The SEL Interactive Read Aloud Collection

Tulare County Office of Education
Tim A. Hire, County Superintendent of Schools

How to Hug a Cactus by Emily S. Smith	
Self-Awareness (understanding emotions and personal challenges) **Self-Management** (developing patience and perseverance) **Social Awareness** (understanding others' feelings and unique qualities) **Relationship Skills** (building empathy, showing kindness in different ways) **Responsible Decision-Making** (finding creative solutions to challenges)	
Background	*How to Hug a Cactus* is a beautifully written story about a child who wants to hug a cactus, despite its sharp spines. Through persistence and problem-solving, the child explores different ways to show affection and kindness, even when faced with challenges. The story serves as a metaphor for relationships, helping children understand that some people—like cacti—may be difficult to connect with, but kindness and patience can make a difference.
Before You Read	Look at the cover—what do you notice about the cactus? How do you think it feels? What do you think it means to hug a cactus? Could this be a metaphor for something else? Have you ever wanted to do something that seemed impossible? What did you do? Why do you think some people are harder to be friends with than others? How can we show kindness to people, even when they don't make it easy?
While You Read **Guiding Questions**	**(Self-Awareness)** Why do you think the girl wants to hug a cactus? What does it mean to her? **(Responsible Decision-Making)** What are some of the first ways the girl tries to hug the cactus? Do they work? **(Self-Management)** How does the girl handle frustration when things don't go as planned? Have you ever felt that way? **(Social Awareness)** Do you think the cactus doesn't want to be hugged? What

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could it be feeling?

(Relationship Skills) How does the girl adjust her approach? What does she do differently?

(Self-Awareness) How does the girl's understanding of the cactus change throughout the story?

(Responsible Decision-Making) What do you think the cactus represents? Can you think of a time when you had to find a different way to connect with someone?

(Social Awareness) How does this story show us that people have different ways of showing love or kindness?

(Self-Management) How does the girl's patience help her in the end?

(Relationship Skills) What is the lesson of the story? How can we use it in our own friendships and relationships?

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<td>**After Reading**</td>
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K-2 Activity: "Ways to Show Kindness" Craft

Objective: Students will explore different ways to express kindness when words or actions might not work in the usual ways.

Activity Steps:

1. **Discussion:** Talk about times when it's been hard to show kindness to someone (e.g., a shy friend, a sibling who is upset).
2. **Craft:** Give each student a **paper cactus cutout** and have them write or draw different ways to show kindness (e.g., "smiling," "writing a note," "giving space," "helping out").
3. **Sharing:** Students can share their ideas with the class and create a **"Kindness Garden"** display with their cacti.

3-5 Activity: "Understanding the Cactus" Writing Reflection

Objective: Students will reflect on the idea that some people are like cacti—difficult to connect with but still deserving of kindness.

Activity Steps:

1. **Discussion:** Ask, "Can you think of a person in your life who might be like the cactus in the story? How do they show their feelings in a different way?"
2. **Writing Prompt:** "Write about a time when you had to find a different way to connect with someone. What did you learn?"
3. **Pair Sharing:** Students can discuss their reflections with a partner and

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	brainstorm strategies for being patient and kind in different situations. 4. **Classroom Commitment:** As a class, create a **list of ways to be kind even when it's hard**, and post it as a reminder.