Promoting Empathy in Schools: A Toolkit for 9/11 (High School, College)
A Message from the Co-founders of 9/11 Day

9/11 Day is very proud to partner with Ashoka to bring you an expanded offering of free lesson plans and resources to help teach children about the period of goodness, empathy and unity that arose in the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 attacks.

In the days that followed the 9/11 attacks on America, people of all ages and from all walks of life found themselves united by an extraordinary spirit of empathy and resilience. Many Americans no longer cared about the kinds of “differences” that often separate us as people, at least for a while, and instead came to realize how much we all have in common. This truly special moment of empathy and togetherness helped to reassure, comfort, and inspire an entire nation at a time of great sorrow and darkness. For many who lived through the horror of 9/11, that moment of hope has become a life-changing reminder that we are stronger as a nation when we work together.

Although this uplifting story is a vitally important lesson for future generations, it is difficult for many of today’s children to understand and internalize because most either weren’t born until after 9/11, or weren’t old enough to remember the heartbreak or the subsequent period of togetherness that changed our nation’s psyche.

Therefore it’s up to educators, mentors, parents and grandparents to teach them about this “other side” of 9/11. The side of goodness. The way people came together. The way empathy changed how we saw and cared for each other.

For more resources to help you spread this message of love and hope in the face of adversity, visit our website at 911day.org.

With your help and expertise as an educator, children will learn valuable, heartfelt, and constructive lessons about the 9/11 experience: the way tragedy impacts us, and how people across the nation experienced a collective sense of empathy that banded us together in response to the attacks.

Thank you again for your support. For more information, please contact us at info@911day.org.

Sincerely,

David Paine and Jay Winuk
Co-founders, 9/11 Day

For more information please visit us online: www.ashoka.org
Getting Started:

1. Visit 911day.org and preview all of the materials we have available.

2. Watch our “Born on 9/11” video featuring Hillary, a child who was born on September 11, 2001.

3. Plan a good deed or service project with your class.

4. Take photos and short videos of your project in action.

5. Visit 911day.org/FieldTripEntry and enter your project for a chance to win $200 for your next class field trip. You will be asked to provide a short description of your project and upload one of your photos or videos. Be assured that we do not publish the photos or videos publicly anywhere. They are used only to document completion of the good deed. Deadline to start your project is September 30, and you need to enter by October 15.

For more information please visit us online: www.ashoka.org.
Why Good Deeds on 9/11?

September 11 has become a day of remembrance and a day of service.

Through our deeds and charitable service activities, we honor in a constructive way the victims of the 2001 terrorist attacks, help to rekindle a spirit of unity in America, and pay tribute to the many who rose in service in response to the attacks – our firefighters and EMTs, public safety officers, rescue and recovery workers, volunteers, and also our men and women in the armed forces.

Individuals and schools can participate in any fashion they want – any good deed counts. So this can include almost any project or activity that involves helping others in need. Even young children can think of things they can do like making their bed, helping a friend with homework, or cleaning up the house. Parents can participate as well by purchasing supplies for the classrooms, volunteering as a teacher’s aide, or reading a book to a child.

September 11 will always be, first and foremost, a day when we remember those lost and injured in the 2001 terrorist attacks, and pay tribute to the many who rose in service in response to the attacks – our firefighters and EMTs, public safety officers, rescue and recovery workers, volunteers, and also our men and women in the armed forces. But 9/11 has also evolved over the years to become the nation’s largest day of charitable service.

People often ask why 9/11 Day is also about promoting unity and putting aside differences. Anyone who was alive when 9/11 happened knows the answer: The 9/11 attacks brought America together in a way not seen since World War II. In a moment, whatever differences may have existed between people throughout the country were instantly dissolved and rendered trivial compared to what we all had in common – our fundamental compassion, empathy and concern for the well-being of others. We became a nation of people bonded together by the universal human spirit of goodness that lives in virtually all of us. For a brief period of time, we had the rare opportunity to view each other as neighbors, not as strangers, and we experienced briefly what our society might be like if we worked more closely together to solve our problems.

It was a remarkable and important moment that we hope to preserve in perpetuity in tribute to the 9/11 victims and others, expressed in this way:

*On the anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, as a way to pay tribute to, and remember the victims and others we wish to honor, we put aside whatever differences we may have at the moment, and work together to help others in need. That is the annual ritual, a fitting and appropriate tribute to the many who lost their lives and the countless others who were injured or came to the aid or defense of those in need.*

The goal of the 9/11 Day program is to teach greater empathy and unity, and thus inspire students to perform good deeds personally or as a group as part of a lesson plan about 9/11.

If you need help, email us at info@911day.org.
Introduction on Ashoka Changemaker Schools and Empathy

Ashoka is a global organization built on the vision of an “Everyone a Changemaker” world—one in which all people are equipped with the skills and societal support to address any social problem and self identify as a driver of change. To realize this vision, Ashoka’s programs are designed to create one united ecosystem of changemaking that is built upon meaningful partnerships and collaboration. Ashoka seeks to forge the ties and create the platforms needed to achieve large-scale social change by bringing together social innovators; schools; universities; and private, philanthropic, and citizen sector players in the United States and the world, until one day, everyone is a changemaker.

Ashoka’s Start Empathy Initiative is working to expand and leverage Ashoka’s network of social entrepreneurs (Fellows) and other changemakers to transform how society understands success in growing up and to drive a movement to prioritize empathy and other changemaker skills for all children. As part of this vision, Ashoka is working with a group of schools, the Changemaker Schools Network; a global community of leading elementary, middle and high schools that prioritize empathy, teamwork, leadership, problem-solving and changemaking as student outcomes.

Through innovations in curricula, culture and systems these schools are leading a transformation in education that supports children as changemakers – individuals with the skill set and connection to purpose that enable them to generate ideas and take initiative to effectively solve problems and drive positive change.

Why Empathy?
Empathy is the little-known giant. It is hardwired into our brain and when harnessed, plays a crucial role in innovation, changemaking, and solving systemic problems. The textbook definition of empathy is “the ability to understand what someone is feeling,” but when put into practice, empathy means so much more: it means being able to grasp the many sides of today’s complex problems and the capacity to collaborate with others to solve them; it means being as good at listening to the ideas of others as articulating your own; it means being able to lead a team one day, and participate as a team member the next. Cognitive empathy expands our social imagination beyond our own direct experience. It is what gives us the will and the tools to be effective changemakers.

Below is a small selection of activities that educators in the Ashoka Changemaker Schools community use in their classrooms to build a culture of empathy, respect and kindness.

If you need help, email us at info@911day.org.
To Power-Up, Slow down

Seven Minute Reboot

Why:
This activity is easy to do with one student or with an entire class as an introduction to relaxation and mindfulness practices. This technique has been used with students suffering from anxiety, exhaustion, and other emotional states that have interfered with them being able to stay in class. The Seven Minute Reboot can also grow self-awareness of personal emotional states which is necessary in order to move on to work on empathy and the identification of what others are feeling. There is tremendous power in the “pause”-- this is a way to disengage from an intense situation or emotion before anything can escalate. If young people can embrace a pause, and understand it as an alternative to reactionary behaviors, we can all move on to reflection and empathy.

How:

Step 1: Arrange floor mats on the floor in a circle. If space is an issue, arrange mats far enough apart that each student can be on the floor with arms spread to the side at 45 degrees). The teacher also sits on the floor. Students should sit on mats for introduction to activity.

Step 2: Explain to student(s) that they will be participating in a short 7 minutes of deep relaxation. Students can sometimes have a hard time relaxing and closing their eyes in a group setting. Reassure the class that you will watch over them and keep the space safe. Explain the benefits of activity to the student(s) and that this is something they can use in their daily lives to center themselves, relieve stress, anxiety, etc.

Step 3: Model the position on the floor: lay down on mat, legs slightly apart, facing up to ceiling, arms 45 degrees from body, palms down.

Step 4: Instruct students to lay down on the floor. Once settled, begin the exercise.

Step 5: Signal the end of 7 minutes counting slowly and in a soft voice from 10-1 or by using a soft bell or singing bowl.

Step 6: Instruct students sit up slowly after the activity. After about 30 seconds, do a check-in with students and have them talk about how they feel.

Materials:
• Floor mats (yoga mats preferred)
• Floorspace large enough to accommodate the class
• Soft bell

Source:
Changemaker High School, Tucson, AZ
A Caring Community

Circle of Kindness

Why:
“I usually run this with about 20 students at a time, and I have been blown away to the point of tears at the results. Many of my young people hear very few kind words from others, nor are they used to using them themselves. Daily life can be harsh and there is a lot of defensive and angry language that is used.” – Linda Cato, Changemaker High School

Tips:
This is usually conducted with about 20 students at a time.

How:
Step 1: Ask the students to sit in a circle.

Step 2: Give every student a sheet of paper and ask each student to make a list down the left side of the paper with everyone’s name on it (excluding their own).

Step 3: Ask everyone to write a kind, understanding, and reflective sentence about each student on the right side of the paper. Some students have open conflict with each other, some have never spoken with each other, but we can easily find good things to think and say about everyone. Please note that complimenting someone’s looks or clothing does not count.

Step 4: Remind the students not to write their own names on their list. Collect the lists from the students.

Step 5: Read all of the lists out to the class. Each student has just received 20 affirming messages about themselves.

Step 6: Ask for a group reflection. Some of the students who usually struggle emotionally the most in class are the ones to participate in this exercise with the most enthusiasm. These students will be happy for the chance to be a loving person and are usually blown away by what others say about them.

Step 7: Type up a list for each student of all the things everyone said about them so they can re-read them whenever they might need to.
What Would a Changemaker Do?

Rats To The Rescue

Why:
In this activity, students will practice their critical thinking skills, empathy, teamwork, and leadership.

How:
Step 1: Share the following Problem Statement with your students:
The last fifty-years has seen many wars break out in Africa, Asia, Europe, Central and South America, and the Middle East. These wars resulted in planting millions of landmines that continue to claim thousands of lives. Approximately 55 million landmines in over 84 countries cause between 10,000 and 20,000 deaths each year. Everyday about 40 to 50 people are killed or maimed by a landmine and every year 40,000 new landmines are being planted in conflict areas. Currently about 1.3 million acres of land around the world are mine infested. Farming in these areas have been brought to a halt, and the millions of people who previously occupied the areas are currently refugees. Landmines have also slowed down delivery of health services, humanitarian aid and road construction. The most used demining method is manual clearance (or humans). Expert deminers use metal detectors to detect and remove landmines. However, the method is too slow because in African soils, which contain high levels of iron, false indications are too common. A human deminer will only scan about 50 meters a day. Besides these few technologies, the field has not seen a lot of innovation of more cost-effective and scalable demining methods to match the demand. With the current techniques, it will take five hundred years to clear the world of all landmines.

Step 2: Ask the following question:
What would you do? What creative solutions can you come up with to improve upon landmine detection and deactivation processes? What would a changemaker do? How could you systematically change the way landmines are demined?
What Would a Changemaker Do?

Rats To The Rescue

How (continued):

**Step 3:** Put students in small groups and ask them to brainstorm solutions together for fifteen minutes. No solution is too far fetched.

**Step 4:** Bring students back together and ask each group to share the solutions they brainstormed with the entire class.

**Step 5:** After each solution is shared, share the short video (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UE94Sxp6mY8)

**Step 6:** Share the following Solution Summary:

Bart’s cheaper, quicker, more scalable, yet efficient technology relies on the high sense of the African Giant Pouched rat’s nose. Bart forms teams of three trained human deminers and one trained rat to detect mines. Relying on local populations to form the human group, the technology not only provides jobs for a poor community, it also reduces the risk of death and to a certain extent the costs of demining. Current demining techniques have failed to keep up with the demand for more cost-effective and scalable demining services in Africa, largely because they are expert-based and expensive. In comparison to mine detection dogs, rats are much cheaper—total costs including staff salaries range from $3,000 to $5,000 to train a rat for mine detection. Compared to manual demining, a rat scans an average of 100 meters in half an hour, twice the area covered by an expert deminer in a day. The rats are trained to differentiate between the smell of explosives and other smells by rewarding them every time the correct sample is identified. Demining work is conducted in teams of human trainers, their rats, and scientists. The rats who pass the training become official HeroRATS, which is the basis of a creative marketing and fundraising campaign for the project.
The Circle of Life
Rock, Paper, Scissors

How:
Step 1: Pair students up and tell students to play “Rock, Paper, Scissors” for a few minutes.

Step 2: Tell students the following:
You are going to play the game a little differently now, but in order to play you need to understand some things about “composting.” Here are the basics of composting. Instead of throwing your organic waste in the landfill, you can compost them and turn them into something valuable. Look at The Cycle of Composting. To compost, you mix together the right amounts of plant materials and food scraps with air and water to make a material called “compost” that you can add to the soil. Compost adds nutrients to soil so organic food can grow faster, stronger, and healthier without fertilizer. Now you are going to play “Composting Rock, Paper Scissors.”

Step 3: Read the following directions:
Start in pairs. Everyone starts out as organic matter. You will now play Composting Rock, Paper, Scissors. If you win, you move on to the next level (compost). You can only play with someone who is at your level (organic matter can’t play against compost or soil, etc.).
· If you are organic matter and you win you become compost; if you lose you stay as organic matter.
· If you are compost and you win you become soil; if you lose you become organic matter. If you are soil and you win you become organic food; if you lose you become compost. The first person to become organic food wins the game.

Step 4: Observe pairs as play the first round. Pause the game after the first round.

Step 5: Read the following directions:
· If you lost the first round, our job is now to root for your classmate that you lost to as they play the next opponent. Everyone should either be playing or rooting for their classmate. Now let’s play another round.
How (continued):

Step 6: Continue observing the game and make sure that every student is either rooting for their classmate or competing. After the final round, bring students together for reflection. Ask some of these questions:

- How did it feel to root for your classmate?
- How did it feel to have your classmates rooting for you when you competed?
- What is the cycle of compost?
- How does compost become soil (air, green, brown, and water)?
- How does soil become organic matter?

Step 7: Tell your students to create their own game that teaches a concept they are passionate about while giving every student the opportunity to feel the emotions they identified when playing Compost Rock, Paper, Scissors. Encourage them to use these guiding questions:

- What did you like about Compost Rock, Paper, Scissors?
- Were the instructions clear?
- How would you improve it?
- What issue will your game focus on?
- What solution will you present?
- What do you want people to take as a result of playing your game?
- What ages group(s) will be playing your game?
- What game will you adapt yours from (or will you make up a new game?)
Source: Changemaker High School, Tucson, AZ

Materials:
• Paper
• Pens or pencils
• Snacks

Step 1: Students will respond to the following questions by free writing their responses on a sheet of paper. This write-up will prepare them to share out loud with the rest of the class during the second part of the lesson.

   · What did you see this week? (in the classroom, on campus, and/or in your community) (example: I saw students learning about climate change in our earth science class.)
   · What did you learn this week? (in the classroom, on campus, and/or in your community) (example: In my earth science class, I learned that climate change is impacting people and the planet.)
   · What will you do with what you learned this week? (example: Climate change is impacting everyone. I will have a conversation with my family and neighbors about climate change and listen to their perspectives.)
   · Recognize one person in the room for practicing an act of kindness during the week. (example: I would like to give a shout out to Brandon for giving me a ride home this week.)

Why:
This activity allows students to share their lived experiences that occurred during the week with their peers and instructor.

Tips:
The Instructor is encouraged to also reflect on their practice and model the free writing and sharing out loud.

Step 2: Gather the class in a circle.

Step 3: Encourage a student to read their reflection first. If no one volunteers, the instructor should model. Tell students that questions and comments will not be encouraged until everyone in the circle has shared their end of the week reflection.

Step 4: Because the heart is on the left side of the body, the student to the left of the first speaker will read their reflection next.

Step 5: Give each student enough time to read their reflection.

Step 6: Allow for questions, clarifications, or comments.

Step 7: Encourage empathy by ending with additional “shout outs” for acts of kindness that may have occurred during the week.
Making Peace
Peace Table

Why:
This allows children to learn how to solve conflicts peacefully on their own through calm, respectful communication.

Materials:
• Small table
• Quiet space
• Peace symbol

Tips:
Teachers can mediate conflicts at the peace table if necessary, but the children should come up with the solution themselves.

How:
Step 1: Place a small table and two children in a quiet part of your classroom.

Step 2: Choose a calming peace symbol (like a stone) and put it on the table.

Step 3: Model for students how to use the peace table: After becoming upset with a classmate, a student can invite the classmate to the peace table. The person who is upset takes the peace symbol and uses an “I feel” statements to explain how he feels when the classmate does a particular action. The student then passes the peace object to the other student, and they pass it back and forth as they take turns speaking. The two can then agree on a solution.
A Peaceful Agreement

Navajo Peacemaking Process

Why:
This allows children to learn how to solve conflicts using the ancient Navajo peacemaking process.

Materials:
Quiet, safe space

Tips:
Here is documentary that 7th and 8th grade students at STAR School created to explain the peacemaking process so that others can use it. The explanation and demonstration of the peacemaking process starts at 13:00 and goes through minute 20:00, and the explanation and demonstration of playground peacemaking starts at 20:33 and goes through 22:45. We recommend watching the whole documentary to better understand STAR School and the holistic nature of peacemaking and community at this school.

How:

Step 1: Take a moment to be quiet, reflect and meditate to ask for spiritual assistance.

Step 2: Use an understanding of relationships to establish shared connection. Talk about the many ways you are related to each other as classmates and people.

Step 3: Outlining the rules of interaction where everyone has the opportunity to speak without blame, discredit or punishment.

Step 4: Define the problem by asking each person to tell their side of the story while the others listen.

Step 5: Restoration/correcting the problem by guiding the negotiation toward agreement. Remind each person how they are ultimately connected. Encourage them to step into each other’s shoes so they can imagine and feel how their own words and actions affected the other. Each side should reach the point where they understand and take responsibility for their actions and offer an authentic apology.

Step 6: Once each party has apologized, clarify the settlement so that each person understands the conditions they are agreeing to and their responsibility moving forward.

Step 7: Ending with thanks and a moment of gratitude for the transformation that peace brings to individuals and communities.
Special thanks to the Ashoka Changemaker Schools, Oscar Medina, Linda Cato, Sammy Lyon, Mark Sorensen.