

Understanding

Syllables

un•der•stand•ing

Pronunciation

uhn-der-**stan**-ding

Definition

An empathetic or tolerant recognition of another's situation.

(An understanding person is patient and kind.)

Simply put: I've been where you are!

Related Terms

Sympathetic: To have shared feelings.

Compassionate: Feeling sympathy with a desire to help.

Fundamental Question:

Is it necessary to be understanding in order to encourage and celebrate differences in people?

Students will investigate the idea that people who possess a true understanding of each other (that is, realize that others have beliefs and desires that are probably different from theirs) are likely more open to accepting each other.

Objectives

Each student will:

1. Examine the idea that shared or similar experiences enhance understanding between people; and
2. Awareness, through listening and observation, are key to understanding.

Before you begin

- Gather four or five pairs of shoes that look like they have a story to tell, e.g., flip flops, an extremely worn pair of old lace-up men's shoes, a new pair of athletic shoes, orthopedic shoes, and high heels with one heel broken off;
- Write a different emotion on each of 12 to 15 index cards or slips of paper;
- Gather a 30-second timer or a watch/clock with a sweep hand;
- Prepare a list of brief discussion topics (such as pets, favorite holidays, summer fun, and fears);
- Print out a copy of *It's About Time* for each student.

Suggested Sidebars:

Speaking of Understanding (Discussion Idea)

Discuss: What does it mean when someone says, "I've been in your shoes"? Tell about a time when "being in someone else's shoe" and imagining how that person felt helped you become more understanding about his or her situation.

Taking It to the Next Level

Try this experiment to find out how well have your children tuned in to each other in the past. Do they recognize that people have different interests and preferences? Can they list the favorite ice cream flavor of someone else in your room? Can they tell you what some of the other children in the class do for fun? Taking a moment to think about another child shows caring and understanding.

Understanding

Procedure

Awareness is a key to understanding. By teaching students to be more conscious of other people's feelings, we can develop a more accepting and respectful community.

1. Divide the class into pairs. Have one student in each pair speak about a teacher-provided topic (e.g., pets, favorite holidays, summer fun, fears, etc.) for 30 seconds while the other student listens. The second student must then restate what the first student said. Can the second student restate the first speaker's main point? Does the first speaker agree? If so, the students switch roles and play the game again.
2. To be understanding, we must be aware of others' feelings and to see situations from different points of view. Are things always what they seem?

With the children sitting on the floor in a semi-circle, place several pairs of shoes on the floor at the circle's opening. Have one child select a pair of shoes, a second child draw an emotion card, and a third child synthesize the two by putting on (or holding up) the shoes and making up a brief story showing an understanding of the information (s)he has been given. For example, if the shoes are an extremely worn pair of old lace-up men's shoes and the emotion is despair, the story might be about a one-time lawyer who now finds himself living as a person who is homeless. On the other hand, the same shoes paired with elation might be about someone who has just completed a cross-country trek in effort to raise awareness for a cause.

3. **Follow Up:** Explain to the children what a time capsule is. Then, distribute the *It's About Time* sheets to the children.

Name _____

Reminder: Understanding is an empathetic or tolerant recognition of another's situation.

It's About Time

Suppose you wanted to put together a time capsule that would allow students 100 years from now to get a true understanding of the life of a kid living in our world today. What are ten of the most important items you would include and why?

1. _____

because _____

2. _____

because _____

3. _____

because _____

4. _____

because _____

5. _____

because _____

6. _____

because _____

7. _____

because _____

8. _____

because _____

9. _____

because _____

10. _____

because _____

Today's Thought: *All truths are easy to understand once they are discovered; the point is to discover them.* – **Galileo Galilei, Astronomer/Philosopher**