

<b>Lesson</b>	What Is Empathy?
<b>Disability Category</b>	Introductory
<b>Grade</b>	3-5
<b>Learning Intention</b>	Students will learn what empathy is and begin to understand its role in building positive relationships.
<b>Common Core Standard(s)</b>	<a href="#">CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.1</a> <a href="#">CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.4</a>
<b>Duration</b>	30-60 minutes
<b>Materials Needed</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Large format paper or poster board</li> <li>• Colored pencils, markers, crayons</li> <li>• Extension: iPads or other devices students can use to record audio and/or video</li> </ul>

### Lesson Structure

Begin the lesson by telling students that you are going to be talking about empathy. Ask, “By a show of hands, who has heard of empathy? What does it mean?”

Give students the opportunity to share their definitions. Then, reinforce their ideas by sharing a dictionary definition of empathy, such as this one from the [Cambridge Dictionary](#): Empathy is *“the ability to share someone else’s feelings or experiences by imagining what it would be like to be in that person’s situation.”*

If you’d like, share this quote by Alfred Adler, an early 20th century psychologist: “Empathy is seeing with the eyes of another, listening with the ears of another, and feeling with the heart of another.”

Ask, “What’s the difference between empathy and sympathy?” Allow students to share their ideas, then reinforce their suggestions by sharing a dictionary definition of sympathy, such as this one from the [Cambridge Dictionary](#): Sympathy is *“an expression of understanding and care for someone else’s suffering.”*

Facilitate further discussion by asking questions, such as:

- Why is empathy important?
- When would we need empathy in understanding other people?

Explain to students that, over the next few weeks (or whatever your time line is), they will be learning about different disabilities. Ask, “Why do you think we’re talking about empathy and disabilities together?” Give students a moment or two to think and share. Then reinforce their ideas and/or explain that learning about disabilities and becoming more aware of different disabilities helps empower us to have empathy.

Explain that you’ll be focusing on disabilities because whether students realize it or not, we all know people who have disabilities or whose lives are affected by disabilities. Yet, people with disabilities often feel misunderstood or excluded. We all know that including people, learning about and from others, and sharing our own experiences is really important. So, while we all have our unique qualities, we also all share common traits, preferences, and experiences. When we learn about others, we develop new perspectives and understanding. In that way, we can develop our empathy, which helps us connect with more people in more meaningful ways – and that’s good for everybody.

Have students split into groups of 2-4. Give each group poster paper or poster board and drawing supplies and tell them that they will be creating posters to promote empathy. The posters should explain what empathy is and why you should have it towards others. Encourage students to make the posters colorful and to draw positive pictures to go with their messages.

Give ample time for students to brainstorm and create their posters. When students are finished, bring the class back together so groups can share their work. Hang posters around the classroom or school.

### **Assessment**

Use posters and participation in the discussion to assess understanding of what empathy is.

### **Extensions**

- Students work in groups of 2-4 to create skits that shows empathy in action and the positive impact it has on the people involved.
- Working in pairs or small groups, students create public service announcements (PSA) about empathy to share through the school’s website and/or shown during a school-wide assembly.
- Students write a short essay comparing empathy with sympathy.
- On index cards, students write a personal definition of what empathy means to them, which is then displayed on a classroom or hallway bulletin board.