

# We'll Walk Together – Solidarity and Compassion are Stronger than Violence:

An inspiring story of one young man who sparked a movement of solidarity and compassion through one simple act against violence.

*This lesson can be presented over 1-2 sessions. Instructors should feel free to use whichever discussion questions and activities you think best for your class or group. We advise giving students the sheet with the definitions of the virtues before the discussion questions.*

### Lesson Goals

help students...

- recognize injustice and wrong doings, and practice empathy for others who may be going through challenges that we don't deal with or suffer from in our own lives
- develop a greater level of respect for vulnerable people, specifically the elderly and minorities who are experiencing discrimination
- be inspired by other young people taking the lead to combat violence
- see how small actions, like walking with others, can make powerful and big differences for individuals as well as communities as a whole
- see the value of living with a sense of duty in taking responsibility for our own community by engaging problems and working to make positive changes
- appreciate the power of solidarity when people among different races, ethnic groups and ages come together to work toward a shared goal

### Primary Virtues / Character Traits

**Empathy:** trying to understand another person's situation, entering into the feeling or spirit of others and imagining yourself in another person's situation.

**Compassion:** feeling of sympathy for the distress of others, with the desire to help

**Solidarity:** unity from a shared common purpose and / or interest; active loyalty within a group; mutual support within a group; being present with others

**Duty:** something that one is expected or required to do according to one's own standards, moral or legal obligation, especially as it relates to one's status as a citizen and / or member of various communities.

### Secondary Virtues / Character Traits

**Responsibility:** accepting and meeting the demands of our duty in life, being accountable, pursuing excellence

**Respect for Others:** showing full appreciation of the worth and dignity of others; living by "the golden rule": do unto others as you would want done unto you

**Justice:** fair treatment, due reward or punishment in accordance with honor, standards, or law. A just person works to give others the opportunity to have what they need to live with dignity and to improve their lives.

### Leader Introduction:

Since the coronavirus pandemic began in March 2020, violent attacks on Asian Americans have skyrocketed. Many of these attacks have taken place in California. Today's lesson focuses on the Chinatown area of Oakland, California, where violence against seniors has been especially bad, including a 91 year old Asian man hospitalized after being shoved to the ground. Elderly people living in this community became afraid to leave their homes, not only for fear of contracting Covid, but also the fear of being hurt.

Fortunately, young adults in Oakland don't just feel badly about the situation, they're working hard to stop the violence and to show the Asian community they care. As with many good endeavors, it all started when one person, Jacob Azevedo. He's a Hispanic young man who has offered to walk with elderly Asian folks of his community to the store and to doctor's appointments. Let's listen to a short audio clip about what happened from there.

### Link to Audio:

<https://www.wbur.org/hereandnow/2021/02/26/anti-asian-violence-oakland>

### Leader Summary:

It's amazing how Azevedo's one small act of kindness sparked over 700 volunteers, from many races and ages, to come forward and support the elderly Asian residents of Chinatown. Azevedo said he believes this moment is an opportunity for all groups of people to stand in solidarity to support the Asian community. And they certainly have seized that opportunity with Compassion in Oakland. Let's dig deeper into the story of Compassion in Oakland:

### Discussion Question Options *(discussion prompts / answers are in parentheses or bullet points)*

Before beginning our discussion, let's read over the virtues and their definitions, which is found in the online lesson as a separate document.

1. What do you think motivated Azevedo to help his community, and what virtues are reflected in his motivations?  
(He was moved by the video showing the extreme violence against the elderly man. Azevedo has a strong sense of **compassion** in feeling distress for another person's suffering and having the desire to help. He likely also has a strong sense of **empathy** in placing himself in the position of those suffering from the violence.)
2. Would you have thought that Azevedo's simple offer to walk with elderly Asian residents of his community would have motivated so many volunteers in Oakland, and now similar groups across the country?

What does this movement of volunteering for these elderly people in Oakland and across the country tell us about people in our country?  
( Most people are **caring** and want to help others in need.)

Often people hear stories of people helping others but it doesn't motivate them to take action. What do you think are some of the reasons Azevedo and the Compassion in Oakland campaign have motivated thousands of people across the country to actually volunteer and create their own organizations?

(The injustice of the violence is compelling; the solution of walking with others is simple to enact; the process of volunteering and organizing is made simple through social media and web sites; the campaigns are lead by people within their own communities)

3. Let's discuss the actions and words of Azevedo and the other leaders of Compassion in Oakland to learn more about their sense of **duty**. Jess Owyong, a fourth generation Asian American, was one of the first people to jump on board to start Compassion in Oakland with Azevedo. She was devastated by all the attacks against people in her community, but was at first hesitant to react. After seeing Azevedo's post she recalled thinking, "I can also do something. I have a voice. I live here." How do you think Azevedo, Owyong and the other leaders view their sense of duty, what do they expect of themselves according to their own standards and as members of their community? (They view it as their duty to work against **injustice**, to protect vulnerable members of their community and affirm **respect** for all members of their community.. They want to take **responsibility** for their community by working to improve their community.)

Let's discuss how we view our own sense of duty. What do we think are our responsibilities within our family life, school, among our friends, community and nation? (It's good to list each of these categories on the board and then suggestions from students within each category.)

4. How is the Compassion in Oakland campaign an example of **solidarity**? (volunteers for the campaign come from many different races, ethnic groups, ages, and backgrounds all working together towards shared goals of working against injustice, affirming the dignity of all members of their community and improving their community.)

Do you think the Compassion in Oakland campaign and their approach in addressing a problem can serve as an example of how to build solidarity and unity within our communities as we address problems?

(Reasons for yes: many people do care and want to help others in need and will likely respond if the need is compelling, there is a simple step or series of steps to effectively address the problem, there is a simple process for joining the cause and the proposed solution is effective)

5. The Compassion in Oakland's slogan is "We promote **compassion**, not indifference, **unity** as opposed to divisiveness." What are some of the problems in your community and / or school where you can use compassion and bring people together to work for change?

Let's talk about each of these problems and issues. Are there existing organizations in our community that we can get involved with to address each of these problems, or do you think a new organization should be built?

(In considering existing organizations, encourage students to discuss how they can specifically help now and / or in the future.)

6. The cofounder of another organization, Stop AAPI (Asian American/Pacific Islander) Hate, Cynthia Choi said about Compassion in Oakland, "It's showing our elders who are afraid... to leave their house that we're here, we want to support you. We're holding you right now." How do you think that elderly members of Oakland's ChinaTown feel knowing that Compassion in Oakland is an option for them? (supported, loved, empowered)

### Journal Writing Option

1. Azevedo and the other leaders of Compassion in Oakland have a clear sense of duty in taking responsibility to address injustice within their own community. Write about how you view your own sense of duty. What do you think you should expect of yourself within your family, school, friendships, as a member of your local community, and our nation as a whole.
2. Choose a cause or issue that is important to you. Write about why it is important and how you want to engage that issue or help to improve the situation, now and / or later in your life?

### Extended Activities:

1. Organize students into teams of 2-4 to make a plan to establish an organization like Compassion in Oakland that will address a specific problem or issue in their community. Each team will make a presentation to their class or group and the presentation should outline:
  - the problem or issue in your community and who they are helping
  - how exactly will the proposed organization address the problem and support those affected
  - how will you raise awareness for your organization, raise funds and recruit volunteers
2. Cynthia Choi said, "It's showing our elders who are afraid... to leave their house that we are here, we want to support you. We're holding you right now." Even if at our age we can't help walk with elderly Asian Americans, we can use our words to support those who are suffering from injustice or other problems such as severe illness. As a class, write a statement of support and **solidarity** to someone who is suffering from an incident of violence, discrimination or severe illness, and then have each student sign the statement and bring it to the person in need.

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