

Lesson Plan: Kindness

Grade level: 4th

Subject: Social Emotional Learning (SEL)

Duration: 60 minutes

Montana Whole Child Competencies:

- **MTSEL.3-5.3.b** Recognize the need for empathy, compassion, and a concern for others
- **MTSEL.3-5.4.h** Express gratitude to promote genuine and sustained relationships

Objectives:

By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

- Recognize situations where someone needs empathy or compassion and explain why noticing others' feelings matter.
- Express genuine gratitude toward a classmate or family member in a way that strengthens their relationship.

Materials:

- Videos of Yayoi Kusama
- Compass (or tracing a circle template)
- Colored pencils/crayons
- Post-it or poster papers

Lesson Outline:

1. Initial Engagement: (5 minutes)

- Open the lesson with either a short class discussion or a think-pair-share activity: *"Share a time someone was kind to you recently."*
- After 5 minutes of discussion, briefly ask students: *"What do you feel after sharing those moments of kindness?"* Further encourage students to notice how sharing stories of kindness can grow positive feelings in the room.

2. Explicit Instruction: (5 minutes)

- Briefly explain: *"Today we will explore kindness and gratitude through the artwork of Japanese contemporary artist Yayoi Kusama. Her signature motif is small polka dots and repetition. We will learn how small actions and thoughts can grow into something"*

powerful when they are repeated and shared, just like Kusama's use of patterns and super fun polka dots."

3. Guided Practice: (15 minutes)

- Show a video of Yayoi's work: [HERE](#)
- Watch the reading video of 'From Here to Infinity' by Sarah Suzuki, focusing on how Yayoi moved from Japan to the US and successfully promoted her art works: [Online Read](#)
- **Discussion Prompt:**
Ask students: *"Imagine seeing the world differently than everyone around you, and having people not understand you. What do you think that would feel like?"* Highlight two key scenes to pause to reflect:
 - **Scene 1: Childhood hallucinations (age 10):**
When Yayoi was young, she began seeing the world in ways others didn't, patterns and dots covering everything around her. Ask: *"How do you think it felt to see something no one else could see? Would you want to tell people, or would you be afraid they wouldn't believe you?"*
 - **Scene 2: Moving from Japan to New York, alone:**
As a young woman, Yayoi moved across the world by herself, without much support from family or community. Ask: *"How do you think she felt being somewhere new, without people who understood her? What would compassion toward her have looked like in that moment?"*
- Draw two columns on the whiteboard: write "Feelings" in the first column and "Kindness" in the second column. Guide students to collaboratively share their perspectives using these expressions: *"If I were in their situation, I would feel ____."* and *"A kind thing I could do or say to a friend who has that feeling is ____."*

4. Independent Application: (15 mins)

Clearly explain the instruction to students and provide an example of artwork if necessary:

- **Draw your circles.** *"Using a compass (or tracing a circle template), draw 3–4 circles of different sizes on your page."* (This is a great chance to reinforce compass skills and math vocabulary like radius and diameter if teacher chooses to integrate this with math.)
- *"Fill in each circle with one sentence. In every circle, write either one thing you are grateful for or one kind action you can take toward someone else."*
- *"Make sure your page includes **at least one of each type**"* (i.e.: one gratitude circle and one kindness circle).
- *"Decorate each circle Kusama-style. Surround the outside edge of each circle with colorful polka dots."* (Bingo dot markers work great for this!)
- *"Fill the page with lots of small dots of positive thinking."*

5. Collaborative Activity: (15 minutes)

- Students choose one "gratitude dot" to share with a partner or small group.
- They explain why they chose it and how it connects to kindness.
- Have students write a short sentence or sticky note next to their artwork explaining one kind action they plan to do this week.

- Create a class display/ bulletin board called “Our Wall of Kindness & Gratitude” using all the artwork.
- Invite another class, staff members, or families to visit and view the display.

6. Closing: (5 minutes)

To close the lesson, students reflect:

- What was something kind or grateful you heard from someone else today?
- How does it feel when we share kindness and gratitude together?
- How can one small “dot” of kindness make a difference in our school community?

The lesson ends by reinforcing that, just like Kusama’s artwork, our classroom becomes more meaningful when everyone adds their own small but powerful contributions of kindness and gratitude. Even one small dot!