



UNIVERSITY of
DENVER

GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK
Institute for Human-Animal Connection



Cool to be Kind Middle and High School

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Subjects:

Humane/Moral Education; Comprehensive Health

Grades:

7-12 (middle and high school)

Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- Think about how current society values certain traits in people
- Determine traits we would like to see in people
- Come up with and advocate ways to enhance these traits in our society
- Establish ways they would like to see animals treated in their community

Common Core Standards:

- **7th Grade**
 - **Comprehensive Health:** Demonstrate effective communication skills to express feelings appropriately
 - **Reading, Writing, and Communicating:** Oral Expression and Listening: Small and large group discussions rely on active listening and the effective contributions of all participants
 - **Visual Arts:** Invent and Discover to Create: Use of various media, materials, and tools to express specific meaning in works of art
- **8th Grade**
 - **Comprehensive Health:** Emotional and Social Wellness: Internal and external factors influence mental and emotional health
- **9th Grade**
 - **Comprehensive Health:** Emotional and Social Wellness: Advocate to improve or maintain positive mental and emotional health for self and others
 - **Reading, Writing, and Communicating:** Oral Expression and Listening: Listening critically to comprehend a speaker's message requires mental and physical strategies to direct and maintain attention

- **Visual Arts:** Invent and Discover to Create: Make judgments from visual messages
- **10th Grade**
 - **Reading, Writing, and Communicating:** Oral Expression and Listening: Effectively operating in small and large groups to accomplish a goal requires active listening
 - **Visual Arts:** Invent and Discover to Create: Make judgments from visual messages
- **11th Grade**
 - **Visual Arts:** Invent and Discover to Create: Make judgments from visual messages
- **12th Grade**
 - **Reading, Writing, and Communicating:** Oral Expression and Listening: Effective collaborative groups accomplish goals
 - **Visual Arts:** Invent and Discover to Create: Make judgments from visual messages

Goals:

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

- Take responsibility for their own critical thinking towards ways in which being a caring citizen can be “cool”
- Understand how empathy and compassion are “cool” characteristics
- Identify the reasons that empathy and compassion are cool, and essential to our happiness and health, and for thriving communities

Time Needed:

30-45 minutes

Materials:

Butcher paper or flip chart paper; writing paper; pencils; markers; Show Your Soft Side posters; pictures of Show Your Soft Side celebrities without an animal present in photograph.

Background Information:

This lesson helps students become more aware of their individual beliefs on what makes someone “cool”, versus what makes someone “uncool.” Often, students define “coolness” based on what media and popularity displays. These may be internal and external characteristics, but do not always explore the way in which a person behaves. Students will understand their own individual attitudes and beliefs toward “coolness” and where these beliefs come from through these discussions. Students will have the opportunity to discuss in groups, and as a class, the various internal and external traits that often define “coolness” in U.S. society today. Students will then be challenged to discuss “coolness” based on how a person behaves, and in further relation to characteristics like empathy and compassion toward other people and toward other animals. Students will be presented with pictures of celebrities who are known for their sports ability and other factors that current society often deems as “cool” or admirable. Students will then be able to present

the factors they believe make these celebrities “cool”. Once students have done this, they will be presented with posters of the same celebrities they have viewed, but this time, the photos will show the celebrities with their companion animals along with stories about how they care for their companions. Students will then be asked if these celebrities are still “cool”, now knowing how they are kind to animals. The class will then be able to write individual paragraphs on who they think is “cool” and why, with a focus on how the person behaves that makes them “cool”.

Paragraph about animal cruelty statistics in the U.S. - include information on how kindness to other animals often inspires more compassion toward other humans.

Activity:

Students will evaluate what they think makes a person “cool” and what they think makes a person “uncool”. After group discussions on what these terms mean and the traits that fall under the categories, students will observe pictures of people that many in society think are “cool” and then later, these same people being kind to animals. After this, students will have the opportunity to write a paragraph about who they think is “cool” and why.

Procedures:

1. **(5 minutes)** Begin the lesson by asking the class what they think it means to be “cool”. What is the definition of this word? What do they think makes a person cool? What does "cool" look like? What does it sound like? Is it the way a person looks, or the way they dress? Or is it internal, the thoughts these people have and then place out into the world, or is it the way they act? Once students have briefly begun to describe what they and current society thinks is cool, divide the class into groups of 3-5 (depending on class size) and give each group a butcher/flip chart paper. The butcher/flip chart paper should have two categories labeled “cool” and “uncool”. This should last no longer than 5 minutes.
2. **(5 minutes)** Once groups have their papers, instruct the groups to come up with a list of traits that define “cool”, and make sure to include personality traits (e.g., independence, strength of character, being a good friend, along with external traits as well). Each group should list these traits on the “cool” section of the paper. Allow 5 minutes for groups to write what is “cool”.
3. **(5 minutes)** Next, ask students if there are characteristics that they think are “uncool”? What are the internal and external characteristics that make someone “uncool”? Follow the same procedure and allow for groups to have 5 minutes to list as many “uncool” traits as they can think under the “uncool” category on their papers.
4. **(5 minutes)** Next, present pictures of the Show Your Soft Side celebrities, but a simple picture in their team jersey that does not show the celebrity with an animal. Have the students add onto the list what is “cool” about the celebrity based on the picture.
5. **(5 minutes)** Bring the class together to discuss the similarities and differences that groups presented on “cool” verses “uncool”. Now, ask more specific questions about “uncool”, such as: Is it “cool” to cry? Is it “cool” to be kind? Is it “cool” to

- litter? Is it “cool” to have a kitten/puppy? Can a person still be “cool” if they are nice and caring? What if a big, tough, muscular looking man has a kitten that he loves - is that “cool”? Why or why not? Allow for critical thinking and challenges on what defines “cool”, and more importantly, who defines what is “cool”. Who defines “cool” – yourself, media, magazines, and/or peers? Allow class discussion for 5 minutes.
6. **(5-10 minutes)** Next, display the Show Your Soft Side posters. Discuss how these media images of celebrities, many of which are viewed as muscular and tough, are showing kindness to animals in the photographs. Discuss how the posters are the celebrities with their companion animals, and how these celebrities have come forward to talk about how much they care about the animals in the photographs. Are these people still “cool”? Are they “cool” in a different way than how you viewed them before? How?
 7. **(5 minutes)** As a closing activity, allow students to write a paragraph on a piece of paper about who they think is the coolest person they know and why. Have students focus on how that person acts, rather than how they look. If time permits, allow students to share their examples with the class.

Evaluation:

Students will be evaluated based on their participation in the discussion and lesson. Through questions that inspire critical thinking, the instructor can collect notes on students’ responses.

Student Handouts:

Show Your Soft Side posters - one per student.