

The Power of Empathy

OBJECTIVE

To understand the suffering of others and foster a sense of empathy. The power of empathy will help students to ultimately understand what others feel and how they can help them.

ACTIVITY OVERVIEW

Students will interview a person who faces a difficult challenge or someone who has overcome a major hurdle in their life. They will share their interviews with the class and note the similarities between the various types of challenges.

MATERIALS

- 🐾 Poster paper for chart

ACTIVITY

Preliminary Discussion

- 🐾 What is empathy?
- 🐾 Why is it important to have empathy for others?
- 🐾 Think of a person for which you have had empathy. What was this person's situation? How were you able to assist this person once you listened to them and tried to understand how they were feeling?
- 🐾 How has empathy helped you deal with your family and friends?
- 🐾 What difficult challenges have you had in your life? How did you overcome them? Who helped you through them? How did they help you?

Procedure

Students will think of a person that is facing a difficult challenge or who has overcome a hurdle in their life. Some examples: an AIDS patient; a recovering drug addict or alcoholic; a person who is, or used to be, homeless; a person with a disability; a victim of domestic violence. Students need to create interview questions and an interview format. They'll conduct the interview either in person or over the phone. The interview should serve to help each student understand the challenges, struggles, and victories of the person they're interviewing. The students should also try to understand how they and their community can help this person.

Once the students have done their interviews, they need to write them in essay form, addressing all the issues mentioned. They'll each read theirs to the class. Afterwards, the class should work together on a chart of similarities that shows ultimately, how similar these challenges are.

Invite several of the people interviewed to sit in on a panel discussion in the classroom. Prior to this, have the students think of questions they'll ask the panel. Focus on how it's possible to overcome hardships with the help and guidance of others.

Post-Discussion

- 🐾 What's the most important thing you learned through your interview?
- 🐾 How did empathy help you connect with these people and your community better?
- 🐾 How can we work together to help people and animals that face hardships?

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

Plan a field trip to visit an organization that one of your interviewees is, or was involved in.