

One of a Kind

(Original)

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I have always pictured kindness as a grand concept, whether it is a billion-dollar cheque or a global kindness campaign. In the beginning, I struggled to find ideas. However, my mindset shifted while I was completing them. I got my light bulb moment when I noticed that kindness is an eight letter word. The number 8, in another angle, looked similar to the symbol of infinity. It projects a vision that kindness can induce limitless possibilities.

Through the process, I discovered that the key to creating a society full of kindness is choosing to be kind in small ways. Eventually, these kind acts will roll and converge into a huge snowball. After the ten acts, I began to contemplate ways to spread the impact. There was a Malay proverb that said we had to bend bamboo from shoots. It means that cultivating good values should be done at a young age. Thus, I decided to make teaching kindness my “eleventh” act.

I showed my pupils a short video that visualises kindness as acts that will colour the world. After that, I threw them a question: “What acts of kindness can you do?” No one raised their hands. In a usually talkative class, this was strange. Eventually, one boy said that he never did any good deeds because only his parents have the money to be kind. It was no surprise that they thought one must be rich to help others. Hence, I explained to the pupils that we do not need money to be kind. I shared with them my acts, which include pledging to be an organ donor and complimenting a hardworking waiter. “Kindness is free.” I told my pupils.

To help them visualise how little efforts can contribute to something huge, I introduced them to “The 100 Acts of Kindness” challenge. Their eyes widened when they saw the huge banner with 100 hearts. I told them that it is easy since there were 41 of them. To achieve 100 acts, they only need to do two to three acts each. The class was enthusiastic. Many of them started to record their acts on the chart I gave them. Some came in front of the class to share their acts with me.

Within two months, these eight-year-olds startled me with their commitment. Fruits of

kindness bore in the adorable shyness they showed when I praised them for their hard work or the small giggles when they talked about how their parents thanked them for their help. From these intimate sharing, relationships improved. I had a very straightforward student-teacher relationship with them. After the challenge, however, I began to see them differently. Whenever I entered that class, I was quickly greeted by pupils who want to share their acts of kindness with me. One shy girl did twenty acts on her own and astonished me when she shared them articulately. My heart warmed when a cheeky boy told me about how he carried the groceries for his neighbour.

Most of all, it amazed me how fast children can learn and imitate. When I was teaching, a boy's nose started to bleed. I took the opportunity and asked a pupil to lend him tissues. I told the pupils that caring for their friends is also kindness. Whenever someone had nose bleeding, I noticed them helping the pupil. Besides, I always pointed to the banner and reminded pupils to be kind. Soon after, some of them did the same when their friends were complaining about each other. Though small, their changes were noticeable.

Even though I did not join them in committing acts of kindness, I learned valuable lesson from the children. Their purity softened me and made me more mindful of my behaviours. When 41 pairs of eyes are watching, being kind is crucial. The success of this challenge also made me realise the power of a great mentor. If we make school a safe place for children to share, learn, and reflect, we can create a society full of kindness. The children are seedlings, and the school will be the fertile bedding for their future growth. The magic that a good education can bring is one of a kind.