

# Dear Me: A Letter on Compassion

This lesson gives students an opportunity to look at caring for their broader communities, even when the problems their communities face are large. There is ample time for both group discussion and personal reflection as students watch how one boy developed an organization to address local hunger in his community. Students will empower themselves through a personal letter they will write and the teacher will eventually give back, ideally reminding students of their own ideas and calls to action.

## Caring Sub-Concept(s)

Compassion, Helpfulness, Kindness

## Lesson Timeframe

30-40 minutes

## Required Materials

- Dear Me worksheet or student notebook paper
- Letter-sided envelopes, one for each student

## Standards Map

This lesson aligns with CASEL Competencies, National Health Education Standards, and Common Core State Standards. Please refer to the [Standards Map](#) for more information.



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AS A RECOMMENDED PROGRAM  
FOR SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING.  
See last page for details.

## Lesson Objective

Students will discuss the concepts of caring and compassion.

- Watch compassion in action through the video about Joshua's Heart.
- Reflect on the main ideas of the video and relate them to their own personal opportunities to show caring and compassion.
- Write a letter to themselves talking about how they might get more involved in caring for their communities.

## Teacher Connection/Self-Care

The act of compassion for others often seems easy for us adults when we are watching a moving documentary or a news broadcast. However, the struggle to show compassion within our own community is at times a bit more difficult. We become immune to the homeless person with the sign or the single mother struggling with the packages. This week take a concentrated look around your community, your school, and even your classroom. Who might be in need that you may have overlooked in the past? Dialing in your compassion to your immediate surroundings can really increase the connectivity with your students, your peers, and your community as a whole. When we are connected we are present, so take a look around. Who has fallen through the cracks? How can your compassion help you remain connected with your school?

## Tips for Diverse Learners

- Watch the video clips more than one time.
- Show the questions as they watch the clip or listen to you describe the foundation; consider writing the questions on the board or giving the students the printed questions.
- Have students discuss their responses to the questions with a partner before responding to the whole group.
- Allow students to write their letters in their native language if that will help them share their ideas with their parents; ask them to also have a short English version, though, so you can provide feedback.



## Share

2-3 minutes

*Ok, everyone hold up one of your hands in a big high-five. Now, turn to the person next to you and give them a high five and then tell them your “GIVE Five” strategies for helping others relieve stress that we worked on in the last lesson. Okay, go!*



## Inspire

15-20 minutes

*In the last lesson, we all looked at images (or discussed situations) that showed us a stressful situation, either a positive stress situation or a negative stress situation. And we discovered that we all experience stress a little differently but that we all experience stress. We also talked about some ways we can try to help others through a stressful situation. The feeling we have when we see others stressed or hurt or lonely or struggling and we want to help them is called compassion.*

*How many of you have heard this word before?*

*Compassion is often something we don't plan to feel; it is simply something that wells up inside us when we see someone in need.*

*Sometimes, though, we aren't sure how to help, or we don't think we can help, so we turn our compassion meter down. Or, sometimes someone else's pain or struggle or loneliness makes us feel uncomfortable or stressed ourselves, so we decide not to help them.*

*And, sometimes, the problem IS too big for us, but that doesn't mean we ignore it. When you are faced with a problem or when you see someone else in distress, but you by yourself cannot help, what are some things you can do?*

Invite student response.

*We are going to watch a short video about a boy who felt compassion and the desire to help others in his community but didn't know how to start. He took his feelings of compassion for others in need and, with the help of others, turned it into real and meaningful action. Let's watch:*

Watch Joshua, Feeding Those in Need | Citizen Kid by Disney:

<https://video.disney.com/watch/joshua-feeding-those-in-need-citizen-kid-by-disney-4ff5cac4824697e707b76a1c>

If you cannot play the clip, here is a synopsis:

*One way we can make a difference is by helping people who don't have enough food. Perhaps you have collected canned food at school or brought it to the local food bank. One boy, Joshua Williams, even started his own organization in Miami, Florida, to help stomp out world hunger. When Joshua was four and a half years old, he saw a homeless man on the street and realized he wanted to figure out a way to help him. With his mom's help, Joshua created the Joshua's Heart Foundation in 2006; since then, he has worked with more than 3,000 volunteers (1,200 kids and 2,000 adults) who have distributed close to a million pounds of food to people in his community!*

Countless people have been helped and are very thankful that Joshua cared enough to provide them with the food they need.



## Empower

5 minutes

Now let's talk a bit about what we watched!

You can do this as a large group or in small groups.

- *Why do you think Joshua Williams wants to help others?*
- *From information on this organization's website, we know that Claudia, Joshua's mom, supports what he is doing. How do you think our families or the people we live with can help us learn how to care for others and our community? Are there things you are already doing as a family to help care for others?*
- *People in the clip seem grateful for the food they received. The video says Joshua and the volunteers have given out 400,000 pounds of food, but it is now closer to a million pounds! Do you think being grateful and thankful for what others do for us is important? Why or why not?*
- *Do you think it is our responsibility to care for and support others in the community? In what way?*
- *Do you think what Joshua did was extraordinary?*

*These are all great answers! Now, let's take some time to think about how this can personally apply to each of us.*

Pass out the "Dear Me" worksheets or invite students to get out a piece of paper if you are not using the worksheet.

*You are going to write yourself a letter answering this question: How do you think you could make a difference in your community? It starts with "Dear Me,"*

*Then, write a few sentences about what we have been learning in these lessons; so far, we have talked about respect and stress and now compassion and caring.*

*Next, describe how seeing the video about Joshua impacted how you feel about caring for others, even if the problem seems too big for you.*

*Finally, write down a few things you think you could do to help care for those in your community; how you could make a difference. Remember that your community could be the city and those in it, our school community, your immediate neighborhood, or your family. Where do you see a need that you could care for, either on your own or with the help of someone else?*

*When you are done with your letter, sign it and put it in the envelope I am going to hand out to you, but do not seal it! Put your name on the outside of the envelope and drop them off in this basket on my desk.*



## Reflect

5 minutes

*There are small things each of us can do to show generosity and kindness to others in our community and around the world. These small acts can be a ripple in the water that spreads out to other community members. Joshua started with an idea that he wanted to help a homeless man, and now he has helped provide food to hundreds of people. You just wrote down some ideas for how you might care for others around you. I will look over your ideas and I will eventually give these back to you so you can be reminded of how you think you might care for others. I look forward to seeing all of your good ideas; maybe there will be something we can even do together as a class.*



## Extension Ideas

- If you want to incorporate a research element, these websites provide good ideas for what kids can do to show caring and kindness:

[5 Ways to Help Children Care More About Others](#)

[Ripple Kindness Project: How You Can Make A Difference](#)

- You can return the letters to students in any number of ways and at any time; maybe at the end of the quarter, end of the Inclusiveness Unit (which is closely tied to respect and caring), at conferences or, maybe you mail them to the student at home over a long break. You might also consider writing a personal note to each student commenting on how you've seen the student caring for others at school, encouraging that student to continue the good work.



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AND EMOTIONAL  
LEARNING.

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) has been reviewing evidence-based SEL programs since 2003. Kindness in the Classroom® meets CASEL's SElect Program and is included in the [CASEL Guide to Effective Social and Emotional Learning Programs](#).

Kindness in the Classroom® met or exceeded all of CASEL's criteria for high-quality SEL programming. Kindness in the Classroom® received CASEL's highest designation for high-quality SEL programming.

<https://casel.org/guide/kindness-in-the-classroom/>

# Dear Me Worksheet

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Dear Me:

In our kindness units so far, we have been learning about:

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Today we watched a video about a boy named Joshua who started a program that helps feed people who do not have enough food. This is a big problem that one kid decided he could help solve! As I watched the video, I felt:

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Here is where I see a need in our community (could be family, school, or general community):

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And here are some things that I think I could do to help care for those in our community:

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Sincerely,