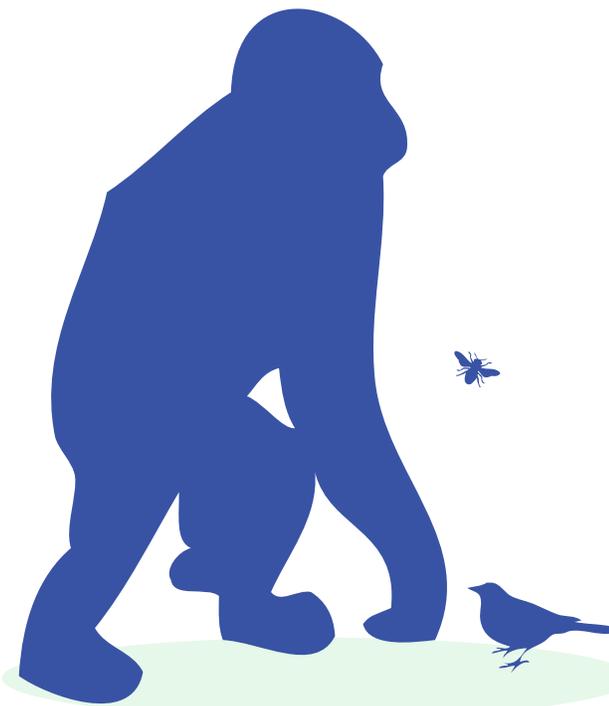
Maria was always fascinated with bees. She had recently noticed there were fewer bees around and began to ask why. After some research, she started to think it had something to do with the chemicals her parents and neighbors were using on their lawns. She convinced her parents to stop using the chemicals and made flyers to teach her neighbors about the problem as well. Maria hoped that her efforts would help to bring the bees back.

Julian and Friendship

Julian was really upset that some of the kids at his school were being mean and bullying other students. He decided to do something about it. He began asking kids who looked lonely to sit with him at lunch and included them in games on the playground. He also gave a speech to his class about why being mean to others is such a harmful thing to do. Many of the kids at his school became concerned and made friends with kids who were often left out. They also started to speak up when they heard their peers being unkind to one another.

Himiko and the Orangutans

Himiko loved orangutans. She had never seen one in real life, but read about them and even watched movies about them. She worried that she couldn't help them because she lived in the United States, far from the Asian rainforests where most wild orangutans live. Then, she learned that one of the problems facing orangutans is that their forests are being destroyed to make room to grow palm fruit trees for palm oil. She was surprised to learn how much of her food contained palm oil. Himiko decided to boycott products that contained palm oil and encouraged others to do the same. One of her favorite brands of cookies even replied after she sent them a letter explaining her decision to boycott their product. The company said that it would take the palm oil out of its cookies.



CIRCLE OF COMPASSION

Directions: Add (in pictures or words) any people, groups, animals, or natural places that you have compassion for.

