

Stories of Compassion

Pembroke's Friday Freebie

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Creating Caring Classrooms

How to encourage students to communicate, create, and be compassionate of others



**Thought
&
Emotion**

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Acting to Make a Difference

One Wingbeat at a Time

Noble Peace Prize laureate Wangari Maathai shared this inspirational story when she addressed 7000 educators from around the world in Montreal at an annual Botanic Gardens Conservation International conference. Maathai founded the Green Belt Movement, an organization that provides income, education, and sustenance to millions of people in Kenya through the planting of trees. She has been honored with numerous awards for her work as an environmental activist and as an advocate for civil society and women's rights.

A Canadian picture book version of the story of the hummingbird has been created by Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas, a Haida artist. The Tsimshian people of the North Pacific recognize the hummingbird to be a joyful messenger, delivering hope and healing during time of sorrow and pain.

See anime "Flight of the Hummingbird" by Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas on YouTube.

The story of a small hummingbird determined to put out a forest fire is told by the Quechua people of Ecuador and Peru. While other animals stand by, bemoaning their inability to stop the fire, the hummingbird actively strives to fight it. Hummingbird demonstrates that it is not always the largest or the loudest that can do the most good. Her efforts remind us that the one who is not afraid to act can make the biggest difference or at least, that trying to do something is worthwhile.

Whatever "message" the students take from the story, they will, it is hoped, understand that the animals of the forest each gave selfish reasons for not helping to put out the forest fire. Can we be compassionate of those who choose not to get involved in a mission? Can we convince those who are reluctant to help out to be compassionate to the cause that others deem to be important?

We hope and expect that students will respond differently to whether Hummingbird was successful in her brave effort to put out the fire. By listening to the viewpoints of others, students will be able to further consider how someone can best take action in times of trouble and how we "do our best" to put forth a compassionate effort even when others do not act in the same way. Considering their own values and the beliefs of others can help move students in their understanding of compassionate behavior.

One version of the story of the hummingbird appears as a line master on the next page. The story will be used as the focus for a number of activities related to putting compassion into action.

1. Respond through writing and talk.

In this activity, adapted from Lynda Hoyt, students use a graphic organizer to write a response after reading a story or listening to a picture book being read out loud. By sharing their response with two classmates, students can discover whether their opinions were similar to or different from their own. This activity works best if students do it in groups of three.

- Students take a blank piece of paper and fold it twice, to make four rectangles. They number the spaces 1, 2, 3, and 4.
- In space 1, students write a short response to the story to consider what it reminded them of, give an opinion, or raise question puzzles.

The Story of the Hummingbird

One day, a terrible fire broke out in a forest. As flames engulfed the huge woodlands, all the animals rushed out of the forest to safety. The snake slithered steadily away. The rabbit hopped, the wolf leapt, and the big bear lumbered out of the forest. Even the birds flew away in a panic.

Frightened by the raging flames and the clouds of dark smoke, the animals ran and ran until they reached the edge of a nearby stream, where they huddled together.

"I can't do anything to put out the fire," hissed the snake.

"What can I do?" asked the rabbit. "The fire is so hot and I am so little."

"The fire is so big," cried the wolf. "I am so frightened."

"My fur will burn!" cried the big bear.

Full of despair, the animals looked back in silence to watch the blazing fire destroying their homes. How sad and frightened and powerless they felt! Each thought that there was nothing they could do to destroy the monstrous fire.

Except for one tiny hummingbird.

Hummingbird decided she would do something to help. She flew as fast as she could and swooped into the stream. She picked up a single drop of water and returned to the forest and put it on the fire. She then went back to the stream and gathered a drop of water again and again. Hummingbird kept going back and forth, back and forth. All the animals watched in disbelief as the brave bird continued her work drop by drop.



"Why are you bothering?" said the snake.

"Your wings will burn," said the rabbit.

"It's too much. You are too little," said the wolf.

The animals just stood around, but Hummingbird carried on, gathering drops of water one by one. The bird noticed how hopeless they all looked.

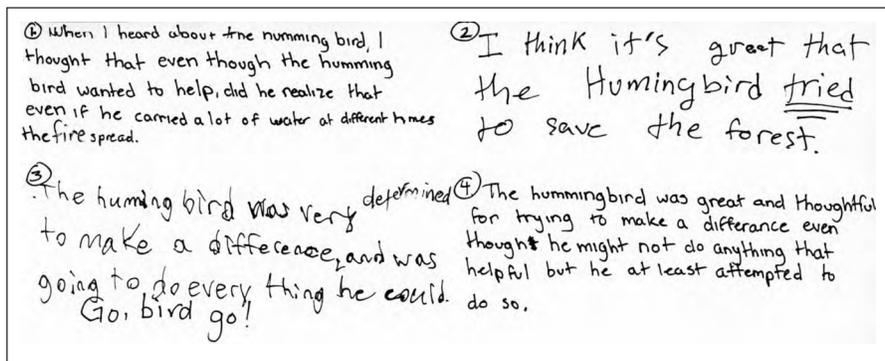
The big bear growled, "Hummingbird, you are so little. What do you think you are doing?"

Hummingbird did not stop to argue. Without losing a beat, she looked back and said, "I am doing everything I can."

1	2
3	4

- Students exchange papers with another person in the group. Students read the response in space 1 and then write a response to it in space 2. What did the response in space 1 encourage them to think about? Ask students to consider whether they agree or disagree with what was written.
- The activity is repeated. Students read both responses on the sheet they receive and write a response in space 3.
- The sheet is returned to the person who wrote the first response. Students read all three responses on the sheet and write a new response in space 4.
- In groups students discuss the story, using their written responses to frame the discussion.

With thanks to Ernest Agbuya's Grade 6 class



How a group of three students responded to the hummingbird story

"It's Cool to Care!"

Me to We, founded in 2008 by brothers Marc and Craig Kielburger, sponsors camps and overseas voyages for volunteer youth who want to make positive change in the world. When participating in any of the *Me to We* events, young people learn how to have a social and environmental impact, thus building a capacity to be compassionate world citizens. Information can be found at www.metowe.com.

4. I wish to see people living the message of this story instead of going with the flow and not showing the courage to stand on his/her own feet. We can't make a difference unless we are brave.

One group's consolidated response

2. Discuss as a whole class.

As a class students discuss the story. The following key questions can be used to guide the discussion.

- What lesson do you think can be learned from this story?
- Do you think Hummingbird's attempts to put out the fire were foolish?
- What puzzles or questions come to mind?
- What other stories of bravery does this story remind you of?
- What does the statement "I am doing everything I can" mean to you?
- In what real-life ways can we put Hummingbird's philosophy into action?

3. Create art images.

Students can create an illustration that they think could be used in a picture book version of this story. Students' images can be assembled into a class publication for others to read. One suggestion is to do torn paper art, where students use a variety of colored paper to create their scene—no scissors allowed.

4. Retell the story.

Students work in pairs or small groups to retell the story, with each person contributing one sentence as the storytelling unfolds. Once the retelling is completed, students can revisit a printed version of the text to determine how successfully they included details from the story. They can add or change information.

Repeat the activity by having the students tell the story from the first person point of view of one of the animals or perhaps the hummingbird.

5. Create tableaux.

Students work in groups of three or four to retell the story of the hummingbird in still images. To begin, invite the students to create one scene from the story; then, tell them to create two scenes, one before and one after. Students can also retell the story using five images. Each picture can be given a title.

6. Dramatize the story.

Students can work in groups to dramatize the story in one of the following ways:

- story theatre techniques (e.g., narrator(s) and actors)
- tableaux and narration
- mime and movement only (perhaps with musical accompaniment)
- improvisation of the story, where all characters have a speaking part
- puppets

Let students choose which method they would like to work with. Alternatively, each group can be assigned a different strategy for presenting the story. Give time to rehearse the play which can be shared with an audience.