

The Torn Heart

This is a lesson in which participants empathize with someone who is being or feeling put-down, towards laying the groundwork for group agreements and commitments to “put-ups.”

What to Know

The ability to empathize with others is recognized as an emotional skill that is linked to more positive social interactions, academic achievement and career success. As children grow in their ability to name and recognize their own feelings, they can and should be encouraged to recognize the emotional experience of others.

As a regular practice, ask children to notice the body language and facial expressions of their peers in response to their own actions. This works for positive as well as negative interactions. For example, if a student gives a compliment to someone or does something nice, say, *“Look at Greta’s smile. How do you think she’s feeling? How does it feel to you to know that you helped make that happen?”* This practice helps children recognize their own power in being an “instrument of inspiration.”

Objectives

Participants will:

1. learn about empathy;
2. develop a common language around put-downs, put-ups, and thumbs-down, thumbs-up behavior;
3. become aware of actions that constitute put-downs and put-ups; and,
4. become more aware of how words and actions can hurt or heal.

Common Core Standard Alignment

- Anchor Standards for Literacy: Integration of Knowledge and Ideas
 - CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7 - Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.
- Anchor Standards for Writing: Production and Distribution of Writing
 - CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.4 - Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
 - CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.6 - Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with others.
- Anchor Standards for Writing: Range of Writing
 - CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.10 - Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.
- Anchor Standards for Speaking and Listening: Comprehension and Collaboration
 - CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.1 - Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.2 - Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.3-Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.
- Anchor Standards for Language: Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas
 - CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.4 - Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
 - CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.5-Make strategic use of digital media and visual displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of presentations.
- Anchor Standards for Language-Vocabulary Acquisition and Use
 - CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.L.5- Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.
 - CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.L.6-Acquire and use accurately a range of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when encountering an unknown term important to comprehension or expression.

Preparation and Materials

- A large paper heart (red paper is often used) with the words "I am important" written on it
- Tape
- A story about a child or young person who is put-down by parents, siblings, teachers, and/or peers. Sample story is included or one can be created.
- "Don't Laugh at Me" song – audio and/or video
- Computer/Internet Access
- Art materials: scissors, glue, markers, construction paper (optional: magazines for cutting)

Gather Together/Warm Up/Bell Ringer: Alliterative Attributes (10 minutes)

"Through the Don't Laugh at Me program, we'll be looking at how we treat each other as a classroom (or school) community and how we can make sure everyone feels safe, cared for, and welcome. Together we'll explore how to make sure everyone is respected in our classroom and no one is laughed at. And we'll be looking out for ways we can share our learning and caring with others in our school, our city, and our global community."

"Let's begin today with a fun activity that will get us in the right frame of mind for working and learning together."

Alliterative Attribute Game: The game will travel around the classroom and works best if children are seated in a circle. Have the first person say his or her first name and one attribute (explain what that is) that begins with the same letter. For example: *My name is Calli and I am COURAGEOUS.* The person next to "Calli" says, *"Her name is Calli and she is courageous."* Then that person says his or her own alliterative phrase. *"My name is Rocky*

and I am REAL!" The game proceeds around the circle, with each student repeating the Alliterative Attribute from the person beside him or her and sharing his or her own.

Main Activity: The Torn Heart (15 minutes)

Introduce the lesson:

"Today we are going to learn how the way we treat one another can affect the way we feel about ourselves. What do you think a "put-down" is? (Put-downs, either with words—name calling and teasing—or with actions, like excluding someone, make someone feel badly about themselves).

What are some examples of a put-down? (Do not record or write down any of the put-downs or those behaviors may be reinforced.)

Show the students the large paper heart you have made.

"I am going to read a story called The Torn Heart, about a boy named Jimmy. This heart represents Jimmy's heart. I'll need your help. Whenever you hear a put-down in the story, I want you to give me a "thumbs-down" sign. When you do that, we will see what happens to Jimmy's heart.

For each put-down, you will gently rip a piece off the heart and drop it to the ground.

IMPORTANT: Be mindful of the students who are highly empathetic or experiencing situations in which such put-downs might be common. Acknowledge for them that it is sad to see what is happening to Jimmy's heart. Remind them the story was written to teach people how to treat one another more kindly.

The Torn Heart

One Tuesday morning, when the alarm clock rang, Jimmy did not get out of bed. Ten minutes later, his mother opened the door to his room. "Come on," she said, "You'll be late for school again. You're a lazy kid." (rip)

"But Mama, I'm sick," Jimmy said.

"Why do you always act like a baby?" (rip) Jimmy's mother said, "You're always sick on PE day. Just get up and get ready. Your brother's already dressed. (rip)

Jimmy quickly put on his clothes and went to the kitchen to get something to eat. His older brother, Lucas, had just finished. "I'm leaving, Mama," Lucas said.

"You wait for Jimmy," their mother said.

"That loser (rip) is always late," Lucas said. "I don't want to miss the bus."

The boys made it to the bus just in time, with Jimmy following behind his older brother. As the doors of the bus closed and it started rolling, Jimmy remembered that he had left his homework in his bedroom.

Jimmy asked the bus driver if he would wait while he went back to get his homework, "What are you, kid, a moron? (rip) This isn't a taxi. Anyway, that's what you get for being late." (rip)

When Jimmy got to school he told his teacher that he had left his homework at home. She said, "That's the fourth time this month, Jimmy. Have you really been doing your work? I'm beginning to think you're lying. (rip) I'm afraid I'm going to have to talk to your parents about this."

Jimmy liked to play sports, but he did not like PE class, where he was the smallest of all the boys. That day in PE they were supposed to play basketball. The teachers asked the kids to divide themselves into two teams, the Lions and Tigers. Within a few minutes, there were ten boys in each team, with only Jimmy left. (rip)

The captain of the Lions team said: "We don't want him—he's no good." (rip)

"He's no Tiger. He's more like a scaredy cat," (rip) said the captain of the Tigers. And the other boys laughed. (rip)

Finally, the teacher assigned Jimmy to the Lions team, but he sat on the bench for the whole time because the captain never put him in the game. (rip)

That day after school, Jimmy's brother, Lucas, was playing soccer with his friends in the field near their house. Soccer was his favorite sport, so Jimmy asked Lucas if he could play, too. "No way, Lucas said. "You'd ruin the game." (rip)

Their mother heard this and said: "You should let your brother play with you, Lucas."

But Mama, he's too slow," (rip) Lucas said. "And he always in the way." (rip)

Integrated Arts Processing:

- ✓ *How do you think Jimmy is feeling right now?*
Have students create frozen body “sculptures” of how they imagine Jimmy is feeling. Use a put up to “un-freeze” each student and ask him or her to describe his or her “sculpture.”

Discuss:

- ✓ *Why is Jimmy feeling that way? What might be the effect on him of being treated this way day after day?*
- ✓ *What could his mother have said that might not have hurt his feelings? How could she encourage him to get up on time?*
- ✓ *Go over places in the story where the put-downs occur. "What could that person say instead that wouldn't be a put-down?"*

"If each person in the story tried to be more positive, we could put this heart back together. Let's try doing it with this tape."

Read the story again, but this time, have students offer some put-ups for Jimmy in the places where there are put-downs. Record the put-ups on your script as students offer them. Then attempt to tape the heart back together.

In pairs, ask students to discuss the following questions:

- ✓ *How do you think Jimmy is feeling now?*
- ✓ *“How did we do? It doesn't look the original heart. Why not?”*
- ✓ *Sometimes people say, “sticks and stones can break my bones, but names can never harm me.” Do you agree? Why or why not?*

Guide students in understanding that the story seems to show that words can be very harmful and are not easy to repair.

“How can we use this story to work on making our classroom a place where we try to notice put-downs and support each other in positive ways?” Record student ideas on chart paper.

Integrated Arts (5 Minutes)

Have two student volunteers act out the version of the Torn Heart with all of the put-ups. Ask: How might this version of the story, the version where Jimmy receives put-ups, affect his day? What do you imagine the rest of his day might be like?

Close Together: A New Chorus to “Don't Laugh at Me” (10 Minutes)

We've been singing the “Don't Laugh at Me” song, which—like the Torn Heart—reminds us that put-downs are painful. Let's try a version of the chorus that Peter Yarrow sometimes sings to help us think about how put-downs can be replaced with put-ups:

*Please smile with me, please be my friend.
Please accept me for who I am.
No one's out and no one's in.
Some day we'll all have perfect wings.
Don't Laugh at Me.*

Go around the group having each child say one kind thing they can commit to doing that day for someone they care about. Stress that it must be something that they know they can do that very day. Model the activity by beginning with a commitment to something you will do.

Grade Level Modifications

K-1

Change the “torn” heart to the “worn” heart. Instead of ripping pieces off during the story, crumple the heart for each put-down. When students offer put-ups for Jimmy, unfold the heart and try to smooth out the wrinkles. The heart will still demonstrate that hurtful words stay with us.

Amend some of the put-downs from the story to more age-appropriate language. (For example, change loser to *slowpoke*.)

Follow the instructions for grades 2-5 for the rest of the activity.

Grade 6-12

Use the story as provided in the 2-5 curriculum or enlist student volunteers to help rewrite a version of the Torn Heart story for your grade level. Be sure they do not use names of any students in your classroom or actual incidents that have happened to them. The torn heart is an effective tool because it is dramatic and exaggerated on purpose. It is not meant to be a real scenario. Here are some additional processing questions to use with secondary students:

What are some reasons people might use such put-downs? What do they gain from it? Are there other ways people might gain that very same thing without hurting someone else?

Adults

Do the activity as described. Debrief the activity additionally:

What are some reasons people might use such put-downs? What do they gain from it? Are there other ways people might gain that very same thing without hurting someone else?

How many of you have been hurt by put-downs at some point in your life?

Explain the rationale: *This activity gives young people a way to talk about what’s going on for them and helps form a common vocabulary for talking about ridicule. It can give teachers and parents a point of entry to hear what children are feeling and be a motivator for more caring behavior. Learning to stop using put-downs and start using put-ups takes practice both on the teacher’s part, as well as the children’s.*

Curricular Connections

K-1 Literacy” A good book to read aloud is [Stand in My Shoes: Kids Learning About Empathy](#) by Bob Sornson. Have students draw a picture and write or dictate about a time when they wanted someone to empathize with them.

K-5 Literacy: [Have You Filled A Bucket Today?](#) by Carol McCloud. This story provides a visual, similar to the torn heart, that teaches the effect of kind words and actions on other people. It encourages readers to be “bucket-fillers” by taking steps to make someone else’s

day. Have students write and draw in journals to share ways that they “filled” someone’s bucket.

K-5 Literacy and Arts: Have students draw pictures of themselves when they hear put-ups. Have them glue their picture inside a large red heart. Encourage students to write or dictate some put-ups they like to hear on this heart.

2-5 Literacy: Read [*The Hundred Dresses*](#) by Eleanor Estes. Have students write a letter to Wanda’s teacher letting her know how the other students have been treating Wanda and making suggestions for how to make it stop. Focus student’s ideas on what *they* would want their teacher to do in a similar situation.

K-12 Literacy, Art and Technology: Have students work in small groups to create a “Put-Up” [Word Cloud](#) using technology or art supplies. Show these word clouds as a gathering or closing for any activity to remind students of the power of positive words.

6-12 Media Literacy: Have young people explore issues of gender stereotyping and the role of the media by brainstorming a list of put-downs related to gender stereotyping and explore where they learned these things. Then have students think of the things they love to do and how it would feel not to be able to do them or to be ridiculed because they do them. What ways could your school become more inclusive to all young people and their unique ways of expressing themselves?

6-12 Media Literacy/Math: Young people can look at song lyrics and TV shows for incidences of put-downs to answer the question: “How pervasive are put downs in our culture?” How many examples of put-ups can they find? This could be turned into a math activity charting and comparing percentages of incidences found across several sources by aggregating each student’s research.

6-12 History: Students can analyze speeches of major historical figures on both sides of a conflict to understand the use and power of put-ups versus putdowns in scapegoating groups, enemies and allies.

6-12 Writing: Have students write poetry or their own song lyrics that express their feelings about put-downs and encouraging put-ups.