

1

Sample Primary Lesson

Passing Along Kindness

The Critical Thinking Consortium

This chapter provides a detailed lesson plan¹ that illustrates how primary students can be engaged and systematically supported in thinking critically about the effects of their actions. The main focus of the lesson is a critical challenge where students must choose and perform an act of kindness towards someone in the classroom so the person feels good enough to “pass it on.”

The lesson is intended to help students experience the power of setting in motion a series of positive actions by being kind to someone who, in turn, is motivated to pass along a kind gesture to another person. The concept of a chain reaction of human kindness is introduced through the story *Because Brian Hugged his Mother*, by David L. Rice (1999). This story tells of a young boy who impulsively hugs his mom one morning and sparks a series of unselfish acts that extends to dozens of people. Students create a “chain of kindness” by role-playing and diagramming the kind acts described in the story. After developing criteria, students brainstorm a list of acts of kindness towards class members. Students individually select one act of kindness that they agree to carry out towards an assigned member of the class. Afterwards, students discuss how they have benefitted from giving and receiving their kind act and acknowledge each other’s thoughtfulness in a letter of appreciation. As an extension, students undertake an act of kindness in their family or community and look for indications that it may have had an effect on the recipient’s behaviour.

In the course of working through this task it is hoped that students will come to understand that treating others kindly creates positive feelings that may be passed on to others. In so doing, students will learn that both the doer and the receiver benefit from acts of kindness.

The premise of The Critical Thinking Consortium approach is that student success in any critical thinking task depends on their possession of the relevant “tools.”² Following are the key tools that students are taught in this lesson:

Background knowledge

- understanding of a chain of events
- knowledge of the effects of actions on people

Criteria for judgment

- criteria for an act of kindness (for example, makes someone feel good about themselves, is thoughtful, shows appreciation for the other person)

Thinking strategies

- web

Habits of mind

- empathy

Preplanning

ASSEMBLE OBJECTS FOR CHAIN REACTION

In Session One, we suggest introducing the concept of a chain reaction by creating a configuration of dominoes or other objects that will visually demonstrate the string of events that one action can put in motion. Gather a sufficient number of objects so that after your demonstration, pairs of students might each receive a handful of objects with which to create their own mini chain reaction. You may want to tie in this activity with a science lesson on cause and effect.

PREVIEW STORY

As a follow-up to the demonstration, we suggest introducing the idea of a human chain of events using the picture book *Because Brian Hugged his Mother*, by David L. Rice. Since the lesson is structured around this resource, you will need to adapt the activities if you use a different book to introduce this theme.

Session One

DEMONSTRATE CHAIN OF EVENTS

Arrange the collected dominoes or other objects in a series so that one action will cause all of them to topple or move in some way. Hold aside three or four objects and place these in a separate configuration so that they do not create a chain reaction. Begin by drawing students' attention to the display of the three or four "non-connected" objects. Invite students to speculate on the number of objects that you would have to tap in order to get every object to move. After everyone has offered a guess, tap the first object and then the next until all of the "non-connected" objects have fallen. Now draw students' attention to the display of "connected" objects and invite students to guess how many objects you would have to tap to get every one of these objects to move. After students have offered their opinions, tap the lead object and watch the chain reaction. Discuss the difference between the non-connected and connected configurations, drawing out that in the first demonstration one action had an effect on one object only, whereas in the second demonstration one action had twenty or thirty times that effect. Explain that "chain of events" is the term used to describe a situation in which one action causes a string or set of events.

DEVELOP OWN CHAIN REACTIONS

Divide students into pairs and distribute five or more objects to each pair. Direct students to arrange their objects so that one action will cause all of the objects to move. Subsequently, ask students to create a second configuration in which no action will cause more than one object to move. Circulate among the pairs to confirm that students can create both types of configurations.

INTRODUCE STORY

After allowing time for students to explore chain reactions using the physical objects, ask students to describe how they feel when someone does something nice for them (for example, they feel like someone cares about them). Discuss how making someone feel good might affect the way that person behaves (for example, the person may be more likely to smile or to share with others). Explain that the class is about to learn of the effects that a young boy had by doing something nice for his mother. Display the cover of the book, *Because Brian Hugged his Mother*. Ask students to suggest how Brian's mother might have felt when Brian hugged her. Invite students to imagine what she might have done differently because of Brian's action.

READ THE STORY

Start reading the story and pause to allow students to check their predictions about the mother's feelings and reactions. Invite students to listen as you read the rest of the story to learn of the events arising from Brian's hugging of his mother. As the story is completed, ask students to suggest why everyone did something for someone else (for example, kindness was passed on, people felt as if someone cared and they wanted to do the same for someone else). Inquire whether students notice any similarity between the events in the story and the effects on the objects they have just played with (one action causes another action, which causes yet another action, and so on).

ROLE-PLAY THE CHAIN OF EVENTS

Enlarge to ledger size (11" × 17") copies of Blackline Master 1.1, "Brian's Chain of Events." Cut out the individual strips indicating one of the twenty-three characters in the story and the kind act each performed. Arrange students in a large circle. Distribute the numbered strips in the order in which the characters appear in the story (Brian appears at the beginning and the end of the story). If your class has fewer than twenty-three students, assign students at the beginning of the circle to assume an additional role near the end of the chain. If your class has more than twenty-three students, either assign two students to play individual characters and share the task or expand the circle of kindness by inventing new characters and acts of kindness. Additional blank cards are provided for these additional characters and events at the bottom of the blackline master. For example, after receiving a hug from Brian, Mom made pancakes for Joanna and Brian. Students can imagine what might have happened to Mom after she sent the children off to school. Perhaps Mom came across a neighbour who was having trouble with his car and gave him a lift to work; as a result the neighbour may have helped a co-worker finish some urgent work. She may have handed in her work on time and made their boss so happy that the boss took the office staff to lunch, and so on. When everyone has been assigned a role(s), begin to reread the story. As the events are described in the story, students role-play their assigned character's action towards the next character in the chain. The class should end up full circle with Brian again hugging his mother.

DEBRIEF THE ROLE PLAY

Help students appreciate that as each person in the story did something kind for someone else, it was as if a chain of kindness was formed—each person was joined to someone else by an act of kindness. Explain that this chain of kindness shows how many people can be affected in some way by one gesture.

BLACKLINE MASTER 1.1 BRIAN'S CHAIN OF EVENTS

	PERSON	ACT OF KINDNESS
1	Brian	hugged his mother
2	Mother	made pancakes for the children
3	Joanna	complimented and helped the teacher get ready for school
4	Mr. Emerson	had the class make a banner for the principal's birthday
5	Ms. Sanchez	was patient with Lorreta
6	Lorreta	didn't embarrass Richard
7	Richard	praised Eddie
8	Eddie	gave his picture to the bus driver
9	Ms. Wong	let the truck driver get in front
10	Truck driver	helped the stock clerk
11	Stock clerk	gave Mrs. Johnson free dog food
12	Mrs. Johnson	let Jumbo watch his favourite video
13	Jumbo	didn't tease Tiffany
14	Tiffany	was friendly to Mrs. Gunderson

continued on next page

BLACKLINE MASTER 1.1 (CONT.) BRIAN'S CHAIN OF EVENTS

15	Mrs. Gunderson	praised the mechanic
16	Mechanic	thanked the mail carrier
17	Mail carrier	complimented the baker
18	Baker	made muffins for the dentist
19	Dentist	complimented the chef
20	Chef	made the police officer's favourite dish
21	Police officer	didn't give Brian's father a ticket
22	Brian's father	spent extra time with Brian and told him how much he was loved
23	Brian	hugged his mother again
24		
25		
26		
27		

Session Two

WEB CHAIN OF EVENTS

As a review of the previous day's lesson, invite the class to create a giant web of the chain of events in the story. In preparation, write the title "Chain of Kindness" on chart paper and attach it to the bulletin board along with one piece of coloured paper (the approximate size of an index card) for each student in the class. Arrange the pieces of coloured paper in a circle or other shape that eventually loops back onto itself, leaving space between the pieces of paper to indicate the actions between the characters. Direct students to locate the strip of paper (Blackline Master 1.1) they received in preparation for the role play. Instruct them to cut apart their assigned character from the action performed. In turn, invite students to attach their "character" card to the coloured paper and their "kind action" card in the space between the adjacent pieces of coloured paper. While doing this, each student is to explain to the class his or her part in the chain of events. Suggest that students use the following format:

I'm their assigned character. Because the previous character who was kind to them and the action performed to them, I decided to the kind act their character performed on the next character in the chain.

CONNECT THE FEELINGS

Explain to the class that you are going to reread the story

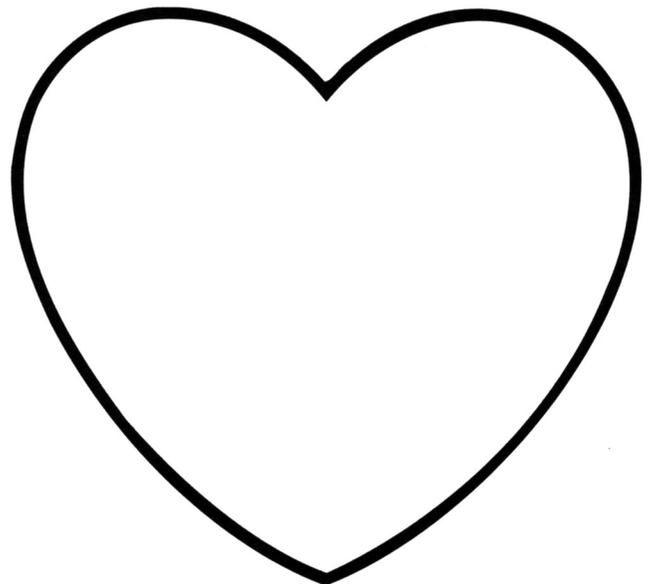
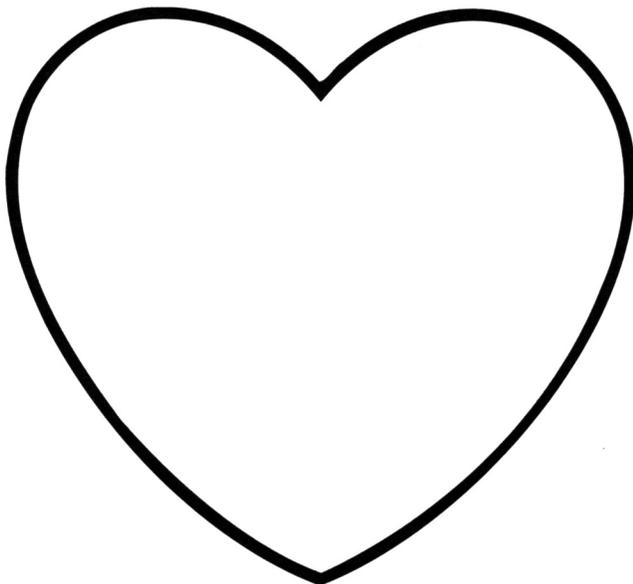
so students can focus on the characters' feelings when others acted kindly towards them. Make sufficient copies of the feeling bubbles (see example in Blackline Master 1.2) so that each student receives one bubble. Pause while rereading the story whenever a character's reactions are identified. Call on students to name or describe the feelings (for example, happy, positive, grateful). For each character, ask one student to write the feeling words inside the feeling bubble. After the story is completed, direct students to attach the bubbles just above the character's name on the Chain of Kindness board. As they post their bubbles, invite students to reconstruct the link, this time in terms of the feelings, not the events. Suggest that students use the following format:

I'm their assigned character. Because the previous character was feeling that character's feelings, he/she was kind to me, which made me feel the feelings their character experienced.

DEBRIEF CHAIN OF FEELINGS

Ask students to explain how the chain of positive feelings started (someone did an act of kindness for someone else). Point out to students that an act of kindness creates positive feelings and when people feel positive about themselves they are more likely to act positively towards others. Emphasize that even a very modest action, such as a hug, can turn out to make a big contribution because of all the people who "pass it on" by performing their own acts of kindness to others.

BLACKLINE MASTER 1.2 FEELING BUBBLES



BRAINSTORM POSSIBLE ACTIONS

Ask students if they would like to create their own chain of kindness in the classroom just as Brian did in his neighbourhood. If they agree, invite students to suggest ways that they might make students in the class feel good about themselves so they will want to “pass it on” to others in the class. Record all suggestions (for example, say something nice about the person, ask the person to play at recess, smile at others, say please and thank you with a smile, offer willingly to help if needed). Encourage students to keep their ideas simple. Title the list “Kind actions we might do.”

Session Three

DEVELOP CRITERIA

Ask students to consider how they might decide which of the many kind acts on the list would be the best choice. Remind students that when making decisions it is helpful to have guidelines for good choices. Ask students to suggest factors for deciding whether something would be a suitable act of kindness. Alternatively, suggest possible actions that would be obviously “inappropriate,” such as those mentioned below, and invite students to explain why these actions would be unsuitable:

- Offering candy to someone who does not like sweets (the action won’t make the person happy or feel good).
- Giving someone a big hug in a way that shows you don’t really mean it (the action is not sincere or honest).
- Agreeing to do everything the person wants for a year (the action is not easy to do; it is too difficult).

Record their explanations for rejecting these possibilities and other factors suggested by students as criteria for an act of kindness:

An act of kindness should...

- make someone else feel good;
- be honest, be something the person feels good about doing; and
- be simple to do; not be too difficult.

APPLY CRITERIA

Help students understand how to apply the criteria to possible acts of kindness by reviewing one or two incidents from Brian’s chain of events. Create a chart such as the one shown in Figure 1.1 and list a few actions from the Chain of Kindness display. Record the identified criteria along the top row. Ask students to indicate whether the identified acts of kindness meet each criterion. Place a “✓” or “✗” in the relevant column. Repeat the process with a few other possible acts of kindness that would not satisfy all the criteria.

ASSIGN RECIPIENTS

You will need to prepare beforehand the specific pairings of students who will give and receive each act of kindness so that an unbroken chain is produced. One method is simply to proceed down the class list, assigning students to carrying out their action on the next person on the class list. If you want to match particular students, be sure to pair each “recipient” with a person who has not already been designated as a “donor” (the final recipient in the chain must be the student who was the first donor). Make a copy of Acts of Kindness (Blackline Master 1.3) for each student. In preparation for distribution to students, record each donor’s name at the top of Blackline Master 1.3 where it says “Donor’s Name:” and record the name of the assigned recipient on the line “Planning an act of kindness for.” Before distributing the sheets,

FIGURE 1.1 KIND ACTIONS WE MIGHT DO

POSSIBLE ACTIONS	MAKES SOMEONE ELSE HAPPY	IS SOMETHING THE PERSON FEELS GOOD ABOUT DOING	IS SIMPLE TO DO
help the teacher get ready for school	✓	✓	✓
hug a parent or grandparent	✓	✓	✓
give someone your age all of your toys	✓	✗	✓
give an adult all of your toys	✗	✗	✗

encourage students not to reveal whose name they have been assigned since it will be more effective if the acts of kindness are a surprise.

SHORTLIST POSSIBLE ACTIONS

When every student has a classmate for whom they will plan an act of kindness, invite the class to refer to the previously developed list of “Kind actions we might do” and to think of other actions. Ask students to select three actions that would be suitable choices for their assigned person. Students are to draw or describe these actions in the boxes on the left-hand side of Blackline Master 1.3 and to place a “✓” or “✗” in the small box next to each identified criterion in the right-hand column. If a criterion is not met, students should explain why in the space below the small boxes.

PRESENT THE CRITICAL CHALLENGE

When everyone has identified three possible actions, introduce the critical task:

Choose and perform an act of kindness towards someone in the classroom so the person feels good enough to “pass it on.”

Invite students to consider which of their three choices would make the best act of kindness for their assigned person. Ask students to indicate the action they intend to carry out and to explain the reasons for this choice on the bottom of Blackline Master 1.3. Collect the completed sheets to ensure that none of the selected actions are inappropriate. Explain to students that the chain of events will take place on the next day.

Session Four

IMPLEMENT THE CHAIN OF EVENTS

On the assigned day, return to students their copy of Blackline Master 1.3. You will need to decide whether to organize the class in a large circle and conduct the chain of kindness acts in a single public session, or to ask students to carry out

BLACKLINE MASTER 1.3 ACTS OF KINDNESS

Donor's Name: _____	
Planning an act of kindness for _____	
POSSIBLE ACTIONS	CRITERIA
Choice #1 I could _____	<input type="checkbox"/> will make the person happy <input type="checkbox"/> is something I feel good about doing <input type="checkbox"/> is simple to do <input type="checkbox"/> _____
Choice #2 I could _____	<input type="checkbox"/> will make the person happy <input type="checkbox"/> is something I feel good about doing <input type="checkbox"/> is simple to do <input type="checkbox"/> _____
Choice #3 I could _____	<input type="checkbox"/> will make the person happy <input type="checkbox"/> is something I feel good about doing <input type="checkbox"/> is simple to do <input type="checkbox"/> _____
I choose _____ because _____	

their actions covertly over the course of the day. If the latter option is chosen, ask students to bring their copy of Blackline Master 1.3 back to you very soon after they have carried out their action. This will enable you to monitor the chain in case some students do not realize that it is their turn to implement their kind act. Start the chain of events by quietly asking one student to carry out the planned action. The student receiving this kind act will then carry out the kind act that he or she has planned for someone else. The chain continues until all students have performed and received an act of kindness.

WEB THE CHAIN OF EVENTS

Duplicate several copies of Class Chain of Events (Blackline Master 1.4) and cut apart the individual strips so that every student has one strip upon which to record the name of the recipient and the kind act they performed for that person. Remove the slips of paper and feeling bubbles that students previously attached to the Chain of Kindness display when creating Brian’s chain of events. Alter the number and configuration of pieces of coloured paper on the display so that there is one piece for each student in the class. Following the pattern used to recreate Brian’s chain of events, invite students

BLACKLINE MASTER 1.4 CLASS CHAIN OF EVENTS

1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		
8		
9		
10		
...		

in the order in which the kind acts were performed to attach their slips to the display, explaining their action using the following format:

Because the student who was kind to them and the action performed to them, I decided to the kind act they performed on the next student in the chain.

Session Five

CONNECT THE FEELINGS (OPTIONAL)

Revisit the Chain of Kindness board one final time so students can explore how they felt when others acted kindly towards them. Invite students to recall the kinds of positive feelings that characters in the story felt as a result of being treated kindly. Read to the class the feelings recorded on the characters' feeling bubbles. Now invite students to think of how they felt when their fellow students acted kindly towards them. Duplicate sufficient copies of the feeling bubbles found on Blackline Master 1.2 so that each student receives one bubble. Invite students to write the feeling words inside the bubble and to attach the bubble just above their name on the Chain of Kindness board. As they post their bubbles, students are to reconstruct the chain of feelings experienced. Suggest that students use the following format:

Because the previous student was feeling that student's feelings, he/she was kind to me, which made me feel the feelings the student experienced.

CREATE NOTES OF APPRECIATION

Suggest to students that giving a note of appreciation is an act of kindness that makes people feel positive about themselves. Using the Note of Appreciation (Blackline Master 1.5) to record their response, invite students to express their appreciation to the student who acted kindly towards them.

REFLECT ON INFLUENCE

Arrange for students to hand their notes of appreciation to the appropriate person. You may want students to read their notes aloud. Discuss how students feel when someone shows appreciation for their kindness. Also discuss students' feelings while performing their acts of kindness and seeing the recipient's pleasure. Invite students to comment on how the satisfaction of giving and of being acknowledged for acts of kindness may affect their future behaviour (for example, more acts of kindness, more consistent in thanking others, more signs of appreciation).

BLACKLINE MASTER 1.5 NOTE OF APPRECIATION

To _____

You are a very kind person because _____

It makes me feel _____

I am glad to pass it on by _____

Thank you from _____

DISCUSS “PASS IT ON”

Congratulate students on the difference they are making to their classroom community. Encourage them to continue to “pass it on.” Remind students of the ripple effect that individuals can have on their class and community.

Evaluation

Assess each student’s ability to identify and carry out an act of kindness using the rubric Assessing Acts of Kindness (Blackline Master 1.6). The sources of evidence and the two criteria for assessment are listed below:

- Use the responses to the checklist of criteria found on Acts of Kindness (Blackline Master 1.3) to assess each student’s ability to judge possible actions in light of the identified criteria for an act of kindness.
- Use the choice and the accompanying explanation recorded on Acts of Kindness (Blackline Master 1.3) to assess student’s ability to select a suitable action. Reaching the “basic understanding” level on the rubric may be appropriate for many primary students.

Extension

CREATE AN “APPRECIATION” BOARD

Invite students to contribute to a class or school “appreciation” board. Include pictures that show students and adults

being kind to each other. Attach notes of appreciation for actions such as the following:

- Thanks to the parents who made hot dogs for a fun day.
- Thanks to the custodian for keeping the school so clean and safe.
- Thanks to older buddies who helped in the class.

Invite other classes to contribute to the display.

CREATE A CLASS MAILBOX

Create a mailbox to collect student and teacher notes of appreciation for other members of the class. The mail might be delivered at the end of each day. Invite students to decide whether they prefer that the notes of appreciation be shared with the entire class or delivered to the person whose name is on the note. You may wish to model the procedure by placing a note in the mailbox each day. Monitor the notes of appreciation to ensure that no students are left out of the chain.

PASS IT ALONG AT HOME

Encourage students to extend the acts of kindness to people at home or in the neighbourhood. Invite students to look for evidence that people might be “passing it on” (for example, being nice to others, smiles more frequently, starts to say hello).

BLACKLINE MASTER 1.6 ASSESSING ACTS OF KINDNESS

	SOPHISTICATED UNDERSTANDING	EXTENDED UNDERSTANDING	BASIC UNDERSTANDING	PARTIAL RECOGNITION	PRE-RECOGNITION
Assesses possible actions in light of criteria	Correctly assesses even less obvious actions in light of identified criteria.	Correctly assesses a range of possible actions in light of identified criteria.	Correctly assesses very obvious actions in light of identified criteria.	Understands what is asked, but does not always correctly assess even very obvious actions in light of identified criteria.	Does not understand what it means to assess possible actions in light of identified criteria.
Selects a reasonable kind action	Selects a reasonable choice and explains in own words why it meets each of the criteria for an act of kindness.	Selects a reasonable choice and explains in very simple terms why it meets the criteria for an act of kindness.	Selects a reasonable choice without any explanation why it meets the criteria for an act of kindness.	Selects an action that does not meet the criteria for an act of kindness.	Unable to select one choice as the best act of kindness.

Thinking of the intended student audience and the curriculum, critique this lesson. Be sure to identify its positive traits and shortcomings. Discuss what you could do to improve, adapt, or extend this lesson.

ENDNOTES

- 1 This lesson is taken from *I Can Make a Difference*, ed. by M. Abbott, R. Case, and J. Nicol. 2003. Vancouver, BC: The Critical Thinking Consortium. Used by permission.
- 2 The tools referred to are explained in chapter 6 of the updated (2013) edition of *The Anthology of Social Studies: Issues and Strategies for Elementary Teachers*.

REFERENCES

Rice, D.L. 1999. *Because Brian Hugged his Mother*. Illus. K.D. Thompson. Nevada City, CA: Dawn Publications.