

A LESSON ON COMPASSION

by

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"A lesson on Compassion" is now a demonstration on caring as students at Guam South Elementary/Middle South prepare to send donated supplies to one typhoon damaged school in Dededo."

Should it take a natural disaster to teach students about compassion? Supertyphoon Pongsona ravaged the island of Guam with sustained wind of 150 mph with gust of 180 mph on December 9, 2002. Many island residents were left homeless and some were forced to live in the schools, which were used as government shelters. Many of the schools were destroyed or damaged. The northern end of the island was hit harder than the other areas. Islandwide power, water, and telephone services in many areas were non-existent for a couple of weeks after the typhoon. The students who attended the local schools lost about one month of instructional time. Many schools did not resume until January 23, 2003.

The students at Guam South returned to school on January 6, 2003 as scheduled to end winter break. The school was barely touched by the winds of Supertyphoon Pongsona. In fact, we had power, water, and telephone services soon after the typhoon hit.

The students in my 5th grade guidance classes were eager to talk to one another after their ordeal during and after the typhoon. For a number

of the students this was the first time they had experienced this type of disaster. The class provided a forum for me to introduce a lesson on compassion.

The learning goals and objectives were:

- To make students aware of the devastation a typhoon can cause
- To empower students to take positive action by responding with compassion to people in need around them
- To offer options for helping people in need

The students came up with the following ideas to define Compassion:

- Being ready to show kindness to others
- Caring for others in our world
- Giving to people who are in need and helping others
- Doing something nice for someone

The activities included:

The students and I talked and discussed what they had read in the local newspaper and/or heard about the fate to the people outside in the local community. Almost all of the students in the school live in base housing and many talked about how little the damage was to their homes.

The students brainstormed ideas on how to help the community. A friend of mine had told me about how a 5th grade building was totally destroyed leaving a group of about 30 students without a classroom, materials and supplies. Because the students I work with are 5th graders, I then posed the question, "How would you help another 5th grader finish out the school year without much clothing and materials for school?"

The students brainstormed and they came up with many ideas including one called the "I Care Package". The "I Care Package 3" was the one idea that the entire students wanted to work on. I had five 5th grade classes and decided to work with them on how to communicate our feelings to the other 5th graders in the local community.

I then coordinated with the Vice-Principal of Juan M. Guerrero Elementary School about our class project to get the ball rolling

A letter then went out to the parents of my students giving them information about the "I Care Package" class project. Boy, what a positive response!

Before we knew it, the entire school wanted to join in the bandwagon, including the Student Council, who asked for donations in the name of the "I Care Package" class project.

A reporter from the *Pacific Navigator*, a newspaper for the Navy community, came to my class to find out what the class project was all about. After the article was published, I received many calls from parents of students in the lower grades wanting to get their children involved in the class project on Compassion.

The students brought in many items, such as, pencils, crayons, calculators, notepads, coloring pencils, writing papers, construction papers, pens, rulers, school supplies, candles, flashlights, canned goods, batteries, and toys. I also had parents calling to ask about articles of clothing. I went ahead and accepted them.

Once the last day came and all the materials were sorted, the students put them in large boxes. They decorated the seven huge Care Packages with hearts and caring messages. After the boxes were decorated the students wrote letters and made cards telling the other students at Juan M. Guerrero School about themselves. The students were very creative in designing their cards. They used the Print Shop software to create some of their cards and letters. Each student wrote his/her name on a large sheet of construction paper and it was included in one of the package.

The last activity the students did was to make posters depicting Compassion. The posters were hung around the school for a short time and then taken down so that they would be included in the "I Care Packages" sent to the other school.

The "I Care Packages" were delivered to Juan M. Guerrero Elementary School on Valentine's Day. The students in my class were full of smiles knowing that they had voluntarily contributed school supplies and materials, articles of clothing, and other items so that they

could put smiles on the faces of the 5th grade students at Juan M. Guerrero Elementary School.

Two weeks later a big envelope was delivered to my office. It contained letters and cards of thanks and appreciation from the teachers and students at Juan M. Guerrero. My students were full of excitement and laughter as they read the cards and letters. Some students received individual letters. They shared them willingly with the other students in class. They could not wait to get started on answering the letters and cards. Those letters were then collected and sent off to the students at Juan M. Guerrero. Correspondence continued up until the last day of school.

Given the goals of this lesson—to empower students to take positive action by responding with compassion to people in need around them and to recognize their options in helping others—the students in my 5th grade guidance classes demonstrated that they reached the goals with enthusiasm and contentment.

The vitality and zest that the students showed while involved in this class project demonstrated that they understood that they were helping people in need. I saw the students react positively to the class project as they brought in items to help people in need. The project gave them the momentum to move outside the “gates of military life” and into the streets of the local community. As the project progressed and as the items kept coming in, I felt that the students knew and understood what their roles were in the “I Care Packages” project. I received a letter from one of the teachers and she said that when the packages arrived the principal and the 5th grade students and teachers had a little ceremony to celebrate the gifts and to thank Guam South E/M School. This little note brought tears to my eyes. Should it take a natural disaster to teach about compassion?

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