



THE INSTITUTE FOR HUMANE EDUCATION
P.O. BOX 260
SURRY, MAINE 04684
207.667.1025
info@HumaneEducation.org
www.HumaneEducation.org

CIRCLE OF COMPASSION

Grades: 4 and up

Time: 60-90 minutes

Materials: Issue/activity stations (see below); definition(s) of compassion, written on paper to post; quotes about compassion; paper and writing utensils

Relevant Subjects: Social Studies, Art, and Language Arts

Pertinent Information: This activity can serve as an excellent springboard for exploring compassion and introducing important social change issues to students.

Preparation:

1. Develop “stations” that participants can visit, which can help them explore the parameters of their compassion. The number, type and content of stations will depend on the age and level of your participants. (See examples for stations below.)

2. Write one or more definitions of compassion on large pieces of paper and display it/them around the room.

1. Let participants know that they’re going to be exploring their circle of compassion. Ask for volunteers to define compassion. Point out the definition(s) you’ve provided.
2. Provide each individual with a sheet of paper and have them draw a large circle and write their own name in the center of it. Have them write inside the circle the names of everyone/everything included in their circle of compassion. Invite volunteers to share: Who’s included in their circle of compassion? Why?

Alternative: Students could also draw or collage the elements included in their circle of compassion.

3. Share quotes about compassion and encourage students to discuss their reactions to them. Examples might include:

“Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.”
~ Albert Einstein

“If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion.” ~ The Dalai Lama

4. Give participants time to walk through stations around the room that include components of oppression, exploitation and suffering, focusing on aspects of animal protection, human rights, environmental preservation, and/or media, consumerism and culture. You’ll also want to include factoids that provide more information about the issues the stations introduce.

Potential Examples Might Include:

- Have a milk crate for people to stand on in their sock-feet, and near it, have a card that offers facts about the conditions factory farmed egg-laying chickens (often called “battery hens”) are subjected to.
 - Have a small wire cage (like those used for dog kennels) just large enough for 1-2 students to fit into. Invite them to get into the cage and stay for a few minutes. Include information about factory farmed animals kept in such cramped conditions, such as battery hens, veal calves and female pigs (who are kept in gestation crates).
 - Have a “sweatshop station” where participants put on a heavy coat and sit under heat lamps while they do a boring, repetitive activity for a few minutes.
 - Have a station where participants tie a series of tiny knots (as if weaving a rug).
 - Have a station with large jugs (5-10 gallons each) filled with water. Invite participants to carry a jug around for a few minutes, imagining what it would be like to have to carry that heavy water for many miles each day.
 - Recreate the represented (mainly plastic) contents found in a whale’s stomach from IHE’s Whale’s Stomach activity (see our Humane Education Activities section on our website). Invite participants to think about how the items could have been reused, recycled, redirected (or not used in the first place), so that they didn’t end up in our oceans.
5. Ask participants to return to their seats and draw another circle of compassion and write down who’s included in it. Invite them to share: Has it changed? How? Why/why not?

Extensions:

1. Invite participants to complete the "My Life is My Message Questionnaire," (found in IHE's Humane Education Activities section) and to share their responses.
2. Invite participants to talk about: What am I going to do about what I just learned? You could have blank sheets of paper next to each of the stations and have participants return to the stations and write a response to "What can I do to change this?"

Activity by: Nadia Erdolen, Sophia Erlsten, Shannon Finch, Charley Korn, and Lynne Westmoreland (M.Ed. Students)