

Lesson Eleven — Coming Full Circle

Objective: Students will assess whether and how their opinions of other cultures and other species have changed as a result of participating in this series of lessons.

Materials Required

Circle of Compassion Worksheets filled out by students for Lesson One and collected and kept by the teacher

One new, blank Circle of Compassion Worksheet for each student

Materials from which to make simple masks: for example, colorful paper, glue, tape, scissors, colorful markers, bits of colorful yarn, string, and fabric

The Natural World chart, enough copies for each student to have one (to be provided by Hakol Chai or the teacher)

Activity One

Give each student one blank Circle of Compassion Worksheet and ask them to fill it in, listing those they care most about in the center circles, just as they did with the first Worksheet in Lesson One.

When they are finished, return to each student the Worksheet they completed for Lesson One, and ask them to compare the Worksheet they completed at the beginning of the lessons with the one they just finished. Do they see any difference between what they wrote on the first Worksheet and what they wrote on the second one? Invite them to share in class what the differences are.

Encourage them to stay open to new ideas about caring and compassion and who we can include in our circle of caring and compassion. Ask once again, as in Lesson One: If another being on the planet were more powerful than we are, would we want to be included in their circle of compassion? Would we want that being to understand that:

- We can feel pain and pleasure, even if we cannot express this to them with words because of language differences?
- We want to be in our familiar home, sharing our life with family and friends?
- We want the freedom to choose how we will spend our days, what we will eat, when we will sleep and eat, where we spend our days and nights?
- We want choices?

Questions for Discussion

(Hand out The Natural World chart, and give the students a few minutes to look at it before asking the following questions.)

- If we call a being "other" and put them outside our circle of compassion, how should we treat them? Is it OK to treat these "others" differently from those inside the circle? Do you think all living beings deserve to live freely (for example, birds deserve to be able to fly, fish deserve to be able to swim, primates deserve to be able to climb trees) and to have their needs met, or do you think humans have the right to abuse those we think of as strangers?
- We often care more about mammals than we care about other vertebrates, such as lizards, or invertebrates, such as insects, who appear quite different from us. Why do we see mammals as less "other" than these animals?
- Ask students to name everything they can think of that we have in common with non-mammals and everything they can think of that is different.

(Some ways humans and non-mammals are alike — must eat and most must drink, some like warmth, want to be free of pain and suffering, have relationships with others in their group and sometimes outside of their group, communicate with each other. Some ways we are different — look different, move differently, may react to temperature differently, some lay eggs instead of giving live birth like mammals.)

- Ask if those who look the most different from us are more difficult to feel compassion for. Is this also true of humans who look different or have a very different lifestyle from our own?
- If part of the reason we give for putting animals inside our circle of compassion is that they are intelligent or cute, for example, is it OK to keep less intelligent or less cute humans outside our circle of compassion, or cause harm to them?
- Can we do whatever we want to beings we consider "other" and place outside our circle of compassion? Why or why not?

Activity Two — Photo or Drawing Project

Ask students to draw or take photos of animals and nature where they live. The scenes they depict can be happy or sad, or they can take contrasting photos of similar situations. For example:

- A beautiful stream or a stream that is full of trash or that is polluted
- A happy, well-cared-for dog or a dog who lives his or her entire life on a chain
- A well-cared-for horse or donkey or a thin, not so well-cared-for horse or donkey
- Well-cared-for cats or cats and kittens searching for food around a trash can
- Birds migrating through the country with no water to drink or birds at a bird bath set out just for them

Ask them to write:

- A caption to go with each photo they took or drawing they made that describes what they saw
- A few sentences or a paragraph about what change they would like to see, such

- as "I would like to see a clean stream."
- What they think they, personally, could do to bring about that change, such as "I could be careful to put trash in a proper receptacle, instead of throwing it in the stream or on the ground where rain could wash it into the stream." Or "I could talk to my teacher about starting a project in school that would involve getting students to spend some time helping to clean up the stream."

Put the photos and drawings up on a bulletin board under the heading "Our Home" or "Our Neighborhood," and ask students to choose a project to change one thing about their home or neighborhood. Help them organize and start their project.

Activity Three — Wise Council of All Beings

Find a quiet place indoors or outdoors and explain the entire activity before beginning.

Invite students to sit or lie in a comfortable position. Ask them to close their eyes, and allow the image to come to their mind of an animal living in their community (perhaps an animal they photographed in Activity Two) or of an animal anywhere else in the world (bird, horse, donkey, cat, dog, porcupine, or any other animal), or of a non-animal part of nature (mountain, tree, or anything else). Tell them not to force themselves to think about a certain animal, but to just allow a being to visit them in their thoughts and see what comes naturally.

Ask students to feel themselves turning into or becoming the being that visited them in their imagination. Tell them to ask themselves the following questions:

- As this being, how do I feel?
- What is my life like?
- What are my days like? What are my nights like?
- How are my interactions with other beings? How do I interact with my environment? What do I want? What do I have to say?
- What would I like to tell humans?
- What wisdom do I have?

Remind them to listen inside for the answers. Give them time (up to five minutes) to really "become" their being.

Bring the art supplies into the center of the circle. Ask students to open their eyes but not say a word.

Ask them to SILENTLY make a mask to represent themselves as this being. The mask does not have to look like the being as long as it feels to the student that it is representative.

Some students will be tempted to spend a long time on their mask. Remind them that the mask is only a representation of the being and they will have a chance to speak for the being when they are a participant in the Wise Council of All Beings. Give them a five-minute and a one-minute warning before they must be finished.

When everyone is done making their mask, ask them to sit in a circle again and put on

their masks and become the being the mask represents. They are now members of the Wise Council of All Beings. Invite all the beings who have come together as members of the Council to share their wisdom with the other members. Ask each being to introduce themselves, one at a time, describe who they are, what their life is like, and how they spend their time. For example:

"I am Whale. I live with my family in the ocean. I love traveling many kilometers through the water each day, eating fish and playing in the waves. I love the freedom of the big ocean!"

or

"I am Tree. I love sunshine and water and the earth at my feet. In cold months, I do not grow a lot, but when the warm weather returns, I come alive and send out my leaves and flowers. In summer, many of us have fruit hanging from our limbs. I am home to many animals, including insects, and provide shade for all. I also take in what you cannot breathe (carbon dioxide) and give you back what you can breathe (oxygen)."

or

"I am Donkey. I love to run free and have the company of others. I am happiest when I can use my legs and my voice freely and protect those around me. When I can be with my whole family and we have food, water, shade and know we are safe, we are all happy."

After each being speaks, lead everyone in the circle in responding to the them: "We hear you [name of being]."

Ask all the beings to speak again, to explain to the Council what is happening to them now on this planet, what people have done to them, and what they would like to say to people. For example:

"I am Whale and our population is getting so small. The oceans are polluted and we are being killed by people who choose to eat us. It is no longer easy to survive. It is even hard for us to communicate with each other because humans make so much noise in the ocean."

or

"I am Tree. Many of us have been cut down for wasteful reasons. The topsoil we once held together with our roots, which are our feet, runs away with the rain into the waterways. When I am cut down to make grazing land or wasteful products, many animals lose their homes and the earth has less oxygen."

or

"I am donkey. I and many of my fellow donkeys are often left on the side of the road with our front ankles tied together so we can only walk a few feet. It is painful and frustrating to be left with no water, no grass or other food, and with our natural ability to take care of ourselves taken from us. Sometimes the person who has decided to be a caretaker for each of us does not take care of us. When we are left alone with our feet tied, we do not

know if or when the caretaker will come back for us. We feel vulnerable to danger, to being taken by anyone passing by. We are hot, bored, lonesome, and feel trapped when we are left this way."

Once again, lead the class in responding by saying "We hear you [name of being]."

Then ask the beings to speak once more, sharing the wisdom, knowledge, or gifts they have to offer, and what they can teach people who are willing to listen. For example:

"I am Whale. I know how to be big and strong and yet I am gentle and caring. I care for my family group and for my home. I hope humans will learn to be gentle and compassionate and take care of their Earth home that is also home to all that lives."

or

"I am Tree. I may seem so still, it appears that I am doing nothing, but even in the winter months, I am continuing to grow, to breathe, and to take in water and nutrients, just a bit more slowly. Sometimes doing things slowly and being still is important. I hope you humans will slow down and be still sometimes, to think before you cause harm to the planet that is my home and home to all the animals, including you."

or

"I am Donkey. I am one of the best of the animal caretakers. You could learn a lot about caretaking from me. I will risk my own life to save other donkeys, horses, sheep, and other companions. If I can do this, then surely you humans who have decided to be caretakers of animals can learn to give us and other species the basic care we need. If you decide to be our caretaker, please provide us with space to use our bodies fully — to run and walk without restraints — and please make sure we have shade, food, and water. Think about the needs of all those you have chosen to place under your care, and protect them as we protect others."

Again, lead the class in responding by saying "Thank you [name of being]."

After each being has spoken for the last time, ask students to remove their masks. Ask each one to make a promise to change one thing in their lives that harms the being they represented or other beings. Examples of promises might be:

- "I will recycle plastic bottles and never again throw trash in water."
- "I will not eat meat one day a week or one day a month."
- "Whenever possible, I will not buy or use anything that causes needless harm to the environment through the way in which it is produced or through its disposal."
- "I will not use plastic bags."
- "I will put out fresh water for the birds every day."
- "I will ask my local religious leader to speak to the owner of an animal I saw who I think is not being treated very well about improving the living situation of the animal."

Remind each student that promises are serious and no promise should be made that cannot be kept. A small promise kept is far better than a big promise broken.

The teacher then says:

"The promises made shall not be broken. Many thanks to the beings who have come together today to share their feelings, dreams, hopes, and wisdom."

The Council then ends.

Discuss with students their feelings about the Council activity and all the lessons.