

# Compassionate People Study – Compassion

## EXPLANATION:

*If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion.*  
~Dalai Lama

In history there are many people who have made a difference through their compassionate actions. Students will choose a person of consequence to research, highlighting how they embodied components of compassion.

**GRADE LEVELS:** 11–12

**STUDENT GROUPING:** Whole group discussion, research in pairs or small groups to facilitate discussion, small group presentations to class

**ACTIVITY LENGTH:** Dedicate a class period for research and a class period for presentations

## CASEL CORE COMPETENCY: *SOCIAL AWARENESS*

- Taking others' perspectives
- Demonstrating empathy and compassion
- Showing concern for the feelings of others
- You can learn more about the CASEL framework [here](#)

## SCOPE OF TASK:

Some notes about compassion:

- The definition of compassion, according to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, is the “sympathetic consciousness of others’ distress together with a desire to alleviate it.” (More definitions can also be explored.)
- The component of action is what separates compassion from empathy and sympathy.
- There are four key components to compassion:
  - i) An awareness of suffering (cognitive component)
  - ii) A sympathetic concern related to being emotionally moved by suffering (affective component)
  - iii) A wish to see the relief of that suffering (intentional component)
  - iv) A responsiveness or readiness to help relieve that suffering (motivational component)

1. Activate students’ prior knowledge about compassion. If students are unsure about the meaning of compassion, allow time to search dictionaries on the Internet for definitions. Pose questions, such as:

- What is compassion?
- Have you felt compassion?
- How did you act on your feelings—what did you do?
- Can you share any examples of others acting compassionately?

2. Share with the students some names of historic people who were considered compassionate. Ask students if they know these people and what they did:

- The 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama
- Mother Teresa
- Martin Luther King, Jr.
- St. Francis of Assisi
- Mahatma Gandhi
- There might be more contemporary people that the students can identify!

3. Share the objective of the activity with the students: working in small groups, students can choose (with the assistance of the teacher) someone in history that has been identified as engaging in compassionate acts.

The aim of the investigation is to discover the following information:

- Demographic information about the person—where and when they lived
- Why they have been recognized as compassionate
- Evidence of the four key components of compassion discussed above (awareness of suffering, sympathetic concern related to being emotionally moved by suffering, a wish to see the relief of that suffering, and an action to relieve suffering)



**If needed, before students engage in their research study, model an investigation with the whole group of students, utilizing web-based and print resources as available.**

4. Students will need to engage in developing questions; finding, sorting, and evaluating information; reading and analyzing; thinking creatively; collaborating; problem solving; and communicating their results.
5. At the completion of the research investigation, students can present their findings to the whole group, sharing details of the compassionate acts.
6. In reflection, question the students:
  - Why should we recognize acts of compassion?
  - How does the “everyday” person engage in compassion? Examples?
  - Do they have examples of compassionate acts that they have personally engaged in?

## RESOURCES:

- Computers with Internet access
- Relevant information texts