



Global Voices Information Sheet

Walking in someone else's shoes: the importance of empathy



Studies have found that chimps show empathy.

Background Info

- Recent studies found that Botox users experience diminished empathy.
- Botox paralyzes the facial muscles used to copy the reactions of other people; some scientists have found that copying physical signs in others, like smiling and frowning, helps us understand emotions in others. When those muscles are paralyzed, it is difficult to perceive the emotions of others.
- Some philosophers believe that it is impossible to fully understand what it is like to be another person because we all experience and perceive the world differently.
- For example, psychologists study perception and try to determine if two people looking at a fire truck will see the same shade of red (one person's eyes might see the light differently and see a darker shade).
- We can never truly know what it's like to look at something from another person's point of view, but we can imagine their emotions by relating them to our own experiences.
- There are lots of ways we can imagine ourselves in the lives of others, and lots of little things we can do to show our empathy for people we encounter every day.
- Scientists found that chimps will yawn after seeing other chimps yawn first, and this is a symbol of empathy. Chimps were more likely to show empathy for a chimp that they recognized, suggesting it's easier to feel empathy for someone you know.

Key terms

- **Empathy**— the ability to understand and share feelings with another person.
- **Botox**—a drug injected into the face during a cosmetic procedure, used to remove wrinkles by temporarily paralyzing facial muscles.
- **Narcissistic** —a personality trait; an excessive love or admiration of oneself.
- **Empathy erosion**—author Simon Baron-Cohen suggests that this is a person's inability to see themselves in others, and to fully understand them.
- **Schadenfreude** — pleasure derived from another person's misfortune.
- **Genetic**— relating to genes or heredity; refers to a physical trait or personality characteristic that a person is born with.
- **Environmental**—the surroundings or conditions in which a person lives; influences a person's behavior or beliefs that come from these conditions.

Global Voices Elementary Educator Resources

Note to Educators:

The following activities are designed to stimulate a current events discussion. Generative in nature, these questions can be a launching point for additional assignments or research projects. Teachers are encouraged to adapt these activities to meet the contextual needs of their classroom.

In some cases, reading the article with students may be appropriate, coupled with reviewing the information sheet to further explore the concepts and contexts being discussed. From here, teachers can select from the questions provided below. Activities are structured to introduce students to the issues, then allow them to explore and apply their learnings. Extension and conclusion activities are included to challenge students and finally, encourage them to reflect on the issues at hand.

Since these activities are designed as discussions rather than formal lessons, assessment strategies are not included.

Themes and Course Connections

- Themes: empathy, feelings, compassion, chimpanzees and science.
- Course Connections: The Arts, Language, Science and Technology, and Social Studies.

Materials

- Chart paper or blackboard
- Video projector
- Global Voices column

Specific Expectations and Learning Goals

Students will:

- Develop and express responses to issues and problems.
- Reassess their responses to issues on the basis of new information.
- Participate in active group work and class discussions.
- Communicate effectively in written and spoken language or other forms of expression.
- Demonstrate the ability to think critically.
- Develop, express, and defend a position on an issue and explain how to put the ideas into action.

Knowledge and Understanding

1. Empathy (estimated time: 15 minutes)
 - a. Explain to students that in a recent study it was discovered that chimpanzees will yawn more after watching a familiar chimp yawn rather than watching an unfamiliar chimp yawn. Scientists say that this is an outward expression of empathy between them.
 - b. Show students the following short video clip to demonstrate this study. Explain to students that in the video the chimp is being shown a clip of a familiar chimp yawning:
http://news.bbc.co.uk/earth/hi/earth_news/newsid_9450000/9450234.stm
 - c. Explain to students that humans take on similar behaviours.
 - d. Create a word web around the word empathy, asking students to volunteer words they associate with empathy.

- e. Hold a discussion around empathy, discussing why it is important and what it looks like in our everyday lives.

Thinking

1. Guided Reading: The Global Voices Column (estimated time: 20 minutes)
 - a. Have students sit in a circle and distribute one copy of the Global Voices column to each student.
 - b. Pre-reading steps:
 - i. Make predictions: ask students to read the title of the column and view the pictures. After doing so, ask them to make predictions as to what the column is going to be about.
 - ii. Introduce vocabulary from the column.
 - iii. Assess prior knowledge: ask students to discuss what they already know about these topics.
 - c. Reading steps:
 - i. Go around the circle and have each student read a section of the column to the class, so that everyone gets a turn to read.
 - ii. As students are reading, offer guidance and coaching by providing prompts, asking questions, and encouraging attempts at reading strategy application.
 - d. Post reading steps:
 - i. Encourage students to provide a summary of the column, in order to ensure they have understood the series of events.
 - ii. Ask questions about the text to judge comprehension.
2. Media Literacy (estimated time: 15 minutes)
 - a. Ask students to practice their media literacy skills by identifying the following:
 - i. Title: the full title of the article (also called the headline).
 - ii. Author: the author's full name; if there is no author given, indicate if the article is an editorial or from a foreign news source.
 - iii. Newspaper: the full name of the newspaper from which the article is taken.
 - iv. Date: the day the article appeared in the newspaper.
 - v. Subject: the overall topic that the article is describing.
 - vi. Event: the event that led to the writing of the article.
 - vii. Main idea: the point or overall argument that the article is making. Is it trying to convince readers to take a side? If so what opinion is it encouraging?
 - viii. Evidence: the facts/arguments that support the main idea and help to convince the reader or inform them of the issue. Does the author provide enough factual material to support his/her ideas?
 - ix. Significance: the importance of the issue and whom it may affect.
 - x. Point of view: is the article, in your opinion, true, balanced or biased? Are different viewpoints presented? Are any left out?
 - b. When this is complete, bring the class back together and discuss student answers.

Communication

1. Showing Empathy (estimated time: 10 minutes)
 - a. In the Global Voices column it is stated that every day is filled with opportunities to put yourself in someone else's shoes.
 - b. Ask students to list some examples of situations where they could put themselves in another's shoes to understand their feelings. List suggestions on the board.
 - c. Go down this list and ask students what actions they would take in each scenario to show empathy.

- d. When the discussion is complete, encourage students to perform one empathetic act before the end of the day.

Application

1. Drawing Empathy (estimated time: 30 minutes)
 - a. Explain to students that they are going to create a visual representation of empathy, reflecting everything they have learned from this Global Voices lesson.
 - b. Distribute blank paper to each student.
 - c. Ask them to write the word empathy somewhere on the page.
 - d. Explain to students that they are required to fill the rest of the page with drawings and words that they feel represent empathy.
 - e. Display completed drawings around the classroom.

Additional Resources

In addition to the above lesson plans, you may want to share some additional resources with your students. Listed below are some links to useful online resources:

Science Daily - <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/04/110406192511.htm>