

by | Judith Snyder ●●●●



KEEP 'EM READING

COMPASSION AWARENESS 101

The library is the heart of the school—a place where curiosity is rewarded with answers and more questions, where learning to help oneself is encouraged, and where helping others is both a joy and a way to solidify learning. So it makes sense that the library would also be a place to initiate a compassion awareness campaign for the staff, students, and ultimately the community.

Some of the strategies for cultivating compassion already exist in many library lessons, for example, encouraging cooperative learning or looking for commonalities with others. But with a concerted effort and directed purpose, even more can be accomplished.

Model with Picture Books

Grades 1–5

A simple approach to broadening students' background knowledge about compassion is to read picture

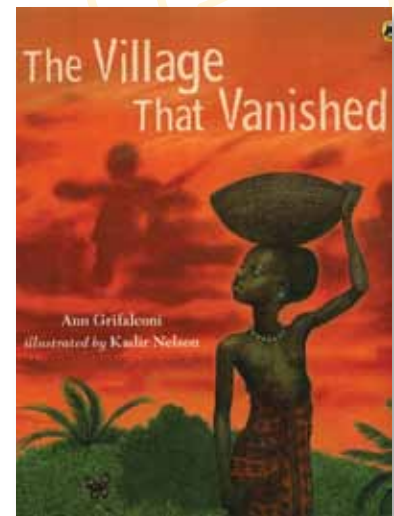
books whose characters model compassionate skills as identified by Emory and Stanford Universities:

1. Developing cooperation
2. Identifying commonalities with others
3. Seeing strangers as individuals with common attributes
4. Showing how children can make a difference
5. Modeling and pointing out compassionate behavior
6. Emphasizing the equality and dignity of all

Choose books according to grade appropriateness and desired skill recognition.

The Invisible Boy by Trudy Ludwig
Compassion Skills: 1–6

Brian feels invisible at school until a new kid includes him in a project. This show of compassion opens a door for Brian, who is then “seen” by his classmates.



The Village That Vanished
by Ann Grifalconi
Compassion Skills: 1, 4

In this story, an old woman and a young girl save their African village from slavers. Resourcefulness, coupled with bravery and compassion, helps the community to work together and overcome fear.

GRADES
1–5



Yeti and the Bird by Nadia Shireen

Compassion Skills: 3, 5

The simple kindness of reaching out to someone different from oneself shows how compassion can illuminate commonalities that can lead to friendship.

America's White Table

by Margot Theis Raven

Compassion Skills: 1, 5, 6

This book tells the story behind the Memorial Day tradition of setting a white table in honor of the prisoners of war and those missing in action. The main character struggles to find just the right words of gratitude to add to the table setting.

Because Amelia Smiled

by David Ezra Stein

Compassion Skills: 1, 4, 5

Amelia sets off a chain reaction of events that encircles the world and comes right back to her, showing how behavior can have far-reaching effects.

Peace Week in Miss Fox's Class

by Eileen Spinelli

Compassion Skills: 1, 4, 5, 6

Classroom squabbling is outlawed for a week in Miss Fox's class. During this time her students discover how pleasant it is to live in an environment where people take turns and say and do nice things for one another.

Pink and Say by Patricia Polacco

Compassion Skills: 1–6

Taking a great risk, Pinkus and his mother help Sheldon as he recovers from battle wounds during the Civil War. Sadly, the mother is killed, and the two men are caught and taken

to prison, where Pink is hanged and Shelton survives.

The Sniffles for Bear by Bonny Becker

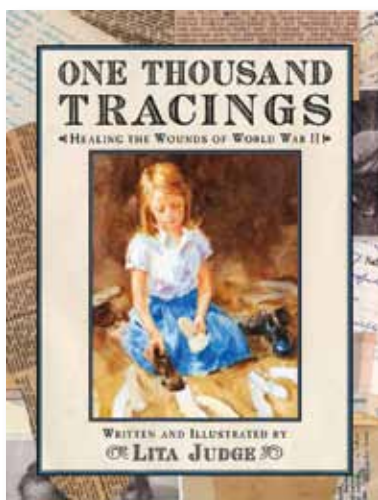
Compassion Skills: 2, 4, 5

Bear has a cold, and Mouse helps him feel better by reading stories, singing, and making soup. It isn't until Bear asks Mouse to write a will that Mouse actually understands how Bear feels. But Bear recovers—just in time to help nurse Mouse.

We March by Shane W. Evans

Compassion Skills: 1, 6

The main character and his family prepare for the March on Washington by working, singing, and marching for justice in cooperation with others to listen to Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech.



One Thousand Tracings: Healing

the Wounds of War by Lita Judge

Compassion Skills: 1–6

This fictional tale about a real event shows an American family striving to help the survivors of World War II in Europe, one family at a time. When a letter arrives explaining the difficult conditions in postwar Europe with requests for food and clothing, along with tracings of shoe soles to indicate the shoe sizes needed, one family undertakes a mission to supply

the necessities. With help from their community, many boxes are filled and shipped overseas.

The Everlasting Embrace

by Gabrielle Emanuel

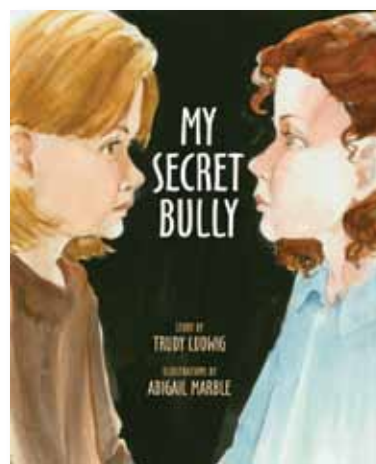
Compassion Skills: 2, 5

A child's interaction with her mother teaches an understanding of love and compassion.

Mr. George Baker by Amy Hest

Compassion Skills: 2, 5

Mr. Baker, who is one hundred years old, and a young boy wait each day for a bus to take them to school, where they are learning to read.



My Secret Bully by Trudy Ludwig

Compassion Skills: 2, 3, 4, 6

Monica has to deal with her sometimes-friend Katie, who is often mean to her. When Katie gets classmates to shun Monica at school, Monica seeks help in dealing with the situation.

Picture-Book Activities

Talk About It

Use the books as models for compassionate behavior. Discuss how the characters showed compassion and provide time for small-group roll-the-dice discussions. Each group rolls

a die and discusses the corresponding question. Groups continue until the allotted time is up.

1. *Why was compassion needed?*

Discuss the ways the main characters showed compassion.

2. *How did the main character feel after displaying compassion?*

3. *Did showing compassion change the main character? How?*

4. *How did seeing this compassionate behavior make you feel about the main character?*

5. *How does a person know when someone needs to be shown compassion?*

6. *Have you ever shown compassion to someone? How did it make you feel? Was it difficult to do? Why or why not?*

Read and Write About It

After reading and discussing the compassionate behavior of the main character, ask students to start making the behavior personal by directing students to use Text to Me and Text to the World writing responses. Text to Me is a personal response to the events or character actions. How do the events directly affect the student's thinking and feelings? Text to the World responses require students to consider how the actions might affect the larger community or world.

Act on It

Create compassion bracelets. Give each student two strips of different-colored foam cut to be 6–7" long by 1" wide. Using markers, students write the words "Show Compassion" on one strip and "Compassionate" on the other. Next, they glue the strips back-to-back. Then they glue them at the ends to form a circle. Students wear the "Show Compassion" side out until they have an opportunity to perform an act of compassion. The student then turns the bracelet inside out to show the "Compassionate" side.

Brainstorm a list of ways to show compassion both at school and at home.

When students have had sufficient time to understand the meaning of compassion, ask why they feel compassion is important in a society.

Model with Novels

Grades 3–5

Let compassion be the main focus for a novel study. After reading and discussing several picture books that model compassionate behaviors, provide novels for independent practice. Groups can read the same book titles or choose individual titles to read for this study.

Though most any novel can be chosen for this study, the following offer good examples of main characters who exhibit compassionate qualities:

- *Because of Winn-Dixie* by Kate DiCamillo
- *Bridge to Terabithia* by Katherine Paterson
- *The Secret Garden* by Frances Hodgson Burnett
- *The Underneath* by Kathi Appelt
- *Wonder* by R.J. Palacio
- *Clementine* by Sara Pennypacker

Literature Responses

- Does the main character show empathy, compassion, or both?
- Divide your paper into two columns. In the first column, list the changes/epiphanies the main character experiences throughout the story. In the second column, summarize the event that was the catalyst for each change.
- Did the main character ever not show compassion? How did you feel about that? Why do you think the author wrote that into the story?



- How did you feel when the main character did show compassion?
- Does the main character remind you of another book character? Who is it, and what do they have in common?
- Write about an event where the main character showed bravery while showing compassion.
- Create time lines showing character changes.

Biographies of Compassionate People

Grades 3–5

Compassion can take many forms. Helping friends and family is usually the first step, but showing compassion can also be accomplished by caring for animals or the environment. Using picture-book biographies in your collection, let students choose a person whose life exemplified compassion in some form and have them share information with the rest of the class via oral presentations from the point of view of the person studied.

Possible biographies of compassionate people include the following:

- *Brave Girl: Clara and the Shirtwaist Makers' Strike of 1909* by Michelle Markel
- *The Camping Trip That Changed America: Theodore Roosevelt, John Muir, and Our National Parks* by Barb Rosenstock
- *The Dalai Lama* by Charles and Linda George
- *Eleanor Roosevelt: First Lady of the World* by editors of *Time for Kids*
- *Grandfather Gandhi* by Arun Gandhi and Bethany Hegedus
- *Irena Sendler and the Children of the Warsaw Ghetto* by Susan Goldman Rubin
- *John Muir: America's First Environmentalist* by Kathryn Lasky
- *Mother Teresa* by Demi
- *Nelson Mandela* by Kadir Nelson
- *Rachel Carson and the Environmental Movement* by Elaine Landau
- *The Watcher: Jane Goodall's Life with the Chimps* by Jeanette Winter

Compassionate Introspection

Grades 1–5

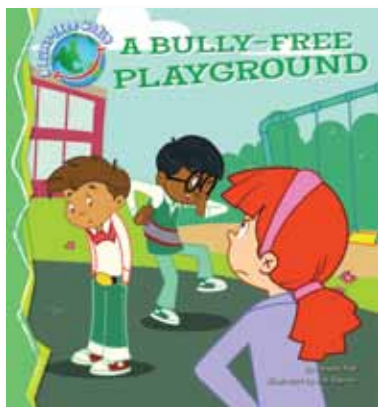
Being a Compassionate Person

After reading and discussing the picture books/novels, ask students to add to their list of what it means to be compassionate. Supplement the list with ideas from *Acting with Kindness* by Pam Scheunemann, *A Bully-Free Playground* by Pamela Hall, or similar books. Ideas might include being kind and generous, helping people who need help, being sensitive to others' feelings, and considering how your actions will affect those around you. Ask: *What is the difference between feeling bad for somebody and doing something to help?*



Practicing Compassionate Behavior

Ask students to brainstorm situations where they saw a person/animal who needed help or support (e.g., someone being bullied, an ill or lonely person, a stray animal). Divide the class into groups and role-play one situation.



Acknowledging Compassionate Behavior

Establish a schoolwide recognition award for students who display compassionate behavior.

End Note

Compassion is mostly learned from families, friends, and the community, so get parents involved in extending the use of compassionate behavior with suggestions for modeling. The blog Tech Savvy Mama offers streaming movie ideas that can be

used as a catalyst for home discussion (<http://tinyurl.com/qeeqs7m>).

"Raising a Compassionate Child" shares information on how to foster empathy and compassion on a daily basis (www.parenting.com/article/raising-a-compassionate-child).

The Greater Good website, sponsored by the University of California, Berkeley, offers interesting data about the advantages of compassion (<http://tinyurl.com/nljwz4k>). Not only does it help the person in need, but it also has long-lasting effects on the individual who performs the act by

- activating the pleasure and reward circuits in the brain that lead to long-lasting happiness
- reducing stress and improving the immune response
- developing a more optimistic and supportive person

These qualities, instilled into the hearts and minds of students and staff, could have a positive impact on student achievement and an even bigger impact on the world.

Judith Snyder is a seasoned teacher/librarian in Colorado, as well as a professional storyteller and freelance writer. Judith is the author of the *Jump-Start Your Library* series, three books featuring hands-on library lessons from *UpstartBooks* (2008), and a picture book, *What Do You See?* (2009), from *Odyssey Books*.