

Creating a Compassionate Curriculum



Theresa McGee

Integrating social-global learning into the art curriculum is critical to shaping an informed citizen and a twenty-first-century learner. Nurturing global citizens can start in the art classroom. The following resources can help you initiate social change through reflective student artwork at your school and in your community, or even touch the lives of others globally.

Start the Discussion with Empathy

The popular PBS Series Art:21 (www.pbs.org/art21) offers a glimpse of contemporary artists' methods and sources of inspiration. Most recently, Season 5: Compassion, featuring artists Carrie Mae Weems, William Kentridge, and Doris Salcedo, highlights how visual art addresses social change. Access the free educator guide and video clips on exploring compassion directly on the website. (*SchoolArts* will be focusing on many of the Art:21 artists this year.)

A personal favorite multimedia resource is the Pixar short "For the Birds" (www.pixar.com/shorts/ftb). This three-minute animation cleverly illustrates how the bullying actions of one can impact the behavior of an entire group. Download this video from iTunes and let your students find

parallel situations in their own lives. Ask students to remake the film's ending through illustrations of compassionate behavior.

Take Action with Compassion

Empower students to make a difference in the lives of others around the world. Teaching Tolerance (www.tolerance.org) has a great collection of classroom activities designed to help you build lessons on empathy and compassion. Another option is to collect money for a charitable organization. Something as small as a penny will help buy a pencil for a child in Pakistan and Afghanistan through Pennies for Peace (www.penniesforpeace.org).

There is no need to reinvent the wheel when other educators are already reaching out to local or global communities successfully. For example, Volunteer Villages, an organization to help flood victims (www.volunteervillages.org) modeled their compassionate effort after Haiti Houses, an artistic service project that benefits earthquake victims (www.haitihouses.org).

You can also take compassionate action through design. In contrast to negative propaganda seen throughout history, you can create a lesson that has students designing a logo for a just cause. Seek inspiration from the Design for Good blog (bigthink.com/blogs/design-for-good) or from The Change (www.thechangecreation.com), a company dedicated to sustainable practices. These resources emphasize the use of contemporary design to help improve the lives of others around the world.

Share the Compassion Online

Finally, the My Hero Project (myhero.com/myhero/go/gallery) lets you upload images of student artwork inspired by someone who gave back to humanity. Take a look at the "Hero Gallery," which exhibits work from artists and students of all ages. The artwork focuses on historical or contemporary figures who promote compassion and social change. 

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