



CLASSROOM LESSON:

U.S. of Kindness: 250 Americans, 250 Years

Mini Kindness Cards

One-Day Social Studies / ELA / SEL Lesson

Grades 3-8 | Easily Adapted K-2 and 9-12 | 35-45 Minutes

Lesson Overview

This one-day lesson introduces students to the idea that kindness is part of American history and civic life. Students learn about a real Americans - famous, local, or unsung - who helped others through kindness, service, or courage, then create a Mini Kindness Card with a picture and short description. Cards are shared and displayed, creating an instant U.S. of Kindness wall or mini timeline.

This lesson stands alone as a low-lift classroom activity and can also serve as a simple entry point into USK 250: 250 Americans, 250 Acts, 250 Years. The focus is concrete and accessible: students identify a real person, name a real problem or need, describe a kind act or service, and connect that example to one way they can show kindness in their own school or community.

Ohio SEL Standards Alignment

This lesson supports Ohio's K-12 Social and Emotional Learning Standards by connecting empathy, civic-mindedness, respect, positive communication, and responsible decision-making to real examples of kindness in American life.

Ohio SEL Standard / Topic	Student Skill	Lesson Connection
C1: Recognize, identify and empathize with the feelings and perspective of others	Students identify a problem or need that affected others and consider who was helped.	Mini Kindness Cards ask students to connect a person's action to the feelings, needs, or experiences of others.
C2: Demonstrate consideration for and contribute to the well-being of the school, community and world	Students recognize kindness, service, and courage as positive contributions to a community.	Students examine how one person's action can improve a classroom, neighborhood, city, state, or country.
C3: Demonstrate awareness and respect for human dignity, including similarities and differences	Students encounter Americans from different backgrounds, time periods, communities, and roles.	The lesson frames kindness as respect for human dignity and helps students see many ways people can contribute.
D1: Apply positive verbal and non-verbal communication and social skills	Students share their cards, listen to others, and communicate why an act of kindness mattered.	Pair-share, class discussion, and card sharing provide practice with respectful speaking and listening.

E3: Consider the ethical and civic impact of decisions	Students connect individual choices to fairness, service, responsibility, and the common good.	Students reflect on how kindness is not only personal but also civic: choices can help others and shape community life.
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Essential Question

How have acts of kindness shaped our country - and how can kindness shape our community today?

Learning Objectives

- Learn about one American who helped others through kindness, service, or courage.
- Identify what problem or need that person responded to.
- Describe one specific act of kindness, service, courage, or civic responsibility.
- Create a Mini Kindness Card with a picture and short description.
- Reflect on one way they can show kindness in their own school or community.

Materials

- One index card per student (3x5 or 4x6)
- Markers, pencils, crayons, or colored pencils
- Optional: short list or slideshow of "Kind Americans"
- Optional: teacher-provided examples or student choice
- Chart paper, bulletin board, or wall space labeled "U.S. of Kindness"

Suggested Examples to Offer Students

Teachers may provide a short curated list, allow student choice, or assign shared examples for younger grades. Examples may include famous, local, or unsung Americans who helped others through kindness, service, courage, fairness, care, or civic action.

Possible examples: Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Ruby Bridges, Fred Rogers, Cesar Chavez, a local helper, first responder, teacher, community organizer, neighbor, coach, family member, or school staff member.

***SEE APPENDIX A (AT THE END OF THIS DOCUMENT) FOR A LIST OF EXAMPLES**

Teacher note: For younger students, keep the selection simple and familiar. For older students, ask students to connect the act to fairness, justice, civic responsibility, or the common good.

Lesson Procedure

1. Warm-Up: Kindness as History - 5 minutes

Teacher prompt:

When we learn about American history, we often hear about wars, presidents, or big events. Today, we are going to look at history through a different lens: kindness. Real people - famous and not famous - used kindness, courage, and service to help others and make things better.

Quick pair-share or whole group:

- Name someone who helped others. They can be famous, local, or someone you know.

2. Introduce the Mini Kindness Card - 5 minutes

Show a sample index card or model one on the board.

You are going to create a Mini Kindness Card about one American who helped others. On one side, you will draw a picture. On the other side, you will write a few key facts about what they did and why it mattered.

Card requirements:

- Front: drawing of the person or a symbol of their kindness.
- Back: name, problem or need they saw, kind act or service they did, and who it helped.

3. Choose a Kindness American - 5 minutes

Options for teachers:

- Provide a short curated list of people for students to choose from.
- Allow students to choose someone they already know.
- For younger grades, assign 3-5 shared examples to keep the activity manageable.
- For older students, encourage examples from different time periods, communities, professions, or civic movements.

Prompt students to write the person's name at the top of their card before beginning the drawing or writing.

4. Create Mini Kindness Cards - 15-20 minutes

Students work independently or in pairs. Teacher circulates and prompts students to focus on actions, not only traits.

Teacher prompts:

- What problem did this person notice?
- What did they do, not just what were they like?
- Who was helped because of their actions?
- How did their kindness, courage, or service make things better?

K-2 Adaptation

- Students draw the person helping or draw a symbol of the kind act.
- Sentence stem, dictated or copied: "____ helped others by ____."

9-12 Adaptation

- Require one sentence connecting the act to fairness, justice, civic responsibility, or the common good.
- Students may choose local or unsung Americans and explain why their action deserves to be remembered.

5. Share and Build the U.S. of Kindness Wall - 5-7 minutes

Students place cards on a board or wall labeled "U.S. of Kindness."

Optional quick share:

- One kindness story that stood out to me was...
- One thing these stories have in common is...
- One act of kindness I want to remember is...

Even though these people lived in different times and places, their kindness helped real people in real ways.

6. Reflection and Closing - 3-5 minutes

Exit ticket, oral, written, or drawn:

- One way I can show kindness in our school or community is...
- OR: One kindness story that inspired me today was...

Kindness is not extra. It is part of who we are - and part of the story we are still writing.

Student Product

- Mini Kindness Card on an index card.
- Front: drawing of the person or symbol of kindness.
- Back: short description naming the person, need, kind act, and who was helped.
- Displayable as part of a classroom or school U.S. of Kindness wall.

Quick Assessment

Students demonstrate understanding by accurately identifying:

- A real person.
- A real act of kindness, service, courage, or civic responsibility.
- Who was helped or what need was addressed.
- One way they can show kindness in their own school or community.

Optional Display

U.S. of Kindness

Display the completed Mini Kindness Cards as a classroom wall, hallway board, or mini timeline. The display can show students that kindness is part of American history, civic life, and the story they are still helping write today.

APPENDIX A:

U.S. of Kindness - 250 Americans, 250 Years

EXAMPLES OF KIND AMERICANS

Teacher Reference List | Organized by 50-Year Sections

Purpose of This List

This companion document supports the U.S. of Kindness - 250 Americans, 250 Years Mini Kindness Cards lesson. Students select or are assigned a real American to research, identify a problem or need that person responded to, and describe one specific act of kindness, service, courage, or civic care. The goal is not to create a definitive list of the "kindest" Americans. Instead, this is a starting research pool that teachers can adapt by grade level, local community, subject area, and student interest.

How to Use With Mini Kindness Cards

- Choose a person from one 50-year section, or allow students to choose from the whole list.
- Ask students to find: name, problem or need, kind act or service, who was helped, and one lesson for today.
- For younger students, use 3-5 shared examples and complete the card together.
- For older students, ask students to explain how the person's act connects to fairness, dignity, justice, service, or civic responsibility.
- Dates below are organized by the period most connected to the person's public work or historical impact, not necessarily by birth or death year.

Student Research Questions

- What problem or need did this person notice?
- What did this person do to help?
- Who was helped by their actions?
- What kindness value does their story show?
- What is one way we can carry that kind of kindness into our school or community?

1776-1826 | Founding and Early Republic

Person	Kindness / Service Focus	Possible Student Research Prompt
Phillis Wheatley Peters	Poetry, literacy, and public voice.	How can words challenge unfair ideas and help people see the humanity of others?
Absalom Jones	Community care, faith leadership, and service during crisis.	How did Jones help people in need during the 1793 yellow fever outbreak?
Richard Allen	Mutual aid, church leadership, and care for Black communities.	How did Allen organize help and build institutions for people who were excluded?
Benjamin Banneker	Science, learning, and speaking against slavery.	How did Banneker use knowledge and writing to stand up for equality?
Elizabeth Freeman (Mum Bett)	Courage, freedom, and legal change.	How did Freeman's personal courage help others imagine freedom differently?
Sacagawea	Guidance, communication, and cross-cultural support.	How did Sacagawea help people travel, communicate, and survive?
Sequoyah	Language, literacy, and community knowledge.	How did Sequoyah create a tool that helped Cherokee people read and write in their own language?
Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet	Education, access, and inclusion for Deaf students.	What need did Gallaudet see, and how did he help expand education?
Elizabeth Ann Seton	Education, service, and care for children and families.	How did Seton use schools and service to help young people?
Martha Ballard	Health care, midwifery, and everyday community support.	How can daily care work be part of American history?

1826-1876 | Reform, Abolition, Civil War, and Reconstruction

Person	Kindness / Service Focus	Possible Student Research Prompt
Harriet Tubman	Freedom, courage, rescue, and community protection.	What risks did Tubman take to help others move toward freedom?
Frederick Douglass	Abolition, education, writing, and human rights.	How did Douglass use his voice to help others fight slavery and injustice?
Sojourner Truth	Abolition, women's rights, faith, and public speaking.	How did Truth speak up for people whose voices were ignored?
Clara Barton	Civil War nursing, relief work, and emergency care.	What kind of help did Barton provide when people were hurt or in crisis?
Dorothea Dix	Mental health reform and care for people in institutions.	What problem did Dix notice, and how did she work to make care more humane?
Elizabeth Blackwell	Medicine, education, and opportunity for women.	How did Blackwell open doors for women in medicine and improve care?
Lucretia Mott	Abolition, women's rights, peace, and moral courage.	How did Mott connect kindness with justice and equal dignity?
Prudence Crandall	Education access and courage in the face of opposition.	How did Crandall show that education should be open to more children?
Frances Ellen Watkins Harper	Writing, abolition, education, and civil rights.	How did Harper use writing and speaking to encourage change?
Robert Smalls	Courage, freedom, public service, and community leadership.	How did Smalls turn one brave action into a life of service?

1876-1926 | Progressive Era, Education, Labor, and Civic Reform

Person	Kindness / Service Focus	Possible Student Research Prompt
Jane Addams	Settlement houses, immigrant support, peace, and public service.	How did Addams build a place where neighbors could find help and belonging?
Ida B. Wells	Investigative journalism, anti-lynching activism, and civil rights.	How did Wells use truth-telling as a form of courage and service?
Booker T. Washington	Education, self-help, and institution building.	How did Washington use education to create opportunity?
George Washington Carver	Science, agriculture, and practical help for farmers.	How did Carver use knowledge to help communities solve real problems?
Mary McLeod Bethune	Education, youth leadership, and service to Black communities.	How did Bethune turn one school into a larger movement for opportunity?
Maggie Lena Walker	Economic empowerment, banking, and community leadership.	How did Walker help families and communities build stability?
Lillian Wald	Public health nursing and care for immigrant families.	How did Wald bring health care into homes and neighborhoods?
Helen Keller	Disability rights, education, advocacy, and perseverance.	How did Keller turn personal experience into advocacy for others?
Juliette Gordon Low	Youth development, girls' leadership, and service.	How did Low create opportunities for girls to lead and serve?
Chief Joseph	Dignity, peace, and advocacy for Native people.	How did Chief Joseph use words and leadership to call for justice and respect?

1926-1976 | Civil Rights, Public Service, Science, and Social Change

Person	Kindness / Service Focus	Possible Student Research Prompt
Eleanor Roosevelt	Human rights, public service, and advocacy for dignity.	How did Roosevelt use public leadership to speak up for people beyond herself?
Marian Anderson	Music, dignity, and breaking barriers.	How did Anderson respond to exclusion with grace, talent, and courage?
Jackie Robinson	Civil rights, sportsmanship, courage, and integration.	How did Robinson help change what belonging could look like in American life?
Rosa Parks	Civil rights, dignity, and disciplined courage.	How did Parks' action connect personal courage to community change?
Martin Luther King Jr.	Nonviolence, justice, service, and beloved community.	How did King connect kindness, justice, courage, and community responsibility?
Bayard Rustin	Nonviolent organizing, strategy, and civil rights teamwork.	How did Rustin help others organize for change?
Dolores Huerta	Labor rights, organizing, and dignity for farmworkers.	How did Huerta help workers and families advocate for fair treatment?
Cesar Chavez	Farmworker rights, nonviolence, and community organizing.	How did Chavez use nonviolent action to support workers and families?
Rachel Carson	Environmental care, science writing, and responsibility to the planet.	How did Carson help people see that caring for nature is also caring for people?
Katherine Johnson	Mathematics, space exploration, excellence, and opportunity.	How did Johnson's work help a team accomplish something bigger than one person?

1976-2026 | Modern Service, Inclusion, Literacy, and Community Care

Person	Kindness / Service Focus	Possible Student Research Prompt
Fred Rogers	Children's kindness, emotional learning, and neighborliness.	How did Rogers help children feel seen, safe, and valued?

Person	Kindness / Service Focus	Possible Student Research Prompt
Jimmy Carter	Housing, peacebuilding, health, and post-presidential service.	How did Carter continue serving communities after leaving public office?
Dolly Parton	Literacy, imagination, and support for children and families.	How can giving books to children be an act of kindness and opportunity?
Marian Wright Edelman	Children's rights, advocacy, and public responsibility.	How did Edelman work to make sure children's needs were not ignored?
Bryan Stevenson	Justice, mercy, legal advocacy, and human dignity.	How does Stevenson connect kindness with fairness and second chances?
Jose Andres	Food relief, disaster response, and practical care.	How can feeding people in a crisis be an immediate act of service?
LeVar Burton	Literacy, storytelling, and encouraging young readers.	How did Burton use stories to help children learn and imagine?
Temple Grandin	Neurodiversity, animal welfare, and changing how people understand differences.	How did Grandin help others understand that different ways of thinking have value?
Opal Lee	Memory, civic action, and community persistence.	How did Lee help people remember a history that needed wider recognition?
Ruth Bader Ginsburg	Equality, law, and fairness.	How did Ginsburg use the law to expand fairness and opportunity?

Teacher Note

Teachers may substitute local helpers, alumni, community leaders, first responders, artists, coaches, mentors, or school staff. The strongest student products usually focus on a clear action: what the person saw, what they did, who it helped, and what students can do now.