



Co-Creating a Caring Community I

This lesson highlights the importance of empathy in co-creating caring communities.

Essential Question

How do we work together to create a fair and just classroom community where individual and collective learning is engaging, valued, and liberating for all?

Guiding Questions

What is empathy? How can empathy help us work together to create a caring community?

Objectives

- Students will gain an understanding of empathy.
- Students will understand and acknowledge their role in community building.
- Students will identify actionable steps toward creating a caring community.

Advance preparation

- Load videos
- Prepare student materials
- Distribute sticky notes
- Have space in classroom for a connection circle.

Materials/Resources

- PowerPoint slideshow 4.7 (adapt as needed)
- Talking piece
- Chart paper to create class Empathy T-Chart

Student Materials

- “Re-ignite the Embers of Empathy” reading
- Empathy T-Chart activity sheet
- “Create a Caring Community: Experience Empathy!” reading
- Optional: WOW activity sheet (homework)

Vocabulary

- Empathy
- Ember
- Ignite
- Sympathy

Do Now

3 min.

Slide 1: Students share with a partner what the word “empathy” means to them.

Introduction (Framing/Overview)

12 min.

1. Slide 3: Student Dedication (30-60 sec; note: if all students have shared a dedication by this time in the course, you may omit this step going forward or allow volunteers to share a second dedication.)
2. Slide 4: Convene students to a Connection Circle. Have students close their eyes for four deep breaths and think quietly about a person in this circle. What are you thankful for about this person? Ask for a volunteer to begin sharing and then move the talking piece sequentially.
3. (Note: You may have students return to their seats or remain in the circle to watch the video.) Distribute the student reading, “Reignite the Embers of Empathy,” an excerpt from former President Barack Obama’s remarks on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the March on Washington (August 29, 2013). Invite students to follow along as they watch the video (slide 5), highlighting or circling unfamiliar words. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2SmIIkQ7rfY>.
4. Tell students that today’s lesson will focus on **empathy**, the idea that President Obama highlighted in his speech, as the foundation for a caring classroom community. Review the day’s agenda (slide 6).
5. Introduce the vocabulary words. Ask students if they would like to add any of their highlighted words to the list. Ask them to write on sticky notes what they think these words mean.
6. Elicit student suggestions on the meaning of **empathy**, based on prior knowledge and on the video they just watched. **Click** to reveal the definition (the ability to identify with and understand someone else’s situation and feelings). Use context clues from President Obama’s speech to craft definitions for “re-ignite” and “embers” (click again). Tell students they will soon learn more about sympathy.

Activity 1: Discovering and Growing Empathy

10 min.

7. To develop understanding of the word “empathy,” encourage students to think about situations where they have seen or experienced empathy in action. Have students to work with a partner to develop an Empathy T-Chart for about 5 minutes. Invite students to help you create a Class Empathy T-Chart using chart paper. The Class Empathy T-Chart will reside on the community wall. Here are some possible items:

**Partner
Exploration**

**Whole Class
Discussion**

Looks Like	Sounds Like
Making eye contact	“I hear you.”
Nodding in agreement	“I’m so excited for you!”
Patting on the back or arm	“Congratulations!”
Bringing a person into your group	“I see you.”
A hug	“I understand your pain.”
A high-five	“How are you feeling?”
Listening without interrupting	“You have my undivided attention.”

8. Ask students how they think the word “empathy” relates to “sympathy” (slide 9). After students’ suggestions, click to explain that “empathy” refers to understanding and identifying with the way someone feels, while “sympathy” simply means feeling sorry for someone, but not necessarily understanding or identifying with their feelings or experience. Give students time to go back to their vocabulary word definitions and edit them if they want (slide 10).

**Direct
Instruction**

Activity 2: Empathy in a Caring Community

15 min.

9. Invite students to read with a partner *Create a Caring Community: Practice Empathy* (slide 11). Conclude the partner reading with a brief discussion that resurfaces the “big ideas” that emerge in today’s lesson including mindfulness, gratitude, and empathy. Click to reveal the following discussion questions:
- Who is responsible for create a caring classroom community?
 - Is it the responsibility of just one person or is it a collective effort?
 - What kinds of behavior and interactions would we see and hear in a caring community?
10. Let students know that they will be exploring empathy interviews the following day.

**Partner
Reading
And
Discussion**

**Whole
Class
Discussion**

Closure

5 min.

11. Invite students to join in a circle and ask students to respond to any of the three **WOW**s of today's learning.

What surprised them?

On it...they already knew it and are actively using that skill/concept/learning

Wondering...Weighing it...not sure about it...

Have students with January birthdays begin sharing, then proceed around the circle.

Extensions

If you wish to assign homework, have students complete the W.O.W. sheet.

President Obama Marks March on Washington's 50th Anniversary (Video Transcript, August 28, 2013)

“Reignite the Embers of Empathy”

The March on Washington teaches us that we are not trapped by the mistakes of history; that we are masters of our fate. But it also teaches us that the promise of this nation will only be kept when we work together. **We'll have to reignite the embers of empathy and fellow feeling**, the coalition of conscience that found expression in this place 50 years ago.

And I believe that spirit is there, that truth force is inside each of us. I see it when a white mother recognizes her own daughter in the face of a poor black child. I see it when the black youth thinks of his own grandfather in the dignified steps of an elderly white man. It's there in the native-born recognizing that striving spirit of the new immigrant; when the interracial couple connects the pain of a gay couple who are discriminated against and understands it as their own.

That's where courage comes from -- when we turn not from each other, or on each other, but towards one another, and we find that we do not walk alone. That's where courage comes from. And with that courage we can stand together.

Empathy T-Chart

Looks Like	Sounds Like



Photo by Allison Shelley All4Ed

Create a Caring Community: Practice Empathy!

Empathy is recognized as an important life skill for building healthy relationships. It's also essential to building a caring classroom community. But what is empathy? Empathy is being able to understand how someone feels because you can imagine what it is like to walk in their shoes. Educator and author Bob Sornson says that empathy is the foundation of all emotional intelligence. When we learn empathy, we can have strong relationships, truly care for others, and set appropriate limits in our own lives without becoming angry.



But how can we develop empathy? Sornson suggests that learning to calm ourselves, manage our emotions, and stay focused on the right things gives us the ability to look beyond ourselves. This creates empathy that makes a caring classroom community possible.

Here are some tips for practicing empathy.

1. Be a friend to yourself first. Be honest about your own feelings and name them: "I feel angry/ frustrated/sad/happy about ____." This helps you understand and relate to others' feelings.
2. Listen deeply without interrupting, judging, or offering advice. Give your full attention.
3. Pay attention to people's body language, facial expressions, and other nonverbal cues. Learn what these clues mean.
4. We sometimes feel uncomfortable and don't know exactly what to say. Saying "I see your pain" or "I am here with you" lets the person know that you care and are present.
5. When someone is happy, share in their joy! Congratulate them and ask about what happened.

As we learn to identify deeply with one another's feelings and experiences—positive, negative, and in between—we can make our classroom a place where each person feels cared for.

Reference: Sornson, B. (2014, June 23). Developing empathy in the classroom. Leadership, Teaching Methods. Corwin Connect. Retrieved from <https://corwin-connect.com/2014/06/developing-empathy-classroom/>

Image <http://clipart-library.com/clipart/116524.htm>

Name: _____

Date: _____

W

What surprised me? -----

O

On it! I already know it. I am using it -----

W

Wondering. Weighing it. Not sure about it-----
