
Developing a Personal Philosophy

A Gift of Days: The Greatest Words to Live By, edited by Stephen Alcorn, is a collection of the inspirational words and ideas of noteworthy figures. It celebrates the society of which we're all a part and reminds us that we each have the potential to change the world every day of the year.

The activities listed below provide strategies for students to respond to the quotations featured on the "Quotations About Compassion" line master (next page). Students can share their personal connections to the sayings of others and consider what personal philosophy frames their outlook on life.

1. Respond to the quotations.

Students choose one of the quotations outlined on the list and write a short response that considers these questions:

- What does this quotation mean?
- Why did you choose this quotation?
- What does this quotation invite you to think about?

2. Research other quotations.

A number of quotations are provided on the Internet. Students can choose a topic that interests them and investigate other quotations to share (e.g., quotations about friendship, education, and peace). Which is their favorite?

3. Do further research.

Students can gather research about the source of a quotation. They may find information about why this quotation was created, when it was said, and who the audience was.

4. Prioritize quotations.

Students choose a favorite quotation, perhaps from the list provided. Students then work in groups of five or six with each student contributing a quotation. Students prioritize the items by listing the most significant to the least significant. Groups can then share their choices with other groups.

5. Get into a corner.

Call out a statement likely to generate strong opinions. The students consider whether they agree with the statement or not and then arrange themselves into the four corners of the room, each labelled Strongly agree, Agree, Disagree, or Strongly disagree. Groups can discuss the reasons for their choices. The activity is then repeated with a new statement or quotation.

6. Present quotations.

Students in pairs are each assigned a quotation to work with. Invite the students to find a way to bring this quotation to life using one or more of the following drama techniques: reading it aloud, creating a still image, using movement. Once students have rehearsed their work, they can present their quotation to others. The presentations can be assembled into a class collective to be shared with a larger audience.

Stretched Out on a Line

"Line ups" is an alternative way to offer this activity. Students at one end of the line strongly agree with a statement; students at the other end of the line strongly disagree with a statement.

7. Create posters.

Students can choose a quotation and create a poster or banner to visually display it in the classroom or in the school.

8. Make sculptures.

Students are given some modelling clay to create a sculpture that represents one of the quotations. Remind students that their sculptures can be symbolic, rather than literal.

9. Do primary research.

Many people have a personal statement that gives them a philosophy of life. It might be something that a parent or grandparent often repeated, or it might be a quotation that they have read or heard about from the media. As a research project, students can interview one or two adults in the school community or in their family to find out what their favorite motto in life is and why it is important to them. Have students report their findings in a class meeting.

10. Arrive at a mission statement.

Students work in small groups to discuss which quotation they think might serve as a mission statement for their classroom. Groups can offer their choices to the whole group. As a class, the students can choose or compose a philosophical statement for the classroom community.

Quotations About Compassion

"Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country."

~John F. Kennedy

"Human kindness has never weakened the stamina or softened the fiber of a free people. A nation does not have to be cruel to be tough."

~Franklin D. Roosevelt

"I know for sure that what we dwell on is what we become."

~Oprah Winfrey

"No one can make you feel inferior without your consent."

~Eleanor Roosevelt

"You cannot do a kindness too soon, for you never know how soon it will be too late."

~Ralph Waldo Emerson

"Kind words can be short and easy to speak, but their echoes are truly endless."

~Mother Teresa

"Our attitude toward life determines life's attitude towards us."

~Earl Nightingale

"Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about the things that matter."

~Martin Luther King

"He who lives in harmony with himself lives in harmony with the world."

~Marcus Aurelius

"Better than a thousand hollow words is one word that brings peace."

~Buddha

"To the world you might be one person, but to one person you might be the world."

~J. W. von Goethe

"You cannot teach a person anything. You can only help him discover it within himself."

~Galileo

"Love doesn't make the world go round, love is what makes the ride worthwhile."

~Elizabeth Browning

"Whether you think you can or you think you can't—you are right!"

~Henry Ford

"Well done is better than well said."

~Benjamin Franklin

"Those having torches will pass them on to others."

~Plato

"If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion."

~Dalai Lama

"There is no one way to be human."

~Robert Fulgham

"Carry out a random act of kindness, with no expectation of reward, safe in the knowledge that one day someone might do the same for you."

~Lady Diana Spencer

"The past, the present and the future are really one: They are today."

~Harriet Beecher Stowe

"In spite of everything I still believe that people are really good at heart."

~Anne Frank