

# Empathy: Classroom Lesson Plan

## Lesson Topic:

Identifying empathy

## Lesson Objective:

Students will be able to write empathetic and non-empathetic responses to a given situation.

Students will be able to explain the impact that empathy has on society and individual situations.

## Materials:

- Paper, enough for each pair of students to have 3 sheets
- Writing utensils
- Choose Your Own Adventure worksheet
- Projector or other method to display the worksheet

## Advanced Preparation:

- [Preview the video](#) before sharing it with your students [2:12].
- If a document camera or overhead projector is not available for displaying the “Choose Your Own Adventure” worksheet, one copy will need to be made for each group. **Do NOT include Part II.**

## Warm-up Activity:

1. Tell a personal story about a time that someone showed you empathy. Be sure to end the story by talking about how this gesture made you feel.
2. Ask, "Does anyone know a word to describe the actions of the person in my story?" Acknowledge student responses, and guide the class to the term "empathy" or "empathetic".
3. Explain that empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of another person.
4. Ask students to think of a time that someone showed them empathy. Encourage students who wish to share to briefly tell their stories.

### **View the Video: "Empathy"**

1. Tell students they will be watching the video titled, "Empathy".
2. Explain that the video presents role models talking about empathy and its importance in everyday life.
3. Ask students to listen for the reasons that role models think empathy is important. Then view the video together.
4. View the video again; this time, invite students to formulate questions or comments about the ideas discussed in the video and to be prepared to discuss these after viewing the video.

### **Video Follow-up:**

1. Ask students to offer their questions, comments, reactions and responses to the video.
2. Ask, "Has anyone read a 'choose your own adventure' book?" Let students raise hands to indicate they are familiar.
3. Tell students that they will be writing a 'choose your own adventure' story. The beginning is already written, so they will be

working together to write three possible actions that the main character could take. Then, they will get some more information to use to finish each of the three stories.

4. Divide students into groups of 2-3. Give each group three sheets of paper and some writing utensils.
5. Read the beginning of the story (Part I) together. Ideally, this will be placed on a document camera or overhead projector so that students are able to reference back to it while working in their groups.
6. Give students a few minutes in their groups to come up with three possible actions that the main character could take. Each action should be written at the top of a separate piece of paper.
7. Reveal Part II. Explain to students that depending on their possible actions, they may write that the girl told them this information, that they overheard her talking on her cellphone, or any other method that makes sense.
8. Give students time to write endings to each of their three possible action scenarios based on the new information in Part II.
9. As students finish writing, bring the class back together to discuss their work.
  - How did your possible action options influence the different endings to your story?
  - Did anyone write a story that included empathy? Allow students to share segments of relevant stories.
  - When you worked with your partner to write possible actions, why did you think the girl was upset? How did your understanding of the situation change when you saw the additional information in Part II? Have you ever thought you understood a situation and then realized that you didn't have all the information?

- One role model told us, “It’s really about remaining open and not just kind of coming in and being like... I know everything, but really stepping back and...being open and understanding.” How does this idea relate to your ‘choose your own adventure’ story?
10. Share this quote from former President Barack Obama:  
“Learning to stand in somebody else’s shoes, to see through their eyes, that’s how peace begins. And it’s up to you to make that happen. Empathy is a quality of character that can change the world.”
  11. Close by asking students to keep empathy in the back of their minds as they go about the rest of their day.



### Extension Activities:

1. Use the “Related Questions to Explore” as discussion springboards or writing prompts to help students further explore empathy.
2. Research and report on historical figures involved in experiential empathy such as Beatrice Webb and Jack London.

### Related Questions to Explore:

- What types of problems could empathy help solve in the world? Why do you think empathy can solve these problems?
- Think of someone you know that is a good example of empathy. What do they do to act this way? Do you think they have always been this empathetic or did something cause them to become like this?
- Can a person be too empathetic? Why or why not?
- Does empathy look the same all over the world or does it look different depending on where you are? Why might this be?
- How can empathy help you at school? At home? In your future career?
- Think of a time in your life that you were empathetic. How did being empathetic make you feel? Is it easy to be empathetic? Why or why not?

## Choose Your Own Adventure

### Part I:

It's the first day of volleyball in PE class. There is a new girl on your team. You've noticed her around for a few days, but you haven't spoken to her yet.

During your volleyball match, your team is struggling and the new girl misses a pretty easy serve. She gives the team a thin-lipped smile and shrugs. Shonda, one of the stronger players on your team, says, "Come on! That was an easy one... ugh."

Just then, the bell for fourth period rings. Everyone pours off the court to change clothes and head to math class.

You start to walk to the locker room when you notice the new girl sitting in the corner of the gym on the bleachers. She looks like she might be crying.

### Part II:

Maybe the new girl told you this, or maybe you overheard her talking on her cell phone...

"My grandma just died, so we had to move out of her house. We had been living with her since I was a baby, and she took care of me all the time," the new girl says. "Now we're living in a tiny apartment and there wasn't even any room for my dog, Sterling, so we had to give him away."



## Ideas for Future Lessons/Activities Related to Empathy:

1. What Do I Need to Do to Be Empathetic? Exploring and Understanding the Language and Actions of Empathy
2. Literature-Based Learning: Identifying and Discussing Empathy in Stories and Poems
3. Historical Empathy: Walking in the Shoes of People from the Past
4. What Would You Do? Challenging Empathy Situations to Imagine and Discuss
5. Empathy Around the World: The Intersection of Culture and Empathy
6. The Science of Empathy: What Does Empathy Look Like in the Brain?
7. Creative Writing Connections: Writing Stories of Giving and Receiving Empathy