

Element 1: The Aroma of Empathy

Social Science, Nutrition, Life Skills	Introduction: The Aroma of Empathy
Grade Level: Grade 5-Adulthood Time: 15 minutes Resources: Video of Mr. Swen’s Sense-It Step Introductory Reading	Teachers, Caregivers or Self-Guided Learners <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Imagine the bounties of a bowl of rice and the gift of empathy• Discuss the nature and nutrition of rice• Examine the etymology of “empathy” and its value as a habit

Sense It

Imagine the aroma of something cooking at your house. It smells savory, comforting and familiar. It makes everyone want to gather around the cooking pot and wait for the water to boil off and the small hard kernels to become soft, plump, chewy grains we can roll around on our tongue before we mash them up and swallow them. We can eat many of these kernels in one dish because they are so small. What are they? Grains of cooked rice!

Our guest teacher, Mr. Christopher Swen, greeted everyone who watched along on the video. He held a sachet full of rice. He showed us the glittering grains of rice in the sachet.

Introducing Rice – a Food that Feeds Many

How is rice grown? First, you need a seed and seed is a living product that must be grown, harvested, and processed correctly in order to realize the yield potential of any rice variety. Good quality seed can increase yields by 5-20%. Using good seed leads to lower seeding rates, higher crop emergencies, reduced replanting, more uniform plant stands, and more vigorous early crop growth.

Before rice is planted, the soil should be in the best physical condition for crop growth and the soil surface is level. Cultivated rice is extremely sensitive to water shortages. To ensure sufficient water, most rice farmers aim to maintain flooded conditions in their field. This is especially true for lowland rice.

The rice plant has a wide array of consumers in the world. People have grown it for ten thousand years. If it were a person, you might say that it shows empathy, by providing energy and food to all who eat it, including humans, rodents, harmful insects, viruses, diseases, and weeds. It doesn't stop to decide who *deserves* to eat, because nature's gifts do not judge others. They offer the same nutrition to all. What about people? Can we offer empathy without judging others?

Empathy means feeling what another person feels—seeing the world through their eyes. If all the world is one family, we can experience and react to the needs of another as if they were our own sister or brother, or as if their pain were our pain. We can learn to fill their hunger as readily as we would our own. Rice tastes just as good to one person as another if they are hungry, after all.

To practice empathy for groups, we can feed the most challenged communities by making sure they have enough staple foods such as rice. Families, students, teachers, and other children who are orphans and do not have the means to fetch food will feel less hunger the more we can practice walking in their shoes.

Practicing the Habit of Empathy

Spell the word *empathy*. Look at its three syllables. Picture the word empathy as a lowland rice field in rich, swampy land, with the leaves green and promising to feed millions. The letters may represent the rows of rice or the rows of workers rising above the plants.

Say and write the word *empathy*. As you engage in the activities in this unit, may you always truly feel that empathy, remembering the rice plant as a symbol. Rice brings relief by giving hundreds of bites in every serving. Perhaps you too will have a chance to express empathy through service to others during throughout and beyond this learning unit.



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