

THE EMPATHY GAP

(Want to create a calm and focused space to start the conversation? Set up desks or chairs in a circle and start the session with 2 minutes of collective silence.)

ACADEMIC OBJECTIVES

Calculating Perimeter
Calculating Area & Angles
Critical Reasoning/Thinking

1 Ask an EMPATHY QUESTION: "Do we understand everyone around us? Do we have assumptions about their lives? Do we know what it is like to step into their shoes?"

Share an experience that YOU have had where empathy was lacking - a time when there was a misunderstanding of who you were or who someone else was. Ask the group if they have ever experienced something like this. "How could we have better understood each other in that situation?"

The group might respond with "we can't know everything about others" or "it starts by asking questions". Guide the conversation towards actionable steps. Remind everyone that, like anything, empathy building is about practice. "Today we can focus on how these actions can exist in our own lives with the people around us. What can I do more effectively next time I'm in that situation?"

2 CHECK ASSUMPTIONS: Watch the beginning of "I Am Sajid" (<http://www.betterworlded.org/#how-this-works-1>). As the video reaches 0:56 (when Sajid pulls out his phone) PAUSE the video. Have the group write down the core ideas that come to mind until now – assumptions and beliefs they have about Sajid.

Pose the questions: "What do we believe about Sajid so far? What do we think of his community? What do you think his life is like, beyond what we've seen in this video? What might we assume about who he is and what he does?" Make a T-chart and take notes. Fill answers in under "Assumptions" on one side.

3 GROWING PAST OUR ASSUMPTIONS: Play the remainder of Sajid's video. Have the group split into groups of 4-6 people. Ask that everyone discusses and takes notes on what changed about their assumptions. (Note: this activity can help us all discover and share ways we can further practice empathy.)

Remind everyone some of the principles of the activity. "As groups discuss, we're striving to practice empathy. As we do, it matters that we give each other respect as we speak. We need not make fun of each other's thoughts; this can be a space to trust one another and be vulnerable. If we're striving to empathize with Sajid, it might help to empathize with one another too."

After 6-8 minutes, have the group come back together. Ask if there are any volunteers willing to share learning that came from their discussions. Ask the group if anyone would like to share some of the assumptions that were broken when learning more about Sajid. If nobody is ready to speak, share some of the assumptions that were broken when you watched the video.

4 Pose a COLLABORATION CHALLENGE: "How does our ability to empathize affect our lives? How does our impression of Sajid compare to our assumptions about others in society? Are these assumptions everywhere, or just with Sajid? How can WE work on building empathy together?"

Share an example of how you will incorporate empathy into your life starting today (maybe of a new person you will learn about who you see often but don't understand). Share an experience, or refer to a previous one, about when you didn't show empathy, and then share how you will improve on that in the future - and how the group can hold you accountable to doing so. Now ask that other people in the room do the same exercise by writing one or two ways they will *live empathy*.

KEEP LEARNING AT HOME: Reflect and write on today's learning for ideas on how to incorporate empathy into the daily practice of our classroom, of our various classes, and in our entire lives. How can we better identify when empathy is lacking and help the people around us grow to be more empathetic people? How can we exhibit this value in everything we do?

DIRECT ACTION IDEA (Creating direct ways to embed empathy into other classes at school):

Groups of 4-5, half of the class, or the entire class can develop lesson ideas for teachers in other classes to show how empathy relates to math, science, history, language, and more. The groups can each develop ways to help teachers see how they can teach about stories that really matter while also continuing to teach their topics. And then students can share those resources with Better World Ed to share with teachers throughout the network. After all, if we don't have every classroom bringing empathy into the classroom, how will we create the world we dream of?