Lesson 5: Compliments and Put-Downs

Lesson Overview

**Purpose:** To be introduced to how compliments make a classroom more peaceful and help make others feel better, as well as to explore how put-downs make a classroom less safe.

**Timing: 60 min**

This lesson is designed to take 60 minutes.

**Objectives**

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

- Identify and define compliments and put-downs.
- Understand how compliments and put-downs make people feel.
- Understand how giving compliments and not using put-downs helps others when they feel sad or angry, and contributes to a peacemaking classroom.

**Agenda**

**Opening**

10 min

- Welcome
- Review
- Preview
- How Are You Feeling?

**Focus Activities**

40 min

- Put-Downs
- Reading *The Meanest Thing to Say*
- Compliments

**Closing**

10 min

- Reflection (Independent or Group)
- Closing Game
Supplies

- Book: *The Meanest Thing to Say* by Bill Cosby
- How Are You Feeling? chart and sticky notes
- Chart paper, or space on the board, for brainstorming
- Handout 1-5A: Compliment Chain Links
- Scissors, one pair per student
- Stapler
- Peacemaker Portfolios

Key Words

- **Compliment**: A positive word or statement; praise; something nice to say about a person: “I like the way you….”
- **Put-down**: A negative word or statement; insult; something said that hurts someone else’s feelings.

Before You Teach

- Review the story *The Meanest Thing to Say* by Bill Cosby.
- If you have not already, you may want to begin to expand the feelings options in the How Are You Feeling? chart beyond “happy,” “sad,” “angry,” “calm,” and “other” based on students’ responses in previous lessons. Create a new chart with these additional columns.
- Decide which Reflection activity you will have students complete for this lesson: Independent or Group.
- If you select the Independent option for this lesson, make copies of Handout 1-5A: Compliment Chain Links (one per student) on colored copy paper, one per student. Alternatively, you could pre-cut strips of colored construction paper and write the handout text on the board or on chart paper for students to use as a template.
- Write the lesson’s agenda on chart paper and post it on the wall.
Lesson Plan

Opening (10 minutes)

1. Welcome

Goal: To participate in an opening ritual to mark the beginning of Peace First time.

Use your Quiet Signal to get students’ attention. Welcome students to Peace First time.

2. Review

Ask:

*What did we talk about last week?*

Possible answers:

- Feeling sad
- Feeling sad and angry at the same time

Ask:

*What story did we read last week?*

- Answer: We read Jamaica’s Blue Marker

Ask:

*How did Russell feel about moving? How did he show us how he felt?*

Possible answer:

- Russell felt sad about moving, but in class it seemed like he was angry

Ask:

*What are some ways you can help yourself feel better when you are sad or mad?*
OPENING CONTINUED (10 minutes)

3. Preview

Preview the lesson by directing students’ attention to today’s agenda, “Compliments and Put-Downs.”

Say:

*Today we will be learning about put-downs and compliments and how they make other people feel. We’ll also talk about what everyone can do about put-downs and compliments to make sure we have a peaceful classroom.*

*But first, we will begin Peace First time by thinking about how we are feeling today, with our How Are You Feeling? chart.*

4. How Are You Feeling?

Goal: To reinforce knowledge of feelings by identifying their own feelings and becoming aware of the feelings of their classmates.

Ask students to sit in a circle, if they are not already.

Show the group the How Are You Feeling? chart.

Remind students that they will be continuing to begin every Peace First lesson with this chart.

Review with students how they will participate in this activity, if needed. (A full explanation can be found in Lesson 3; questions to review rules with students can be found in Lesson 4.)

Help students read and review familiar feelings words, and arrive at definitions together for any new words on the chart.

Remind students to think about their own feelings, not to copy other students’ ideas or responses.
OPENING CONTINUED (10 minutes)

Emphasize that it is okay to be sad or angry (or jealous, nervous, etc.); these are not “bad” feelings.

Comment on the progress of the chart as it grows.

After everyone has had a chance to place a sticky note on the chart (including you), have students help you count up the number of names in each column.

Ask the class to note and share any observations they have about the chart.

Teacher Tip: If time allows, ask students to “turn and tell”—to share with a neighbor why they feel the feelings they’ve just identified on the chart.

Ask:

Why is it important for us to know how we (ourselves) are feeling?

Why is it important for us to know how our classmates are feeling?

How does knowing our feelings and our classmates’ feelings help make our classroom more peaceful?

Continue to emphasize to students that feelings change. This chart just shows how they are feeling right now.

Teacher Tip: Consider continuing to record how students identify feeling each week on a separate piece of paper. Doing this may help you notice patterns in particular students. Additionally, you may want to add new feelings to the chart as the year progresses, especially if you notice particular feelings reappearing in each lesson.

TRANSITION

Ask students to remain seated in a circle for the next activity.
Focus Activities (40 minutes)

Activity Overview

First, to preview the book you are about to read to them, students will generate a definition of the phrase “put-down.”

Next, you will read *The Meanest Thing to Say*. It is narrated from the perspective of Little Bill about a new student, Michael, and a new game he brings with him (involving put-downs). The story helps students connect how put-downs affect others in the fictional classroom with how put-downs affect students in their own classroom. Once you finish reading the story, students will offer ideas of how to stop put-downs in the classroom.

Then, students will shift focus to compliments—again, generating a definition, and practice giving compliments to their classmates in the game Compliment Relay.

1. Put-Downs

   Goal: To define “put-down,” and to identify how put-downs hurt the classroom community.

   Tell students that today you are going to read them a story about a group of classmates and how they deal with a tough situation.

   Explain that in this story a boy moves to town and becomes a new student in a school classroom. However, the new boy starts trying to build friendships by playing a game that involves put-downs.

   Tell students that before you read the story, you want to learn what they may already know about put-downs.

   Write the phrase **put-down** in the middle of the board or on chart paper. Use this for developing a put-down concept web.

   Teacher Tip: In a concept web, a word or idea is written at the center. Lines (like spokes) are drawn outward to create a web. This can help students visualize how their ideas are connected.
FOCUS ACTIVITIES CONTINUED (40 minutes)

Remind students that they are not to use other students’ names when giving examples, especially when talking about put-downs.

Model for students the types of responses you are looking for to the question below by providing an example that doesn’t mention names.

Ask:

What is a put-down? What are some examples of put-downs?

Possible answers:

- “You have messy handwriting”
- “I don’t want to play with you”

Ask:

When do people use put-downs? Why do people use them?

What words or images come to mind when you hear put-down?

Map students’ responses on the concept web. Follow up on their responses by probing further. For example, if a student says, “a bully,” ask how (and why) bullies use put-downs.

After recording students’ answers, provide students with the Peace First definition of a put-down, emphasizing student contributions that match this definition.

Explain to students that the use of put-downs in the classroom, school, and community can make people feel unsafe:

- **Put-down**: a negative word or statement; insult; something said that hurts someone else’s feelings.

Tell students that for this next question, they will each share an answer with a neighbor, in a Pair Share.

Ask:

How do put-downs make other people feel? How does it feel when someone uses a put-down against you?

Ensure that each student has a partner and that no student is left out.

Allow students one minute to share their answers with their partners, and then ask if any students would like to share their responses with the group.
FOCUS ACTIVITIES CONTINUED (40 minutes)

2. Reading *The Meanest Thing to Say*

**Goal:** To listen to a story about the use of put-downs by a new student and connect the themes of the story to their own experiences.

**Tell** students that it is time to read a story about put-downs. **Ask** students to turn on their listening ears because you will need their help in identifying the put-downs in the story. **Tell** students that you want them to quietly show you when they hear a put-down in the story by using their thumbs: When they hear a put-down, they will raise a hand with their thumb facing down.

**Teacher Tip:** You may want to quickly practice this with students. Explain that you will practice first before beginning the story, and share two or three statements, one of which is a put-down. Pause after each, acknowledging students’ silent responses (or lack of response, for the neutral statements).

**Begin** reading *The Meanest Thing to Say* to the class. When you have finished the first chapter, **pause** and ask students a few questions to check for understanding.

**Ask:**

*What is “playing the dozens”? Why did Michael want to play the game?*

*How do you think Andrew felt when José put him down? What did Andrew do?*

**Continue** reading the story, beginning with the second chapter. **Pause** to ask students additional questions.

**Ask:**

*How did Little Bill feel when he got home from school? Why?*

*What strategy does Big Bill (Little Bill’s dad) teach Little Bill to use against put-downs?*

**Finish** reading the story to students. When finished, **debrief** the story with students.
FOCUS ACTIVITIES CONTINUED (40 minutes)

Ask:

Why did “So?” work?

How do you think Michael felt when Little Bill kept saying “So?”?

Why?

Possible answer:

- Frustrated, because Little Bill wasn’t “playing” or getting angry

Ask:

Why do you think Michael wanted to “play the dozens”?

Possible answers:

- Michael wanted to act tough because he was nervous about making friends at a new school
- Michael was trying to get people to like him by putting others down

Ask:

How did Little Bill act like a peacemaker? What did he do to help Michael feel like a part of the classroom community?

Possible answer:

- Little Bill invited Michael to play with him and his friends during recess

Ask:

Has anyone ever called you names or used put-downs with you?

What are some ways we can stop put-downs in our own classroom?

Write down students’ suggestions for stopping the use of put-downs in the classroom. Remind students that put-downs can hurt people’s feelings and make a classroom feel unsafe.

Teacher Tip: You may want to save the list of students’ suggestions and keep it somewhere visible in the room as a reminder for students outside of Peace First time.

Thank students for being such great listeners, and tell them it is time for an activity involving compliments.
FOCUS ACTIVITIES CONTINUED (40 minutes)

3. Compliments

**Goal:** To define what a compliment is, identify how compliments help the classroom community, and practice giving compliments to others.

**Teacher Tip:** Students (and adults) often naturally gravitate toward surface-level compliments, since these can be the easiest to notice. For example, “I like your hair,” “Great shoes!” or “You look nice today.” While it is important to acknowledge with students that these are indeed compliments, it is also essential to develop the concept of compliments more deeply. Push students to focus not just on appearance, but on actions and personal qualities. For instance, acts of kindness, ways that students make each other feel, or things they do that demonstrate caring or courage.

**Explain** to students that you now need their help defining another word, “compliment.”

**Say:**

*Just as you all helped each other understand what a “put-down” is, I need you to do the same thing for the word, “compliment.”*

**Write** the word *compliment* on the board or on chart paper. Use this for developing a compliment concept web, as the class did for put-downs.

**Ask:**

*What is a compliment? What are some examples of compliments?*

*How do you feel when someone gives you a compliment? How do you feel when you give someone a compliment?*

*What words or images come to mind when you hear the word “compliment”?*

*Do compliments help or hurt our classroom community? Why? How?*

*How can we help others to use compliments? How can we help ourselves?*
FOCUS ACTIVITIES CONTINUED (40 minutes)

Map students’ responses on the concept web. Follow up on their responses by probing further.

After recording students’ answers, provide students with the Peace First definition of a compliment, emphasizing student contributions that match this definition.

Explain to students that using compliments in the classroom, school, and community can make these places more peaceful and help make others feel better.

- **Compliment**: A positive word or statement; praise; something nice to say about a person: “I like the way you….”

Remind students of the definition they arrived at for “put-down” and ask them to notice how the two compare.

Thank students for helping come up with a definition of the word compliment.

Tell students that they will be using their knowledge of compliments for an activity.

4. Compliment Relay

Tell students that it is time for them to practice giving and receiving compliments. Explain to students that you want to review with them how to give someone a compliment before getting started.

On the board or on chart paper, write the phrase: **I like the way you…**

Explain to students that most compliments begin with the above phrase. This phrasing helps students to think of behavior-based, rather than appearance-based, compliments.

Ask students to give you examples of compliments. If they are struggling, provide students with a few examples.

Share with students examples of compliments that do not focus on physical appearances.
FOCUS ACTIVITIES CONTINUED (40 minutes)

**Explain** to students that they can also compliment others on their skills, talents, the way they treat people, etc. Here are some suggested compliments to share with students:

- I like the way you make me laugh.
- I like the way you are really good at math.
- I like the way you are a caring friend.

**Tell** students they will now practice giving and receiving compliments by playing the game **Compliment Relay**.

**Ask** students to join you in a circle, if they are not already.

**Explain** to students the directions of the game.

- As a class, students will be sending compliments all the way around the circle.
- Each student will turn to the right and give a compliment to the person sitting (or standing) next to him or her.
- After receiving a compliment, each student will thank the person that gave the compliment, and then turn to the student on the other side to repeat the process.
- The game ends when everyone has had a turn to both give and receive a compliment.

**Ask** students if they have any questions.

**Tell** students that you want them to turn to their right to see who is sitting next to them.

**Give** students 30 seconds to think of compliments for their neighbors.

**Ask** students to show you that they’re ready (and have thought of a good compliment for their neighbor) with a thumbs up.

**Model** this by putting your hand out in front of you and raising your own thumb after you’ve thought of a compliment for the student next to you.

**Teacher Tip:** By making sure each student has some time to think of a compliment for his or her neighbor, you will help to prevent hurt feelings. If a student is struggling trying to think of a compliment, whisper a suggestion in his or her ear, or ask a nearby student to offer a suggestion.
FOCUS ACTIVITIES CONTINUED (40 minutes)

Once all students have shown you that they are ready (all students’ thumbs are up), **begin** the game. **Turn** to your right and give the person sitting next to you a compliment.

After all students have given and received a compliment, **debrief** the activity with students.

**Ask:**

- *Did you like this game? Why or why not?*
- *Was this game difficult? Why or why not?*
- *How did it feel to hear a compliment from your neighbor? Why?*
- *How did it feel to give your neighbor a compliment? Why?*
- *How can we use compliments to help make our classroom more peaceful?*

**TRANSITION** Compliment students for their cooperation during the game, and tell them it is time to reflect on today’s Peace First lesson and then play this week’s Closing Game.
Closing (10 minutes)

Activity Overview

Using the Independent Option, students continue to practice giving compliments to others by writing compliments on and cutting out links to form a class compliment chain.

In the Group Option, students answer debriefing questions to demonstrate their understanding of and to reinforce concepts introduced during this lesson.

1. Reflection

Goal: To share and review the major ideas and skills explored during the day’s lesson.

Praise the group on a great Peace First session. Where possible, cite specific actions/behaviors that contributed to the success. Remind students that Peace First time will always end with a closing Reflection activity (followed by a Closing Game).

Guide students to reflect on today’s lesson using either the Independent or Group option below.

1a. Reflection: Independent Option

Tell students that they will need to return to their desks for this activity.

Explain to students that it is time for this lesson’s reflection page.

Tell students that this week, rather than putting their completed reflection pages into their Peacemaker Portfolios, they will be using them to create a big project together that will be displayed in the classroom.
CLOSING CONTINUED (10 minutes)

Distribute copies of **Handout 1-5A: Compliment Chain Links** to students and review the directions.

**Ask** each student to:
- Write the name of another student in the classroom on the first line.
- Think of a compliment for that student, and write it out on the line below.
- Write his or her own name underneath.
- Cut out the link and, if there is time, fill out another for someone else.

**Ask** students if they have any questions.

**Circulate** around the room to help students and answer any questions as they work.

**Teacher Tip:** Consider completing a few links yourself for students whom you believe may be less likely to receive as many compliment links as others. You may also choose to make extra copies to encourage students to create additional links outside of Peace First time.

As each student hands in a completed link, **attach** the ends with a staple, enclosing the link around the previous link in order to form a chain.

**Ask** students to return to a seated circle for the Closing Game.
CLOSING CONTINUED (10 minutes)

1b. Reflection: Group Option

Ask:

Why do people use put-downs? How does it make them feel to put-down others?

Possible answer:

- Sometimes people use put-downs because they think it’ll make them feel better about themselves, or make others like them more. This usually doesn’t work, and hurts someone else’s feelings.

Ask:

What can we do to stop the use of put-downs? How can we help others to keep from using put-downs?

How does it feel when you receive a compliment from an adult? A classmate? A friend? A member of your family?

How can we use what we learned today to help us be better peacemakers in the classroom? At home?

Possible answers:

- Giving compliments to others makes them feel proud or happy, so this is a peacemaking action
- Peacemakers give compliments to their classmates and family members

When finished debriefing, tell students there is one last activity to do before Peace First time is over.

2. Closing Game

Goal: To build teamwork, settle down, and to consistently close Peace First time with the ritual of playing a short game before transitioning to regular classroom time.

Ask students to remain seated in a circle and tell them that it is time for their Closing Game. Tell students that for today’s Closing Game they will be playing another round of Compliment Relay.
CLOSING CONTINUED (10 minutes)

If students are still seated in the same places they were during the first round of Compliment Relay, tell them that this time they will send compliments around the circle to the left (in the opposite direction as the first round).

Ask students to look to their left and think of compliments for their neighbors. Be sure to give them a few moments to think of compliments.

Then, begin passing compliments around the circle again.

Teacher Tip: This game can also be played in teams in order to facilitate more movement and create more variety for students between this game’s use in the Focus Activities and Closing sections. To do so, divide students into two teams. Have each team make a line facing the other team, but separated by about 15 feet. Have a student from Line A walk up to a student from Line B and give him a compliment. The student from Line B then follows the same process, complimenting a student from Line A. This continues until everyone has given a classmate a compliment.

Compliment students for their kind words and for another great lesson. Remind them that you will have Peace First time together every week.

Challenge students to try to use at least four compliments during regular classroom time this week.

Tell them that during next week’s Peace First time, you will ask to hear about the compliments each of them gave one another over the week.

Preview that next week, the class will take a look at some other feelings, and will also have some more time to practice giving each other compliments.
### Compliment Chain Links

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