

Empathy Obstacle Course

In this project, students engage in a variety of activities made more difficult than usual because they are somehow disadvantaged. Students move through an empathy obstacle course, first, at full ability and, second, with imposed limitations. Students are timed on both experiences and there is an opportunity at the end of the project to discuss their experiences and the difference between being able to move through the course without limitations and with limitations.

Caring Sub-Concept(s)

Compassion, Empathy, Kindness

Project Timeframe

25-30 minutes

Required Materials

- Large classroom space or gym space
- Jump rope
- Two pieces of paper; one that reads, “Fourth grade is the best!” and one that reads “La quatrième année est la meilleure!”
- Masking tape to put a zig zag line on the floor
- One tie shoe
- One oven mitt or winter glove(s)

Set up the four stations explained below. Allow students to move through the stations first without limitations. Time students and have them record their first time.

Then, have students move through the stations a second time with limitations imposed at each station. Time students the second time and have them record their new time. Do not tell students what the limitations will be until Run 2 begins; don’t even prep them that Run 2 will be different than Run 1.

After the students have gone through the course, have them sit down in a circle (as you will have cleared part of the room of desks/tables) to talk about their experience. There are additional journal prompts they can write about after group discussion (or in place of, if desired).

Station #1: Jump Rope

Run 1: Do 10 jumps with the jump rope.

Run 2: Do 10 jumps on one leg with the jump rope.

Station #2: Zigzag Walk

Run 1: Walk the zigzag line

Run 2: Walk the zigzag line while blindfolded

Station #3: Read Aloud

Run 1: Read the sentence: Fourth grade is the best!

Run 2: Read the sentence: La quatrième année est la meilleure (“Fourth grade is the best!” in French)

Station #4: Tie the Shoe

Run 1: Tie a shoe.

Run 2: Tie a shoe with an oven mitt on one hand. (If you believe an oven mitt will make the task all but impossible, you could substitute a thick winter glove or gloves on each hand; the goal is to make the task difficult yet doable.)

Stagger student groups and have a classroom aide help with timing. Ideally, you would have an aid or “judge” at each station to ensure students complete the task (or get as far as they can before giving up).

If it is possible, this could be paired with gym time as this works best with ample space.

Wrap Up:

- How did you feel going through the course on your second time compared to your first time?
- Why is it important to think about what we do, what we say, and how we act from a variety of perspectives?
- Part of caring for others is making sure they can participate in life in meaningful ways. This ties into our next unit about how we can do a better job including others. If you see someone struggling to complete a task, read something, or get around our school, what are some things you could do?

Proposed Lesson Outcomes:

Students will:

- Experience challenges through a series of limitations and discuss how they felt and how they can assist others who are struggling.



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Kindness in the Classroom® met or exceeded all of CASEL's criteria for high-quality SEL programming. Kindness in the Classroom® received CASEL's highest designation for high-quality SEL programming.

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