

# Celebrating What Makes Us Unique

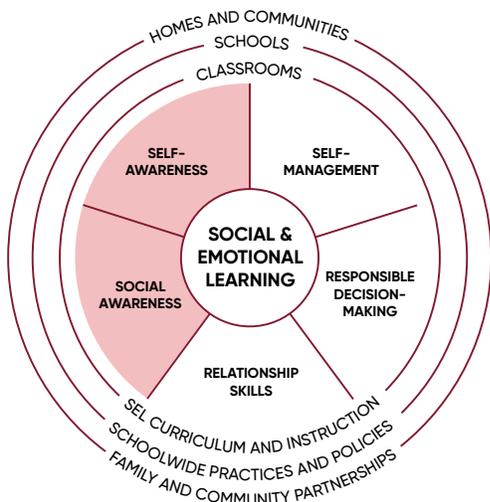
Teacher's Edition • Grades: 4–8 • Length: 45 minutes

## OBJECTIVES

In this lesson, students will:

- Participate in a project to develop self-awareness and social awareness skills
- Perform a role-playing exercise to learn about and practice empathy
- Share out their project

**Featured Social-Emotional Learning Competencies:**  
Social Awareness, Self-Awareness



Credit: CASEL, 2017

## VOCABULARY

### SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING TERMS

**Bullying:** unwanted, aggressive behavior that involves a real or perceived power imbalance

**Compassion:** feeling of wanting to help someone who is sick, hungry, in trouble, etc.

**Communication:** a two-way process of reaching mutual understanding

**Empathy:** ability to understand and share the feelings of others

**Empower:** to give someone more control over their own life or situation

**Self-Awareness:** the ability to recognize one's own emotions, thoughts, and values, and how they influence behavior

**Social Action:** taking steps to change things that are wrong in society

**Social Awareness:** the ability to show understanding and empathy for others

### WORDS TO KNOW:

**ADHD:** attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder—a set of behaviors, including overactivity and poor concentration, that may interfere with learning

**Autism:** a condition that makes it difficult for people to communicate and form relationships

**Dyslexia:** a condition that makes it difficult for people to read

**Dyspraxia:** a condition that makes it difficult for someone to control their movements

**Neurodiverse:** variations in the human brain regarding learning, attention, mood, social interactions, and other mental functions

## SET-UP

Introduce and watch “Fearless Kids Around the World | Siena Castellon” video.

Today, Carmen Sandiego™ introduces us to this episode’s fearless kid, Siena Castellon, from London. London is home to a culturally diverse population who vary in their interests, lifestyles, and needs. Siena is a teen who lives in London. Growing up, Siena struggled to communicate and concentrate. This set her apart from many other students—and she was bullied as a result. Eventually, Siena was diagnosed with several medical conditions that explained her behavior and learning challenges. This discovery made Siena reflect on her bullying experience; she suspected that most students would not have been mean to her if they knew about her diagnosis. She didn’t want any kids with similar challenges to go through the same ordeal.



Soon, Siena made it her life’s mission to empower those people who seemed “different” while educating those who didn’t understand them. Now that you’ve heard Siena’s story, we are going to think about how our personal experiences affect the way we see the world—and how we might use those experiences to better understand—and empathize with others. Suppose you were struggling with a serious issue. What would you do? How would you use that experience to help—or relate to—someone who was struggling with a different challenge?

## LEARN

Talk through the video as a group, gradually introducing social-emotional learning concepts and terms the video explores. Consider asking the following questions:

- **Why does Siena describe herself as being “different”?**  
*E.g., She communicates differently with peers; she is autistic, dyslexic, dyspraxic, and has ADHD.*
- **What are some qualities that set you apart from your peers?**
- **How did Siena’s peers react to her behavior when she was younger?**  
*E.g., They bullied her. Some shoved her into lockers.*
- **How would you feel if your peers reacted negatively to your unique qualities? What would you do?**  
*E.g., I would be upset or angry. I would cry; try to talk to them; shout.*
- **What has Siena done to help other kids with learning differences? ?**  
*E.g., She started a website to help create a sense of community and make them feel less alone. She is promoting Neurodiversity Week.*
- **How might Siena’s work also useful to those people who don’t have learning differences?**  
*E.g., It helps educate them about things they might not be familiar with; the more they know about a subject, the less judgmental they will be.*

## WORKING PERIOD

Now students will work on creating trading cards.

Students will apply what they have learned about self-awareness and social awareness.

**Introduce project.**

If you don’t have learning differences, it might seem difficult to understand what Siena is going through. But you can begin to understand by asking, “How would I feel in this situation?” This is called empathy. It helps us become more understanding and respectful of others.

So, just how empathetic are you? Test your skills with a role-playing exercise. Select one character from the worksheet provided, and read the issue that he or she is dealing with. During the activity, you’ll pretend to be this character. Partner with a classmate who has selected a different character. In front of the class, have a discussion with your partner. Explain your issues to each other. Then share your thoughts and feelings about what the other person is going through. Remember to be empathetic in your responses.

After the exercise, talk to your partner about whether or not they were successful in showing empathy toward you.

## SHARE-OUT

Close the lesson by bringing the class back together as a group to share their work and celebrate their ideas.

- Students will share their thoughts on the empathy demonstrated by each pair of partners.
- Teacher will provide positive feedback to each set of student partners.

## SUPPORT/EXTEND

### SUPPORT

#### Teach the Language of Empathy

Some students may struggle with the right words to use when expressing empathy. Guide students to use the following sentence frames to facilitate empathetic discussions:

- I can hear how \_\_\_\_\_ you are feeling.
- It sounds like you're feeling \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_.
- I can see how important this is to you because \_\_\_\_\_.
- It seems like you're saying \_\_\_\_\_.
- I am thankful you shared this with me. I know how difficult it was for you.

### EXTEND

#### Create an Empathy Quilt

Provide each student with a piece of construction paper cut into a square shape. Tell students each square is a "patch" for the empathy quilt they will create. Have each student decorate their square with illustrations, words, and phrases that convey information about their interests, traits, and feelings. After students are done, tape or string the pieces along a wall to form a "quilt." Encourage students to review the patches created by their peers in an effort to better understand them.

#### Teach Students How to Give Meaningful Feedback

Invite students to give you feedback about your performance as a teacher. Create anonymous surveys in which students respond to questions and include comments about how you may improve. Remind students to be empathetic in their comments. Discuss the survey results with your class. Be sure to note strong examples of empathy, and explain why the examples are successful.

To access more classroom resources, visit [carmensandiego.com](http://carmensandiego.com).

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**NAME(S):** \_\_\_\_\_

How empathetic are you? Test your skills with this role-playing exercise. Select one character from the choices below. Read the issue he or she is dealing with. During the activity, you'll pretend to be this character. Partner with a classmate who has selected a different character. In front of the class, have a discussion with your partner. Explain your issues to each other. Then share your thoughts and feelings about what the other person is going through. Remember to be empathetic in your responses.

**Character 1**

I am a star basketball player on the varsity team. Before the playoffs, I got injured so badly that I had to sit out the rest of the season. My team ended up losing, and I feel responsible. If that isn't bad enough I'm worried that I won't play as well when I recover.

**Character 2**

My little brother has autism. I love him very much, but sometimes, I'm embarrassed by his condition. I'm afraid to let my friends know about it because I think they'll judge me—and make fun of him.

**Character 3**

My best friend shared a secret about a crush. I didn't think it was a big deal, so I told a few people about it. Soon, the information spread and the entire school was talking about it. My friend got upset and stopped speaking to me.

**Character 4**

I recently moved here from another country. I'm shy and I don't speak the language well. I also think people stare at me in the cafeteria when I eat "unusual" looking lunches from my homeland. Sometimes, I don't think I'll ever make friends.

**Character 5**

My mom has been suffering from an illness for quite some time. Recently, it got worse. I feel really down about it. I haven't told my friends about it because it's too upsetting to discuss. I'm concerned they think I'm pushing them away.

**Character 6**

I overheard a classmate say that he wasn't going to study for the big test. During the actual exam, I saw him cheat. He ended up receiving a better grade than I did. I'm really upset because I spent hours studying for it. It's not fair!

**Character 7**

My best friend is great. I can tell her anything and we have a lot of fun together. There's just one problem: she's a bully. I notice her picking on a younger kid. It makes me uncomfortable, but I don't know how to address it.