TIME SAVER:
Conscious Empathy

TIME FOR CHANGE:

DREAM. ACT. CHANGE OUR WORLD.

Are you looking for ways to help your students practice conscious empathy but short on planning time? Here are three quick steps to help students develop and practice empathy as they embark on or continue their changemaker journeys.

STEP 1

READ ALOUD

Read alouds are a great tool for starting discussions with students of all ages. Reading a book that features diverse characters and unfamiliar stories gives students the opportunity to reflect, ask questions, consider how others experience the world, and build empathy.

Books have many different purposes in the classroom and can help students learn about themselves and their own culture as well as other people and different cultures. For some students, literature may be the first time they are exposed to differences in culture, religion, and lifestyle. Representation is key when selecting books: to support and foster positive self-identity, and promote awareness and cultural understanding for all students.

A *window** is a text that offers a view into someone else's experience.

A *sliding door* is a text that allows the reader to become a part of the story's world.

A *mirror* is a text that reflects the reader's own culture and helps them build and be proud of their identity.

*Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop introduced these concepts in her groundbreaking article "Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors" (Bishop, 1990).

Educator and author Cornelius Minor shares his tips for selecting and discussing stories that invite students to notice differences without assigning value.

Source: Empowering Educators: A Digital Series on Race and Racism

Who Do We See? Using Books to Have Conversations About Race

> I'm providing kids a blueprint and I'm providing kids language by exposing them to different characters in books so that kids can develop a healthy reverence for people that they have never met by beginning to empathize with them in the pages of a book.
>
> CORNELIUS MINOR

STEP 2

REFLECT & DISCUSS

Regardless of the book you choose, you can use these questions to help students deepen their sense of empathy and consider different experiences and perspectives. This exercise in perspective-taking encourages students to practice curiosity, nonjudgment, and empathy.

- What do you think a particular character is feeling right now?
- Why do you think the character feels that way?
- What about another character? Can you reflect on what they are going through?
- If you were one of these characters, what would you do differently?

SHOP THE FIRST BOOK CANADA MARKETPLACE

You can use any book you have in your classroom or program, but if you need suggestions, the First Book Canada Marketplace offers many books about empathy and compassion.

Visit the **Respect & Empathy** section of First Book Canada's Marketplace to find stories of kids and adults demonstrating appreciation for others.

Browse the **Kindness & Compassion** section to find examples of empathy in action. When people use empathy to spur action, that results in kindness.

See our ever-expanding selection of diverse books and resources in the **Diversity & Inclusion** section.

Enrich your classroom with diverse perspectives by incorporating books from our **Indigenous Voices Collection**, highlighting the importance of respecting and honouring all communities in Canada.

STEP 3

STOP. BREATHE. LISTEN. RESPOND.

While it's important to discuss empathy and books can spark reflection, students also need opportunities to *practice* conscious empathy. With practice, this mindset will become a natural part of their changemaker toolbox. This exercise teaches kids active listening and to pause before reacting, the key to emotional regulation and empathy. This is also a great strategy when dealing with conflicts between students. Take them aside and ask them to use this technique to listen to and consider the other person's side of the story.

1. Divide students into pairs.
2. Explain that being empathetic requires us to be present with someone and not be distracted or preoccupied. Attentive and empathic listening is possible when we:
   a. **Stop:** We stop what we're doing when a friend has something to say, and we don't text, doodle, or multitask.
   b. **Breathe:** We slow down, find a quiet place, and really concentrate on being present.
   c. **Listen:** We allow our friend to share whatever is on their mind and listen without interrupting. Try saying, "Tell me more..."
   d. **Respond:** After listening, we respond in a kind and compassionate way. Try asking, "How do you feel about what is going on?" or "What do you think you should do?"
3. Give each pair of students the opportunity to share and listen. They can share anything that's on their mind — what they did last weekend or an upcoming test, for example. After each pair has had the opportunity to share and listen, reflect as a class by discussing these questions:
   a. How did you feel doing this activity?
   b. Did you learn anything new about how to listen?
   c. How did it feel to have someone give you their undivided attention?
   d. Why do you think good listening skills and empathy are important qualities in a changemaker?

This exercise is adapted from Ashoka's Empathy Toolkit.

LEARN MORE!

For more information about how empathy relates to changemaking, explore **Time for Change Canada: An Introductory Guide for Educators**.