

# Introducing Empathy

## *Teacher's Guide*

### LESSON SUMMARIES

Engaging Empathy provides two lessons for Introducing Empathy. Each lesson works independently, so they may be taught separately or as a unit.

- [Circle of Viewpoints with War News from Mexico](#) encourages students to engage in perspective-taking with Richard Woodville's *War News from Mexico* as an entry point to empathy discussions and experiences. The lesson guides students to choose one of the excluded figures' perspectives from the periphery of the image to explore in greater depth through writing.

- [Art Slides for "Circle of Viewpoints with War News from Mexico"](#)

*CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.3: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details and well-structured event sequences.*

- [See Think Wonder with John Cage Robot II](#) explores how art can reveal one's authentic selves and propel people to take a closer look at others through an examination of Nam June Paik's *John Cage Robot II*. The lesson guides students to create a self-portrait revealing their authentic selves or to create an empathetic portrait that highlights a classmate's true self.

- [Art Slides for "See Think Wonder with John Cage Robot II"](#)

*CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.10: Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.*

## OVERVIEW

According to Jamil Zaki (psychology professor at Stanford University and author of *The War for Kindness*):

most people understand empathy as more or less a feeling in itself—I feel your pain—but it’s more complicated than that. ‘Empathy’ actually refers to several different ways we respond to each other. These include identifying what others feel (cognitive empathy), sharing their emotions (emotional empathy), and wishing to improve their experiences (empathic concern). (Zaki 4)

In addition, Zaki further details the three types of empathy by saying that cognitive empathy is also called mentalizing, thinking about, or theory of mind; emotional empathy is also called sharing, experience sharing, and personal distress; empathic concern is also called caring about, motivational empathy, and compassion (178-80).

On the dust cover of his book, Jamil Zaki explains “empathy is in short supply. Isolation and tribalism are rampant. We struggle to understand people who aren’t like us but find it easy to hate them. Studies show that we are less caring than we were even thirty years ago. In 2006, Barack Obama said that the United States is suffering from an ‘empathy deficit’” (Zaki dust cover). But Zaki adds, “it doesn’t have to be this way” because “empathy is not a fixed trait—something we’re born with or not—but rather a skill that we can still strengthen through effort” (Zaki dust cover).

In [Brene Brown On Empathy](#), Brown succinctly outlines and explains empathy in an easily accessible and light-hearted manner including delineating the difference between empathy and sympathy and explaining the concept of silverlining.

Roman Krznaric’s [“How to Start an Empathy Revolution: Roman Krznaric at TEDxAthens 2013”](#) offers another quick and effective approach to introduce empathy and its importance to students.

*Note: The Engaging Empathy lessons address complex topics. They include important and representational perspectives, but they do not encompass all of the relevant issues and experiences. We hope you will use the lessons as a starting point for deeper dialogue, understanding, and empathy. The activities in this lesson explore the consideration of diverse viewpoints and understanding self.*

# LESSONS

## Circle of Viewpoints with *War News from Mexico*

**Background:** The Mexican-American War lasted from 1846 to 1848. It was the first U.S. armed conflict primarily fought on foreign soil. President James Polk believed in Manifest Destiny and actively encouraged expansion toward the Pacific Ocean. As Americans continued to claim lands farther west, fighting broke out along the Rio Grande and eventually devolved into the Mexican-American War. At the end of the war, Mexico had lost approximately one-third of its land including present-day California, Utah, Nevada, Arizona, and New Mexico (“Mexican-American War”).

Richard Caton Woodville painted *War News from Mexico* after the war’s conclusion in 1848. He depicted “a novelty of the moment: the transmission of breaking news by telegraph to the penny press” (Heyrman 12). The painting speaks to the social, political, and technological changes leading up to the Civil War. According to Joy Heyrman, author of *New Eyes on America: The Genius of Richard Caton Woodville*, Woodville’s choice of subject matter highlights his understanding of social issues including the unequal application of democracy and personal freedom, founding principles versus modernity, and limited sacrifices of war service (11-13).

**Activity:** Analyze Richard Woodville’s [\*War News from Mexico\*](#) using [Circle of Viewpoints](#) from Visible Thinking. To extend this activity, ask students to write a monologue from the perspective of one of the figures on the periphery (the black man, the black child, or the woman in the window), considering their thoughts and feelings in the pictured moment. For an additional extension, have students find a similar photo or image from a current event and discuss who is included, who is excluded, and to consider perspectives with Circle of Viewpoints.

## See Think Wonder with *John Cage Robot II*

**Background:** Nam June Paik was born in Korea in 1932. With the onset of the Korean War in 1950, the Paik family left Seoul and settled in Tokyo. In 1958, Paik met and attended music classes led by John Cage, which marked a turning point in Paik's life (Stooss and Kellein 133). It is at this time that Paik's art began to shift from musical creations to media works including artwork featuring television sets (Lee and Rennert 9).

In the early 1960s, Paik began conducting "experiments with electromagnets and color televisions" and "developed a remote-controlled robot that could walk, talk, and excrete beans" (Stooss and Kellein 133). In 1970, Paik and Shuya Abe invented a video synthesizer that allowed them to manipulate shapes, colors, and movements on video and television (Stooss and Kellein 134). From the 1970s-1990s, Paik utilized multi-monitor video installations arranged into sculptures. He "employed art as a projection screen for the constant questioning of social, political, technological, and economic processes" (Lee and Rennert 10). Paik is "internationally recognized as the 'father of video'" because of his avant-garde art "used to expand video and television as artistic expressions in contemporary visual culture (Hanhardt dust cover).

In 1995, Paik created *John Cage Robot II* as a portraiture tribute to his friend John Cage. The robot figure features piano hammers and keys in reference to Cage's composition 4'33". The sculpture carries "a basket of books, CDs, wood mushrooms, and chess pieces. The chess figures very likely refer to Cage's 1944 composition "Chess Pieces" (DeBerry). The mushrooms bring attention to the fact that Cage not only collected mushrooms but also published a book about them. The cropped tie alludes to a joint concert during which Paik cut off Cage's tie and washed his hair (DeBerry).

**Activity:** Analyze Nam June Paik's *John Cage Robot II* using [See Think Wonder](#) from Visible Thinking. To extend this activity, have students create either a self-portrait reflecting their authentic selves or an empathetic portrait reflecting a classmate's authentic self. The portrait can be symbolic (like *John Cage Robot II*) or can be traditional in nature. Encourage students who need additional guidance to conduct a quick search for traditional portraiture and non-traditional portraiture. Pair the self-portrait with a 200 word written reflection which highlights a key feature, value, or trait of the subject.

## ARTWORKS CITED

Nam June Paik (South Korean, 1932 - 2006)

[John Cage Robot II](#), 1995

Vintage wood television cabinets, color television receivers, DVD players, multi-channel video, piano keys, piano hammers, piano wire, acrylic paint, basket, books, wood mushrooms, and chessmen

Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, Arkansas, 2011.17

Richard Caton Woodville (1825 - 1855)

[War News from Mexico](#), 1848

Oil on canvas

Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, Arkansas, 2010.74

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- Zaki, Jamil. *The War for Kindness: Building Empathy in a Fractured World*. New York, Crown, 2019.

## SUPPLEMENTARY TEXTS & RESOURCES

*The following sources are not cited in the lessons, but they may be helpful for extending your knowledge on the topic.*

Chiu, Melissa and Michelle Yun. *Nam June Paik: Becoming Robot*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 2014.

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Hanhardt, John G. *Nam June Paik: The Late Style (1996-2006)*. Hong Kong, Gagosian, 2016. *Human Library*. <http://humanlibrary.org/>. Accessed 12 June 2019.

Murphy Paul, Annie. “Reading Makes Us Smarter and Nicer.” *Time*, 3 June 2013, <http://ideas.time.com/2013/06/03/why-we-should-read-literature/>.

Musiker, Cy. “Fighting the Empathy Deficit: How the Arts Can Make Us More Compassionate.” *KQED Arts*, 3 September 2015, <https://www.kqed.org/arts/10933932/fighting-the-empathy-deficit-how-the-arts-can-make-us-more-compassionate>.

Wolff, Justin. *Richard Caton Woodville: American Painter, Artful Dodger*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2002.

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