

# Fair vs. Equal

This lesson explores the difference between fair and equal. Students at this age really struggle with differentiating between these two concepts as they correlate fair as being the same as equal. This lesson will highlight what each concept means and how that manifests within a classroom setting.

**Caring Sub-Concepts**

Fairness, Kindness

**Lesson Timeframe**

45 minutes

**Required Materials**

- ☐ Two glasses - one tall, one short
- ☐ Water (1 c. or amount as determined by teacher)
- ☐ “Fair is Fair” by Sonny Varela  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kVqZzLN9eQU>

**Standards Map**

This lesson aligns with CASEL Competencies, National Health Education Standards, and Common Core State Standards. Please refer to the [Standards Map](#) for more information.

**Lesson Objective**

Students will be able to:

- Explore the concepts of fairness and equality through literature.
- Explain examples of fairness and equality within the classroom.

**Teacher Connection/Self-Care**

Ask yourself this question each day this week: How can I treat people in a way that does not show favor for some and not others? Identify one action step you can take to move forward in your quest for fairness!

**Tips for Diverse Learners**

- Form groups with varying levels of English proficiency to aid in comprehension.

**Share**

5-7 minutes

Ask for 4 volunteers to come to the front of the classroom. Explain that each person is going to the doctor for something different.

- Student #1 has a cough
- Student #2 has a broken bone
- Student #3 has a cut on their knee
- Student #4 has a stomach ache

After explaining what each student has wrong, tell them you have the perfect solution: a band aid! You might even hand out a band-aid to each student and tell them that you have solved their problem. (You will most likely hear comments like “That won’t work!” or “Who will that help?” Or “That’s not fair!” etc. - those are great responses!)

**Ask:**

- Did everyone receive the **same** treatment? *Yes, it was equal.*
- Did everyone receive a treatment that will help them? *No, it really only helped the person with the cut on their knee.*
- Would it be fair if everyone received the same treatment when they went to the doctor, no matter what was wrong with them? Why wouldn't that be fair?

Today we will talk about the difference between fair and equal in our classroom and what that looks like for our special, unique third grade class.



## Inspire

10 minutes

### Fair vs. Equal

This unit has been focused on inclusiveness as we work towards including everyone, even when we don't know them very well. Today we are going to talk about fair versus equal because this topic comes up a lot when we are trying to include others!

Explain that **fairness** means that everyone gets what they need and that we are not favoring some people over others. Explain that **equal** means that everyone gets exactly the same thing.

### Optional Visual: Glass Half Full?

**Step 1:** Show the class the two cups: one tall and one short.

**Step 2:** Pour the same amount of water (ex. 1 cup) into both the tall and short cup (about half full for the tall glass; full for the short glass). Point out that while each cup has the same amount of water (equal), the tall cup looks much emptier than the short cup.

**Step 3:** Now, explain that to make the cups equally full, you would need to either add more water to the tall cup and take half of the water from the short cup. This would make each cup equally full, which is fair, even though the amount of water isn't the same.

**Step 4:** Ask the students if they can think of situations where people might need different amounts of help to reach the same goal. For example, some students might need extra time or help on a difficult assignment. Or, if you are bowling, your younger siblings might want the bumpers out so they don't throw gutter balls all the time.

**Step 5:** Wrap up by explaining that equal means giving everyone the same amount, while fair means giving everyone what they need to succeed, which sometimes means giving different amounts.



## Empower

15 minutes

**Story:** “Fair is Fair” by Sonny Varela

**Read Aloud link:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kVgZzLN9eQU>

This story illustrates the difference between fair and equal and how sometimes when we treat everyone equally, it can have serious consequences!

After reading the book (or watching the video), ask the following questions:

- What did the hare and giraffe notice about the amount of food they received in comparison with the elephant?
- How did they feel when they realized they received less food?
- What was their solution?
- How did that affect each of them?
- What is one example in your own life when being equal might lead to an unsafe situation? (feeding yourself the same amount of food as your little baby sibling, wearing clothes the same size as dad, etc.)



## Reflect

2-3 minutes

Remind students that understanding the difference between fair and equal can be a struggle at times. Even adults struggle with this concept! Whenever you feel yourself getting frustrated that something isn't “fair”, stop and ask yourself if that person needs exactly the same thing as me, OR do they need something different so we can both have fun and learn? Once you answer that question, it's a lot easier to see why different people need different things.



## Extension Ideas

- **At Home Extension:** Have students examine their home life. What are some areas that might be fair but not equal? Have them make a T-chart for home and share it with the class the following day.



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The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) has been reviewing evidence-based SEL programs since 2003. Kindness in the Classroom® meets CASEL's SElect Program and is included in the [CASEL Guide to Effective Social and Emotional Learning Programs](#).

Kindness in the Classroom® met or exceeded all of CASEL's criteria for high-quality SEL programming. Kindness in the Classroom® received CASEL's highest designation for high-quality SEL programming.

<https://casel.org/guide/kindness-in-the-classroom/>

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