



# YALE NATIONAL INITIATIVE

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## Family of Empathy

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### Introduction

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I was raised in a single parent home. My mother did everything she could to ensure that my brother and I became successful. I did not grow up in the best neighborhood. I was told by some of my non-black teachers that I would never succeed, and that I would simply end up serving nuggets at McDonald's. I was basically told by those meant to encourage and mentor me, that I had a very bleak future with few choices and a small chance of accomplishing anything in life. I did manage to become successful despite these things. These experiences, however, led me to the idea of telling myself that if I could become a teacher, I would inspire kids like me to overcome the struggles and challenges that life places in their path. I did become a teacher, and now I have the unique opportunity to do just that. To inspire and show my students that they can be resilient and overcome any obstacles that life may bring their way.

One of my goals in life was to work in inner-city urban schools. I wanted to work in the same school district that I grew up in. I wanted to work in the same area that I grew up in. God has granted me this request. I now work in the exact school district and in the exact area where I grew up. This has meant so much to me because now I am inspiring children that go through the same obstacles and situations I went through and showing them, firsthand, that they can make it. I earnestly desire to prove to them that they will overcome any obstacle in their life. I had a beautiful single mother who pushed me to defy the odds. I knew that if I followed her example, I could teach my students that they can defy the odds as well.

### Rationale

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By teaching this unit, I hope to teach my students how to inspire and have empathy for others. My goal is for them to see that many cultures have different struggles and for them to know that they can still succeed. I want to provide them with the knowledge that there are other kids their age that are going through tough times as well and arm them with the tools necessary for them to learn and overcome. I do not want my students growing up bitter or with hatred in their hearts because of the curve balls that life has thrown them. I want them to see that they can overcome, show empathy, and have the ability and desire to be the change

that is needed in the world around them.

My students are African Americans and they experience a lot of tough things in life, and racism is something they experience on a daily basis, in this unit I want to open our eyes to how empathy can really help change the world around us all and that if we pause sometimes to examine our perspectives, thoughts, feelings, and ideas, try to see others perspectives through showing empathy, we can make more progress in these sorts of issues.

## The Unit

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This unit is really special because I want to emphasize how you can be resilient and have empathy for others despite the hardships in life. This unit will be taught through readings. I have picked a book that deals with students from different backgrounds that my students can relate to. They will learn about being resilient and having empathy for others through reading *Class Act* by Jerry Craft. This will help my students see how other students have overcome difficult situations. They will learn how, just like them, their fellow students all struggle in different ways. I feel like the unit is a necessity today as resilience is often an underestimated characteristic.

Many times, in education, we emphasize toughness and effort. We teach the students to work hard and do their best and to focus etc... When the reality is sometimes, they are being tough while their world is collapsing around them. A lot of times the toughness they have has to be directed into being resilient. I have students that struggle with reading, fifth graders reading on first grade level. Imagine, one of my student's houses burned down and their brother was shot in the same week. The student comes to school already sad and down, already struggling with reading, and the student already struggles with emotions. Imagine how much effort it takes for that student to get up and come to school every day with an attitude of learning. After losing everything in their home, after their brother getting shot and not knowing if he is going to make it out of the hospital. Still to have to come to school is an example of how I feel we underestimate resilience. Now imagine me teaching him to "tough it out" instead of teaching him that he can make it and that he can do it. Therefore, in this unit, I need to expose my students to learning about people who had to struggle and were able to overcome the obstacles in life. This will help restore hope in my students and will help them to see that despite what takes place in life, they can bounce back, and they can still succeed.

It is my hope that reading books like *Class Act* by Jerry Craft will help my students to see how resilient they are while encouraging them to keep steadfast hope in unfortunate situations. Resilience is multiplied exponentially by its most important factor, empathy. Empathy encourages community. This community then provides an important support system for students to get through stressful situations. Which in turn helps build a family environment in the classroom. An environment where my students are able to develop empathy for each other and are aware that when working together we can all make it through hardship. The pandemic is a good example of how people from many different cultures had to come together in hard times and really work together.

I desire for all my students to feel supported and important. I want them to understand that having empathy can help them see that other people are important as well. I want them to learn that even though they go through hardships they can make it. This unit would deal with topics such as understanding other cultures,

learning that no one culture is more important than another, and the comprehension that inclusion of all cultures creates a complete whole society. By realizing that one culture is not more important than another one, we can gain an understanding on how equality is very similar to how a family operates. This will show how we all have an important role and part in society.

In this unit, students will be able to learn about having empathy for people that are different from them, how they can care for others and how to set high ethical priorities. They can also see that their role is important. I want them to realize that every single one of them matters and that their part counts as much as their counterparts. This unit will be taught in English Language Arts (ELA) as it is a great topic for ELA. We will read the story *Class Act* and learn how to show empathy and embrace everyone's cultural differences, even amid conflict and difficulties. This research-based curriculum unit would involve not only learning and respecting different cultures, but also the grasp of how cultural differences make up society as a whole.

## What is Empathy?

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Empathy is a big word and can be explained in many different ways. The Minds Journal definition of empathy is "the ability to step into the shoes of another person aiming to understand their feelings and perspectives, and to use that understanding to guide our actions." We have to be willing to put ourselves in someone else's shoes. If we can see how another person is feeling and really understand other perspectives, we would be able to have more unity in life. In showing empathy, the most important part is taking the understanding that is gained from other people's perspectives and feelings and using it to guide us. The key purpose of empathy is to bring about a noticeable change. When we see things through another person's point of view, we do get sympathy, but when we allow that new vision to cause our view of life and actions to change, we have gained empathy. Far too often we just see and understand the problem, empathy allows us to take that understanding and use it to change how we act. Empathy takes that new understanding and uses it to promote changes in our response to different situations.

## Why Is Empathy Important?

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### Racism Affecting Children's Health

Racism plays a major role in child development. Seemingly having a huge impact on a child's social and emotional development. This impact starts in infants; some say it starts in the womb. Even so, I have heard it said that racism is something that is a learned behavior. Not one person, at the beginning of their life, when they first come out of the womb, knows about color, gender, race, religion, or any difference that can separate people. All of these ideas or concepts separating humanity into subdivisions are learned from parents, society, friends, coworkers, social media, television, teachers, doctors, personal experiences, etc. Just like in the classroom the only way racism or empathy can become a part of a person's personality or character is through repetition. For example, if a young boy is told repeatedly throughout his childhood that women are weak and inferior to men, it becomes a part of his paradigm, and how he views the world around him. The fact that this behavior is learned through repetition is what allows it to become such a strong belief. The way a

civilized society tries to counteract the negative teachings of racism and degrading ideas about our differences is by trying to teach empathy with the same or more rigorous repetition.

In mathematics positive 1 plus negative 1 equals zero. A negative is canceled out by a positive. If we run this fact parallel to the concept of racism and empathy, then it stands to reason that the more we teach empathy and understanding the more we will counter the ideas and concepts of racism that are infiltrating our society as early as adolescents. It is easier to affect change in the developing mind of a child than it is to attempt to change negativity in the fully developed mind of an adult. Children are a pure and blank canvas when they are born, and it seems that they are ready to experience life. If we could look at our children and teach them empathy from the start by showing empathy in our actions with repetition and positivity, I think we would be able to change the role racism has played and is playing in society. This, undoubtedly, begins with us. It starts with us examining our own heart, mind, motives, intentions, ideas, and understandings. We are the example and what children are looking at. If all they see is a world being split into categories of value because of your skin color, then shame on us, because our world should be more than the color of your skin.

I was a kindergarten teacher, and the concept of colors is one of the first things that I taught my students about. While teaching colors, I taught one color a day and the students had the chance to interact with that color for the whole day. By the end of the unit my students would have had full experiences with each color, and they would have had the chance to create beautiful images by using all the colors. I wonder if we took that same approach with racism, and we taught our children about the beauty and the importance of every skin color, gender, race, and class, how much further we would be. If we showed them how to experience the best in relationships and to really get to know other ethnicities, if we took the time to show them the beauty of a person beyond their skin color, just how I taught the beauty and importance of each color in the rainbow, children would be able to have full experiences with other people regardless of their racial makeup.

When I taught colors to kindergarteners, I noticed when it was my students' favorite color day. They really were engaged and so excited because I included their favorite color. I even created color raps for each color, and they all sang it and participated but they really loved the song that is about their favorite color. I loved seeing them smile, while watching their excitement rise about their favorite color. If we took that idea into society, consider how people would feel. They would feel so excited that everyone is embracing the color of their skin, and that people care about and show interest in it.

How would that make you feel, if someone was studying your culture and embracing it. It would make you feel so special, and it would make you feel that as a person you are important and that you matter to other people. Maybe it would even cause you to believe that people outside of your own culture also are important and matter. We have to have empathy and embrace everyone. We teach children that every color is important, which is a direct contrast because our actions through racism are showing them that certain colors are not important. It is showing them that white is better than black, yellow is better than orange, and purple is not as pretty as pink. It is so deep, how as adults, we are teaching our children to have this double standard. We tell them to look up at how beautiful the rainbow is and how the various colors and tints of colors are what make it look so beautiful, all while we lack to teach them how all the various tints of skin colors are beautiful and that if we each did our part it really could make the world a better place. Yet, children are growing up in fear, doubt, and hopelessness because the pretty painting they painted in kindergarten doesn't match the reality of what is happening in our world today. We have to make changes because racism is really affecting our children's health and social wellbeing and is affecting them in the classroom.

In this unit, I want to emphasize how empathy is important and how it is sorely needed in our society with our

children's lives at stake. We want strong healthy children, joyful children, and hopeful children. To get that we have to realize how much racism is killing our children from the inside out. The article, *The Impact of Racism on Child and Adolescent Health* by Maria Trent, Danielle G. Dooley and Jacqueline Dougé, is dedicated to addressing these issues and how racism plays a key role in the development of children. Racism has a huge impact on children that receive, commit, and observe it. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) conducted a workshop in 2016, to develop a task force with the AAP to address racism and other forms of discrimination that impact the health status and outcome of minority health. In reading this we realize that racism impacts our children at very early ages and is one of the major driving forces of health inequities. Racism has been linked to birth disparities and mental health problems in children and adolescents.

We discover that children raised in African American, Hispanic, and American Indian populations continue to face higher risks of parental unemployment and to reside in families with significantly lower household net wealth relative to white children in the United States, creating barriers between them and equal opportunities and services that optimize health and vocational outcomes. (1) Many people focus on the social effects in society however; there are many mental health issues that also arises from the problem of racism. Mental health is something that we need to take seriously because we have children committing suicide, and walking in depression, anxiety, fear, and frustration.

### **Students of Color in School Systems**

Another factor is how our jail cells are being built based on how third graders read, armed with the knowledge that minority groups struggle in academics compared to their white counterparts. We have more minority groups in the juvenile system than those of their white counterparts. In this article, we learn that the juvenile system is also detrimental to the social wellbeing of our children. (2) This is because racism is what is shaping our juvenile systems. Working in school systems, I have noticed that African American males are more likely to be in trouble, and to have harder consequences than just about anyone else. To fully examine this idea and concept it is important to look at where this idea has received its roots. In the very beginning when Indians and African Americans were introduced into American society, they were immediately dehumanized, and minimized to objects. In many cases they were bought, sold, or traded as cattle or land. The most interesting part of this is the cattle and land was viewed as more valuable than members of these civilizations.

Self-worth is the idea of how a person sees himself or herself. One can only imagine how being subjected to the process of being bought, sold, and traded as property, could affect what these human beings saw when they "looked in the mirror". Proud heritages were lost to disrespect. Strong family traditions were trampled on like dirt under the feet of American society. As much as these proud civilizations tried to maintain their dignity, American society corroded away at the very roots. While the constructs of society and its treatment of different people have improved, the gap and destructive nature developed during some parts of history, unfortunately, remain.

If two runners run the same race at the same pace, but one runner starts ten minutes behind the other, the second runner will never catch up. Even though conditions are starting to change in the right direction, issues of lack of empathy still exist. If runner 1 cannot see the situation runner 2 is in and runner 2 cannot see the situation that runner 1 is in, how can either one feel empathy or try to understand what the other is going through. This is comparative to how minorities feel just trying to interact in this society. On the other hand, many in this society, while seeing the disparities and differences, lack the answers to bring about change. According to this article African American, Hispanic, and American Indian youth continue to be disproportionately represented. Incarcerated youth experience solitary confinement and abuse that has

undermined socioemotional development and general developmental outcomes. (3)

Although institutions such as slavery were abolished more than a century ago, discriminatory policies, such as Jim Crow laws, were developed to legalize subjugation. Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander, Alaskan native, Asian American, and Latino American populations have experienced oppression and similar exclusions from society. (4) Some racial and/or ethnic groups have received reparations and fared better than others over time, all the while, remnants of these policies remain in place today and continue to oppress the advancement of people from historically aggrieved groups. The landmark US Supreme Court case *Brown v Board of Education* banned government sponsored segregation and laid a foundation for equal access to a quality public education. The US Department of Education continues to report institutional or structural inequality in educational access and outcomes. (5)

The disparity between the education system and children of color has been around since the beginning of the education system with children of color having always been at a disadvantage. Lack of access to quality education, lack of resources, lack of relevant subject matter and lack of materials continue to prove why minorities are still getting the shorthand of the stick when it comes to education. There are not many African American teachers in school systems. Student-teacher racial mismatch can impact academic performance, with studies showing that African American children are more likely to receive a worse assessment of their behavior when they have a non-Hispanic white teacher than when they have an African American teacher. (6) This finding may result from racial bias in teachers' expectations of their students. The disproportionate number of Black students who have faced disciplinary exclusions from U.S. public schools has been documented as far back as the early 1970s. (7)

Research has shown that students of color, particularly Black students, continue to be suspended and expelled from K-12 schools at rates much higher than their proportion within the population and for the same, or similar, behaviors demonstrated by their white peers. (8) Similarly, data demonstrates that white and other non-African American teachers are more likely than African American teachers to predict that African American students would not finish high school. With data indicating that teachers may underestimate the ability of African American and Latino students, which can lead to lower grade point averages and fewer years of schooling. (9) African American students who have 1 African American teacher in elementary school are more likely to graduate from high school and enroll in college than their peers who do not have an African American teacher; the proposed mechanism for this improved long-term educational outcome is the exposure to a role model early in the educational experience. (10) We are finding that these same large disparities are also occurring for Hispanic/Latino and American Indian students (Whitford & Levine-Donnerstein, 2014; Brown & DiTillio, 2013). This is critical when we view our school systems today and observe that there are not many African American teachers.

We need more minority teachers teaching for minority students to succeed. Children need to look for themselves in the curriculum and in the educational setting. Research has noted that educational achievement is an important predictor of long-term health and economic outcomes for children. Adults with a college degree live longer and have lower rates of chronic disease than those who did not graduate from college. (11) These findings indicate the importance of ensuring a diverse teacher workforce, particularly as the population of students in US schools continues to diversify. (12) Students who had a positive perception of school racial climates had higher academic achievement and fewer disciplinary issues. (13) It is paramount that we fix these things in order to really help change the trajectory of our children, molding them for a better America. It can teach them the importance of acknowledging that everyone is important, that we all matter and that we all can succeed. That realization can happen if we spread more empathy around. If we want to

start changing, we have to embrace each other with empathy and start seeing each other and building each other up.

## Where do we need to show empathy?

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### Teachers' Bias and Perception in Education

Most teachers are well intentioned, but their dispositional empathy or tendency to react to the observed experiences of those who are different from themselves is influenced by implicit social cognition or implicit attitudes; negative or positive involuntary actions, reactions, or thoughts; and feelings toward presented stimuli, based on past experiences with, or understanding of, the stimuli (Devine, Forscher, Austin, & Cox, 2012; Fiske, 2000; Greenwald & Banaji, 1995; Konrath, O'Brien, & Hsing, 2011). Implicit bias can contribute to discriminatory discipline. In other words, a person can be concerned about racism, but unless they understand their part in it, they remain unmotivated to focus on behaviors, and they might be exhibiting that perpetuate racism. Similarly, it may be difficult for a teacher to empathize with students if they do not understand who their students are or the experiences they bring to the academic setting. (14)

The common hindrance in teaching empathy to children is the educator themselves. Through voluntary and involuntary bias in the teacher personality, the example of empathy that teachers are supposed to be at times gets lost. Often times this lack of empathy and negative bias is involuntary. This is similar to when a person acts on what they learn without even knowing that they are doing something wrong. Learned behavior is something that usually must be dealt with on a personal level, but when it comes to educators there is no time to hesitate or delay. We have been dealing with the problem of racism and lack of empathy for far too long and as educators we no longer have an excuse. We tell students to look past your differences, your color, your religion, your gender, and to get along, but now for teachers this is not the time to just say it, but to do it, with educators participating one hundred percent.

Several researchers across multiple fields have theorized that school and university-based empathy programs are necessary to increase and maintain empathy for teachers in various educational settings. (15) I do think as an educator, we need professional development sessions aimed at empathy education, and empathy sessions or discussions should be a part of school culture. Along with eliminating the lack of empathy, teachers need to make sure their example is consistent. Educators have to make sure their actions speak louder than their words. Another issue in teaching empathy is that educators cannot let their perceived bias affect how they treat students of color. It is very important that students are treated fairly, not based on their color but based on their work ethic. It is impossible to eliminate all bias, but it is also essential that educators work hard to not let that bias enter the classroom. One thing students can pick up on right away is negativity, and they know if a teacher truly cares or if a teacher is pretending to care.

Research shows that lack of awareness and acknowledgment among teachers could also limit their concern for child and adolescent students' intentions. If teachers do not know or understand the disparities faced by their students of color at school and in their daily lives, they may be more likely to react to student behavior due to negative biases and less likely to understand and empathize with them, in turn leading them to react negatively and punish students of color for perceived behavioral infractions, simply based on who the teacher implicitly believes the student is, rather than what the student has actually done. (16) Sometimes the

misconception made about students causes them to be punished unequally. A lot of the time students of color are treated as troublemakers. They are not given the same opportunities as their counterparts. The disproportionate punishment of children of color many times leads to students believing that they are going to get in trouble anyway, so what would be the point of following the rules. There is an overwhelming need for teachers to be understanding of the background issues leading to undesired behavior before assuming that it is part of a person of color's character. Many times, these undesired consequences, like being kicked out of the classroom, can push students of color further down the line to more extreme behaviors.

Okonofau and Eberhardt (2015) conducted a simulation study in which they asked teachers to assign the severity, disruption, and irritation levels, in addition to disciplinary action necessary for multiple infractions by racially stereotypically named fictional students (e.g., Darnell or Deshawn for a black student and Greg or Jake for a white student) and found racial biases in teacher responses. Teachers were more concerned after the second infraction by a fictional student with a stereotypically black name than after the second infraction by a fictional student with a stereotypically white name. Teachers believed the black students' second infractions should be met with more severe discipline than the white students' second infractions. Furthermore, the more likely teachers were to assume the student was black, the more likely the behavior was perceived as an indicator of a pattern of misbehavior and a tendency to label the student as an agitator. Misperceptions, overreactions, and racial discrimination contribute to a chain reaction that pushes black males toward ever-increasing gaps in discipline and academic achievement, leading to limited access to college preparatory opportunities, and impacts on postsecondary access, future earning power, economic stability, and increased likelihood of incarceration (Aud, Fox, & KewalRamani, 2010; Butler et al., 2014; Fenning & Rose, 2007; Rocque & Paternoster, 2011). (17)

We need teachers to examine their motives, hearts, understanding, and thinking. We claim we want our students to succeed but in reality, we are the ones that are failing them. We need to train and learn more about empathy. We need to build practices into our classrooms that teach empathy and build a culture of empathy. Our assumptions and perspectives need to change.

Empathy takes hard work, long discussions, and a lot of understanding, but it is worth the fight if it saves at least one child. We must always remember that our children's lives are at stake. Not color, not gender, not religion, not race, but children who are growing up looking at us as the example. So, what example do we want to set, the example that we are all important and that we can be a family of empathy, or we can continue the example that we do not need each other, and we can create a family of hatred because of skin color. Just like the body has many parts and works together to keep a human being alive, healthy, and intact, we all need each other's part and need to work together to keep our world alive, healthy, and intact.

## How do we teach empathy in the classroom?

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### Teaching Empathy to our Students

In this unit, I will be using the book *Class Act* by Jerry Craft. This Graphic Novel has many scenarios that I believe my students will relate to. This book also has multicultural characters that must find ways to get along with each other, by looking past their differences and by embracing everyone's true self and where they come from. I think this is a good graphic novel to help show how to build empathy in my students and a good way to



ask the following focus questions: What is empathy? Why is it important to show empathy towards others? Are there times when students do not show empathy towards others? What would school be like if everyone showed empathy toward one another all the time? What is it like to walk in someone else's shoes? These questions will be some of the main points I want to discuss in this unit. It is important to teach empathy to our children now, that way they have a better future ahead of them. The ideas presented in *Class Act* show many ways of how empathy can be implemented in school. In Chapter 12, the Teacher gathers the students together to have discussions so the students can see that although they are different, they all have things in common. This example also shows them that they do not have to insult each other or be rude in order to get along, and to see things from each other's perspectives.

One of the examples in the book he uses is donuts to show diversity. The teacher bought different donuts and said all the donuts are different, but they all are sweet and delicious. In other words, we all are different, but we all have good in us, we all are important, and we all have one thing in common, we are all humans. I think that is something we need to teach our students. After the discussion the teacher had in the story, the students begin to bond and start to understand each other a little better. This is one of the lessons; I will be doing with my students. As we read through each chapter in *Class Act*, we will be stopping to have some discussions about each chapter. My students will be writing down their opinions and thoughts in a journal and then we will be discussing it with the class. In Chapters 1 and 2, one of the main characters, named Drew, is dealing with some uncomfortable things. Drew seems to be having several people come up to him and touch his hair. Touching Drew's hair was very wrong, although the students weren't trying to be rude, it was still very wrong. The discussion questions, I will ask my students are: How do you feel about someone touching your things, without permission? Have you ever had someone do something that made you feel disrespected, or uncomfortable, even though his or her motives were right? How does it make you feel if someone touched your hair without your permission? Why do you think Drew felt uncomfortable? In these chapters Drew also tells his grandma " I can't be myself at RAD. I gotta be more." What does Drew mean by this? How was Drew trying to be more than who he was? Have you ever felt that you could not be yourself at school, or at home? Have you ever felt pressure to be someone you are not? These are important questions to ask my students because they seem to want to please each other to fit it.

In chapters 3 and 4, we have Andy who thinks he is better than every one and tends to bully on other students. The questions I will ask are: Do you know anybody who thinks they are better than you? Have you ever treated anybody unfairly because you think that you are better than them? How do you feel about Andy's actions? Andy also wanted his friends to dress up as a super hero; he was categorizing his friends to match the superhero close to their skin color, or gender role. How do you feel when people categorized you based on how you look? Also based on where you are from? This past week have you categorized anybody? I think this is huge discussion piece because it will teach my students and show how categorizing people based on skin color, gender, race, or any other difference is a not great thing to do. Andy also in this chapter turned green, and could not wash the green die off of his skin. He goes to school and is embarrassed because of the color of his skin. Andy states in the book "It is not cool to tease someone because of the color of their skin." I will use this opportunity to discuss with my students the following: How do Drew and Jordan act towards Andy in this situation? How can Drew be more empathetic towards Andy? What lesson can Andy learn from this? If you were in Andy's shoes, how would you want someone to treat you? This is an important topic because Andy is constantly bullying Drew because of his skin color, but now the roles are reversed. This will be a good discussion on coming up with a list of ways on how to be empathetic towards people who have mistreated you.

In chapters 5 and 6, Drew gets picked to lead the sister school tour and Jordan did not get pick because he

was light skinned. This situation allows us to have the following discussions: How do you feel about being picked for things because of the color of your skin? Jordan seems to feel not important because he did not get picked. Are there times at school where you feel that you are not important or have been overlooked? Sometimes our students can misbehave because they do not feel important and this is a good way to learn how my students are feeling and how they feel about the color of their skin. Also, in these chapters, the students realize there is a huge difference between RAD and their sister school Cardi De Academy. They realized there are huge disparities between the schools that are well funded and the schools that not well funded. The questions I will ask are: What are your thoughts about the school? Compare and contrast the two schools. What surprised you about the schools? How do you feel about schools getting funded based on where they are located?

In chapters 7, and 8, Drew and Jordan spend time at Liam's house and realize how different Liam lives. Afterwards Drew seems to have stopped speaking to Liam due to his living situation. Although Liam seems to have a better living situation than Drew. These chapters will prompt us to have discussions based on these questions: How can Drew been more empathetic towards Liam? What are some of the struggles Liam is going through? Can you be friends with someone who lives differently than you? How can Jordan, Drew, and Liam embrace each other's differences? This will help me teach my students how to embrace their differences. We spend too much time on molding people to be alike, when being different is truly powerful and special.

In chapters 9 and 10, Drew seems to be struggling with who he is as a person. He is starting to think that nobody is being their true self. We will discuss how they can relate to Drew's feelings. As well as: Do you feel that you are being who you really are? Do you feel that people are accepting you just as you are? Are you accepting your friends for who they are? Why is acceptance important? This allows me to talk to my students about accepting themselves and everyone around them.

In chapters 11 and 12, their teacher, Mr. Roche, is trying to show empathy and is trying to make a change. In making a change, he does not always do it the right way. With this we will be able to discuss these questions: How do you feel about Mr. Roche's role in the story? Do you think that he is trying to learn from his mistakes? Can people learn from their mistakes? Do you think your teachers make mistakes? How can we show empathy to someone who is trying to understand, but keeps making mistakes? This is an important point because it will teach my students that there are people who are trying to change and that you have got to forgive them and try to see the change. Also, it opens up a discussion about teachers making mistakes. I think it is important for my students to know that as teachers, we make mistakes and that we can change as well.

In chapter 13, Drew and Jordan learn something about themselves and their friends. This discovery gives way to the following questions: What have you learned about by reading this story? Did you learn anything new about yourself? What did you learn about being empathetic towards others? At the end, we will discuss some of the things we learned, and how we can take what we learned and begin applying it so the world around us can change.

## Teaching Strategies

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The teaching strategies I will be focusing on are direct teaching, and classroom discussion by making predictions, questioning, making connections, and forming opinions.

Direct teaching: I will provide them with an introduction lesson on empathy before we read the story and discuss some real life people who showed empathy throughout history.

Classroom discussion: This will be the biggest component of the lessons. This involves having genuinely open classroom discussions throughout reading the story *Class Act*. The discussions will lead us to journaling, questioning, making connections, and sharing our opinions.

Predictions: Students will make predictions before, during, and after the readings. They will be able to write these predictions in their reading journal. Predictions is where the students will determine what they think will happen in the text using the title, the text, and the illustrations. The book *Class Act* has a lot of illustrations that the students can make predictions from.

Questions: Questioning is really important and I want them to get a deeper understanding of the text. I want them to stop and ask themselves questions to gain understanding and to really connect to the story.

Connections: I want them to make connections to the story and for them to think about what they already know about the text. I want them to find a way to relate to the text, and to relate that to the world around them.

Evaluate: I want them to think about the text and to form opinions and thoughts about what they have read.

Graphic organizers: This will help the students to organize their thoughts and it will help them compare and contrast the characters, and the settings in the story. They will also be able to compare their final thoughts to those that they had during the predictions stage.

Writing journal: It is important for the students to write in their journal, I think having an interactive notebook will help them see their thoughts clearly. It will help them organize their thoughts through graphic organizers in their notebook.

## Classroom Activities

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### Lesson 1

#### Donuts

In the book *Class Act*, the teacher buys donuts to start a discussion with his students about Empathy. What you would do is bring all kinds of donuts one morning for your class or put a picture of assorted donuts up on your board. You can even print out a picture of assorted donuts to hang around your classroom. Then you ask questions to your students about the donuts. What do you think these donuts represent? What do you notice

about these donuts? You want to lead them in the discussion by allowing them to see there are all types of donuts with all different flavors, but the one thing they all have in common is they all are donuts. You want your students to see they are all different and to gain an understanding of how to embrace those differences with the knowledge that it is okay to be different. You also want them to see that although we all are different we all are human. We all serve a purpose. In this lesson, you not only want to guide the discussion, but allow the students to really do most of the talking. Allow them to examine the donuts and to see what some of the donuts have in common. Ask questions for example: What do you think it would be like if you only had to eat one kind of donut? Would that be fair if we only had one flavor donut? What if someone felt chocolate was the best donut and decided to make a law banning all other flavor donuts, how would you feel?

## **Lesson 2**

### **Step in their shoes**

Teach “being in someone else’s shoes.” I would use different scenario cards to practice being in someone else shoes. This will encourage students to think about how they might feel. Then, have the students think about how someone else might feel. This is a very important component of empathy, because it shows how everyone doesn’t think and feel the same. It will teach the students how to be aware of others feelings. This is a skill that the students can practice.

## **Lesson 3**

### **What do you see?**

Use optical illusions to teach perspective. Optical illusions are a great way to teach perspective because they show students that they all think differently and that is okay! I will show different optical illusions and have the students write down what they see. Then, have them do a “think pair share”. The students will write it down, share it with a partner, and than discuss it with the class. This will help the students realize that they do not all see the same things the same way. This is a great lesson to have a classroom discussion on perspective and empathy.

## **Lesson 4**

### **Character study**

Reading lessons about the characters, using the graphic novel, will lead the students to think about their emotions and motives of the characters. They can discuss how they relate to the characters. Some questions to ask are: How do you think they feel right now? Why do you think they feel that way? What might they be thinking? How would you feel if you were in their shoes? What might they do next? Character traits are really important. The students will also be comparing and contrasting the character’s feelings and motives and home settings, by using graphic organizers.

## **Lesson 5**

### **Interactive Notebook**

This notebook will be used throughout the whole unit. The students will use this notebook to write down their opinions and feelings from our classroom discussions. They will be asked multiple questions through the chapter. Opinion writing is really important and this will be a great way for students to share their opinions

and feelings. This will also be a great lesson that will help the students reflect.

## Student reading list

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*Class Act* by Jerry Craft

## Resources

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## Appendix in Implementing Districts Standards

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### PA Common Core Standards

CC.1.4.3.G Write opinion pieces on familiar topics or texts.

The students will write in their interactive journal their different opinions and responses to the book *Class Act*. We will be going through each chapter answering questions; the students will be able to reflect on their opinions through various writing prompts.

### 3-5 standards

CC.1.3.3.C Describe characters in a story and explain how their actions contribute to the sequence of events.  
CC.1.3.4.C Describe in depth a character, setting, or event in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text. CC.1.3.5.C Compare and contrast two or more characters, settings, or events in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text.

The students will compare and contrast the characters in *Class Act*. They also will compare and contrast the settings in the story. Each character comes from a different home background. The students will compare and contrast the characters to gain more of an understanding on how to embrace people's differences, and go on to be empathetic towards others who look different, or live in different areas. The students will be describing the characters by doing a character study. This will help them gain an in-depth understanding of the character. The Character study would examine the character's struggles in all areas of his or her life. This would include home, school, family, and friend's struggles.

### PA Social Studies Standards

5.1 2.C Define fairness in working with others. The learner will: Discuss the importance of treating others fairly and Identify similarities between self and others.

I will be defining equity and equality to the students teaching them about having empathy. Giving them scenarios and having them read texts that help them see that we need to all be treated fairly. I will be modeling in the classroom the acceptance of diversity. I want the students to learn to accept themselves and accept others.

5.4 2.A Explain examples of conflict in the community, state, and nation. The learner will: • Research current conflicts. (e.g., community, state, nation), Participate in discussions on current conflicts , and state emotions relating to current conflict. (e .g ., fear, sad)

I will have the students read *Class Act*, it deals with real life conflict and we will be tying the book into the conflicts that are happening in the community, in the state, and all over our nation. I will encourage the students to share their emotions relating to the current conflicts. I will use questions to enhance and expand my students thinking about conflict and how to handle conflict in a respectful way. I will model a problem-solving dialogue throughout the day.

5.4 2.C Explain why nations need to work together for peace. The learner will, work cooperatively with peers to achieve a common goal, explain conflict resolution steps and the importance of practicing cooperation and resolution, explain the benefits of working together. (e .g ., less conflict, work done faster, build friendships), and brainstorm reasons nations should work together.

I will engage my students in morning meetings by having them discuss quotes about empathy and coming up with a plan that we can use to spread empathy throughout school, and how we can use it to spread empathy throughout our nation. I will be actively modeling and reinforcing conflict resolution with my students individually. Having a one on one talk with them about how to solve problems and how to develop coping skills to help in conflict. I will also show them how during the pandemic, we had many people come together in our nations to help each other and to support one another.

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