

The Invisible Boy: A Role-Playing Activity **- Empathy**

EXPLANATION:

A simple act of kindness can transform an invisible boy into a friend. Trudy Ludwig's tale raises poignant life issues of friendship, belonging, empathy, and acceptance, opening avenues for classroom discussion about ways to create classroom inclusion.

GRADE LEVELS: 4–6

STUDENT GROUPING: Group discussion and individual reflection time

ACTIVITY LENGTH: 60 minutes approx.

CASEL CORE COMPETENCY: SOCIAL AWARENESS

- Taking others' perspectives
- Demonstrating empathy and compassion
- Showing concern for the feelings of others
- You can learn more about the CASEL framework [here](#)

SCOPE OF TASK:

Brian is the invisible boy in the story. Nobody ever seems to notice him or think to include him in their group, game, or birthday party. Then a new boy named Justin arrives, and Brian and Justin begin to form a friendship.

1. Begin this activity by asking students if they know what empathy is (awareness of others' feelings and the ability to see situations from alternate points of view). How does it feel when you see other people hurt or upset?
2. Introduce the book *The Invisible Boy* to the class. Tell students that we are focusing on discovering the feelings of different characters in the story. Click on the link to hear the story narrated:



3. After the students have listened to the story, ask them to share what happened. Questions for discussion could include:
 - Who was the main character in the story?
 - What was happening to the main character in the story?
 - Why did the main character feel invisible?
 - What changed in the story?
 - How do you know what the characters might be feeling?

At this point of the activity, try to make connections between the students' feelings and the feelings associated with empathy.

4. Tell students that their task is to role-play the section of the book when Brian feels invisible. Break into groups of 3–5 students. One student pretends to be the audience. Tell that student that when the role-play is over, you want them to report how they felt for Brian. If time allows, swap roles in the role-play so students can experience the different perspectives.
5. Once students have had approximately 10 minutes to role-play, bring the class back together. Ask them to explain:
 - How did they feel when they were “invisible”?
 - What did the audience feel while watching Brian’s rejection, loneliness, and isolation?
6. Ask the students if they can think of other times when they have felt empathetic to other people or animals.
7. Give each student a sticky note, and ask them to write down a time when they have felt empathy. These memories can be stuck on a poster with the heading, “I show empathy when”
8. To close the activity, ask the students to share what they wrote on their sticky notes and displayed on the poster.

Remind students: Empathy is important in almost every aspect of daily life. It allows us to have compassion for others and to relate to friends, family, and even strangers. When we can feel for others, it has a positive impact on the world.

RESOURCES:

- Sticky notes
- Posters with the heading “I show empathy when”

Ludwig, T. (2013). *The Invisible Boy*. Random House.

Online video: “The Kindness Curriculum - The Invisible Boy, Read by Carla Dziwoki,” sourced from:

<https://youtu.be/TOa3qwawCzw>

