

Taking control of our happiness

Abstract

With the rise in mental health disorders in adolescents, classroom teachers are at the forefront of this phenomenon. This unit incorporates philosophical, literary and informational materials to address how understandings of happiness may contribute to anxiety and depression.

Background

“Ms. Hastings, what scares you more? Being locked in a car with a serial killer outside of it or all of us drinking these blue sugar drinks in the morning before class?”

I laughed at the thought but realized the second of these two prospects seemed more frightening. After all, the killer would be a quick death, thirty seventh grade students in a classroom hyped on the blue sugar drink would be a long and painful morning - probably leading to death.

This seventh grade boy recognized that something about his behavior, as well as the behavior of other students in the classroom, changed when he drank this mixture.

Despite its adverse effects, though, he did not stop drinking it nor did the adults and stores around him stop making it available to him.

So, what about the behavioral impact of food or drink on students deserves more exploration and building a curriculum around? When we look beyond hyperactivity, we also see that mental health issues are on the rise in middle and high school students.

While how students choose their snacks may not be exclusively to blame, it could contribute to this phenomenon. Thus, this curriculum seeks to incorporate materials

about diet into a broader academic curriculum about happiness in order to determine if students can gain more control over their emotions. .

Rationale (or research to support the need for this curriculum)

Headlines continuously remind us that mental health disorders in adolescents are on the rise. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, suicide was the second leading cause of death for people 10 - 24 years of age in 2017 with 6,769 reported (nimh.nih.gov). An alarming rate, that is almost nineteen suicides per day.

Much research is surfacing on how today's adolescents claim more anxiety and depressive episodes. In a widely circulated piece, "Young Americans Today are More Depressed, Prone to Suicide than Generations Before", IFLScience interprets research published through the *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* in which the spike in psychological stress is attributed to electronic communication and digital media as well as disruptions in the sleep cycle. Furthermore, they state:

"Cultural trends in the last 10 years may have had a larger effect on mood disorders and suicide-related outcomes among younger generations compared with older generations," said study author Jean Twenge in a [statement](#), adding that the sharpest increase in mental health issues was after 2011. Around this time, the opioid use hit its peak in the US when the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [announced](#) overdoses were at "epidemic levels".

Hence, changes in technology, exposure to more information and rises in drug abuse contribute to what ails this generation's teenagers.

The reality of classroom teaching is that educators are a first line of defense in this phenomenon. Incorporating mental well being materials within an academic unit attempts to help students understand that they are part of larger conversations when it comes to taking care of themselves.

Standards:

CC.1.2.9-10.C: Apply appropriate strategies to analyze, interpret, and evaluate how an author unfolds an analysis or series of ideas or events, including the order in which the points are made, how they are introduced and developed and how the connections are drawn between them.

CC.1.2.9-10.H: Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing the validity of reasoning and relevance of evidence

CC.1.5.9-10.B: Evaluate a speaker's perspective, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, identify any fallacious reasoning or exaggerated or distorted evidence.

CC.1.5.9-10.C: Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse media or formats (visually, quantitatively, orally) evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source.

CC.1.5.9-10.D: Organize ideas, concepts, and information to make important connections and distinctions; use appropriate and varied transitions to link the major sections of a text; include formatting when useful to aid comprehension; provide a concluding statement or section.

Objectives:

SWBAT understand and explain how they receive messages surrounding happiness.

SWBAT will be able to apply their understanding of ethos (is the message delivered via a reliable speaker/do we trust the source?), pathos (does the message appeal to our feelings?), logos (does the message use facts/statistics to convince us?) to these messages.

SWBAT apply their understanding of ethos, pathos and logos to the analysis of the New York Times article “Can What We Eat Affect How We Feel” in order to understand how the writer presents his argument.

SWBAT to determine how a writer/speaker uses ethos, pathos, logos to support a central idea of a text.

SWBAT analyze two competing philosophical meanings of happiness.

SWBAT to be able to apply and discuss Toulmin’s argumentative analysis (Claim/Reason/Evidence/Counterclaim/Rebuttal) to various informational texts dealing with problems surrounding and solutions to finding happiness.

Lesson Plan and Activities:

This unit is constructed with philosophical, informational and literary works to enable students to think meaningfully about their feelings and understandings of happiness.

Whether messages are received via the media and music they consume or delivered through more thoughtful analyses from a variety of texts, students will be able to participate in the debates surrounding what happiness is and what it is not. Similarly, these texts and activities are intended to provide students with personal opportunities to boost their mood when they feel anxious, sad and/or depressed.

Deliverables: 1) Argumentative essay about competing understandings of happiness;

2) Creative piece (poster/Ted Talk discussion/comic book to deliver a message about happiness that showcases a message learned through the pieces we explored) 3)

Notebook containing academic notes on topic - all evidence of their participation in the topic (front) journal entries of exit tickets and mood tracking (back)

Phase One - Persuaded to be happy

Homework to be brought into class. Write down/bring in any quotes/memes you see that contain the word or ideas about happiness/being happy.

Do Now: Quickwrite: If someone asked you to explain happiness, how would you respond? From where did you get this/these idea(s)? Take 5 minutes to write as freely about the topic as you can.

Discussion around our Quickwrite - Teacher will record responses of students' ideas.

Do we see any overlap in students' perceptions of happiness? Do we all bring in the same understanding? What are some trends we see?

Guided practice (Academic notebook portion)

Lesson - Ethos/Pathos/Logos - Students will be able to understand and identify what the meanings of Ethos/Pathos/Logos are.

Teacher will provide a variety of advertisements so that we can determine the messages being delivered about happiness. Does a particular advertisement about a product promise to make one happy? If so, how? Is the advertisement employing ethos, pathos or logos to convince the audience that happiness awaits the consumer?

Teacher will demonstrate the expectations of the lesson and students will be provided time to work independently based on the materials the teacher has provided.

Exit Ticket:

Writing piece: How did your ideas about happiness change once you realized that advertisers use different devices to persuade you about what will make you happy?

Independent practice (Academic notebook portion)

Teacher will have quotes and memes that students will analyze to determine if they include ethos/pathos/logos to deliver the messages.

Day Two

Quickwrite: Oftentimes, people think about how sugar or caffeine gives us energy or changes our mood. Write about any thoughts or associations you connect to food or drink you have. What comes to mind with pizza/spaghetti and meatballs/McDonald's/anything else you can think of?

Lesson Food & Mood

Teacher guided: The article contains nineteen paragraphs. The teacher will provide the central idea of the text and analyze the first four paragraphs to determine how the details employ either ethos, pathos, or logos.

Guided practice: Students will work in partners for the next eleven paragraphs to determine if and how the writer employs ethos, pathos, or logos to support his central idea.

Independent Practice: With the remaining five paragraphs, students will work independently to determine if, where and how ethos, pathos or logos may be being used.

Homework:

Exit Ticket: Academic portion of notebook: Summary paragraph of the article that contains the central idea, evidence of the ethos/pathos/logos and students' thoughts on the connection of how food affects mental health.

Homework/Journal Assignment:

Weeklong journal task: Everyday record everything you eat and drink and the context in which you ate it.

Example: I ate a bowl of oatmeal with honey and banana for breakfast. I know that this is good for me and so I expect it to feel good for the day. Emoji - Happy face.

On my way to work, I stopped at Wawa for a 16 ounce coffee. The hash browns caught my attention so I grabbed one to eat before getting to school. While I know coffee will boost my energy, I don't associate hash browns with being good for me. I feel a bit guilty for this indulgence. Emoji - Happy and guilty face.

Day Three - Food & Mood Continued

Students will be broken into four groups so that they can present the central position/idea of a text and how the writer/speaker employs ethos, pathos, and/or logos to persuade readers/listeners.

Online research assignment to get information about food and mood -

<https://www.healthline.com/health/mood-food-can-what-you-eat-affect-your-happiness#mood-foods>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xyQY8a-ng6g>

<https://www.pcrm.org/good-nutrition/food-and-mood>

Exit Ticket:

Academic Portion of notebook - Each student is required to have notes on each presentation.

Day Four

Assessment on the food mood & mental health

Weaving together the numerous pieces we read/viewed, write a five paragraph explanatory essay of the three pieces you found the most intriguing about food and mood.

Notebook check/food and mood journal will be graded.

Phase #2 - Our Expectations of Happiness

Day Five

Do Now:

Personal component: Students will take online quiz to measure their personal happiness. How happy are you? www.thepursuitofhappiness.org

Journal Reflection: What were the results of your quiz? What are your thoughts about this?

How has the information from the material in this class influenced your ideas?

Texts:

Adler's discussion of Aristotle's Happiness - Living a Meaningful Life - What comprises a meaningful life? - copies for each student

Hedonism - Seeking pleasure/avoiding pain as the purpose of living life (excerpt from Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy) - copies for each student

Do Now (Academic portion/front)

Provide two scenarios in which students have to articulate what happiness looks like from the scenario:

Scenario #1: It's Friday night and Ms. Hastings has a group of five friends who invite her to go out for dinner and karaoke singing. She always enjoys such events. However, she had some projects she hoped to do for the weekend. She has to complete a paper for a class she is taking; she wants to hang pictures and get cleaning done in her house; she has lesson plans to write and student papers to grade. She budgeted her time appropriately so that each project would take a portion of the weekend. Although she

wants to see her friends and enjoy a night out, she declines the offer as she knows putting off the projects would mean a harder week and month for her to be able to catch up. She is satisfied with her decision.

How would you describe the happiness Ms. Hastings experiences from the decision she makes?

Scenario #2: It's Monday and a group of Ms. Hastings's friends is going out for a run and then for ice cream. The run starts at 7pm but the whole adventure could take up to 3 hours. She may not get home until 10pm. It's a school night.

When Ms. Hastings goes out for such things, she ends up tired and cranky in class. While she considers this, she thinks YOLO (you only live once) and she can catch up on sleep on Tuesday night. Besides, she's been cranky before and she really likes ice cream. Out she goes with her friends, enjoys an ice cream sundae complete with chocolate syrup, whipped cream and cherries. She lets the night escape from her as she watches 10 o'clock roll into 11 and then 12midnight. "Oh dear", she thinks, "I'm going to be exhausted and short tempered tomorrow with the students. Oh well."

How would you describe the happiness Ms. Hastings experiences from the decision she makes?

Annotating the texts/extracting the two definitions of happiness:

Guided and Independent Practice -
T - chart graphic organizer

Aristotle's definition of happiness (living a meaningful life/delaying gratification)

Hedonism (seeking pleasure/avoiding pain/immediate gratification)

Exit Ticket (journal portion/back)

Write two scenarios in which a person makes a “meaningful life” choice in one scenario and a “hedonistic - full or pleasure/absent of pain” choice in the scenario.

Day Six

Assignment of Leo Tolstoy’s “The Death of Ivan Ilyich” to be read through the lenses of “meaningful life” vs. “hedonistic” mentalities. In the academic portion of the notebook, students will be assigned pages of reading and produce evidence and explanation for where Tolstoy is writing about each lense. Each night will require 3 -4 pages of reading, a short quiz will be given each day to ensure students read the assigned pages. This quiz will serve as the Do Now going forward in the class.

In class, we will read the first 4 - 5 pages together so that the teacher can demonstrate the journal entries required.

Do Now: (academic portion)

Quickwrite: If you look at the society in which you live, what would you argue is the major cause of unhappiness/sadness? What would your recommendation be to fix this problem?

Instructional Component

Template to analyzing the text:

- 1) What does the writer claim is the problem with happiness (does it fall under “meaningful life” or “hedonistic”)?
- 2) What reason does the writer provide?
- 3) What is the evidence he/she uses to support?
- 4) Does the writer provide a counterclaim?
- 5) If so, what is the writer’s rebuttal?

- 6) Going to the journal - What are your thoughts about the piece? How would you agree or disagree with him/her?

Text: "Secrets of a Happier Life" by Emma Seppala from Time Magazine's "The Science of Happiness" - September 2017

1. The writer claims that people get so caught up in getting ahead in their career/life that they don't know how to appreciate happiness. According to the piece, the problem could fall under both the "meaningful life" and "hedonistic" category because the reach for happiness could be about working hard and getting fulfillment from a career or "hedonistic" in that pleasure is derived from material objects like a big house. Instead, the writer contends that there are specific ways in which people can slow down to be happier. Foremost, the writer argues that people should focus their minds on the present and be less future oriented (pg 14). Meditation and focusing breath tactics can help to bring one into the present (pg. 15 - 16). Additionally, the writer suggests that taking a "technology fast" is in order (pg. 14).
2. The reason the writer provides for her position is that people do not slow down to appreciate that which they have since they are just going for more and more. Hence, they are unhappy waiting for their happiness to be attained through the goals they seek to achieve.
3. The evidence the writer uses to support her position includes research on being present. She cites a study conducted by psychologists at Harvard University that found people are often checked out of their tasks but their happiness levels

increased when they are actively engaged in a task in the present moment (pg. 13).

4. The writer offers a counterclaim in the way of technology and the ability to multitask. Some argue that it makes life easier to achieve more through the ability to do multiple things and, thus, the more one is able to achieve the more satisfaction is guaranteed (pg. 12).
5. The rebuttal to this is that the more technology is present in people's lives, the more people have to do. The more people have to do contributes to the stress levels people experience (pg. 13). Therefore, the pursuit of happiness can become inhibited by the overuse of technology.
6. My own thoughts on the piece. This piece offers valuable insight into the idea of happiness. I know I often get caught up and stress myself out with worry about achieving my goals. I use meditation to help keep me focused or when I feel too stressed. Additionally, I notice that when I have my cell phone in my hand, I'm only half present in conversations. Thus, this is a good reminder to take a break from it when I'm having a conversation.

When completed we will have a paragraph frame for writing the piece to ensure we are giving proper credit to the thoughts of the writer.

In the "Secrets of a Happier Life" article, the writer, Emma Seppala, identifies a major problem people face when they are trying to attain happiness: they get so caught up in their pursuit of happiness, goals and material possessions, that they are unable to appreciate that which they have. Their desire to want more and always looking to the next accomplishment on their "to do list" inhibits the feeling of happiness. Citing a

research study conducted by psychologists at Harvard that found people who are checked out of their present moment also feel high levels of stress, she states that people need to focus more intently on their moment they are living. This same research study found that people who are actively engaged in their present moment reported higher levels of happiness. Hence, it supports her theory. A way in which Seppala contends that people can stay engaged in the present would be by taking breaks from their technology so that they are not trying to multitask so much. Additionally, she offers breathing techniques and meditation as tools for people who find themselves stressed while worrying about the future.

Guided practice

The article to be done together applying the template for analysis is “Can Money Buy Happiness?”

As a class, we will do steps 1 - 5 together as well as the paragraph frame.

Exit Ticket: (journal portion of notebook)

A paragraph in which students offer their thoughts on this piece.

Days Seven through Eleven

Do Nows:

Quizzes on “The Death of Ivan Ilyich”

Brief discussions to follow

All students will be provided with copies of 5 articles relating to happiness. Students will be assigned to groups in which their group will be responsible for analyzing and presenting one article. Each day will be the presentation of an article. Students will be

required to take notes in the academic portion of the notebook. Each day's exit ticket will be their own thoughts on the points the article made (at least one paragraph).

Articles:

1. "Does Spirituality Make Us Happy?" by Bryan Walsh, Time Magazine
2. "The Power of Gratitude" by Ellen Seidman, Time Magazine
3. "Happiness is a glass half-empty", The Guardian
4. "Happiness is other people", The New York Times
5. "The Power of Positive People", The New York Times

Also included in Days Seven through Eleven are assigned TedTalks in which students utilize Toulmin's argumentative structure to analyze the talks

Those talks students will analyze are:

1. Robert Waldinger's "What Makes a Good Life?"
2. Emily Smith's "There's More to Life Than Being Happy"
3. Don Norman's "The Three Ways that Good Design Makes You Happy"
4. Students' may self select a TedTalk video to watch and apply the same analytic structure

Assessment of this portion of the unit

- 1) Academic portion of the notebook to ensure all Do Nows & Exit Tickets are complete
- 2) Short essay test on the different problems/solutions/theories analyzed

Unit Deliverables:

- 1) Argumentative Essay Prompt choices: 1) Imagine you are riding on the subway and overhear a conversation between a couple sitting in front of you. The woman

says: "I just don't understand why I feel so sad. I have everything I want: a nice house, a good boyfriend, the job I sought, great friends. I just can't shake this feeling." The man next to her just looks at her. You lean forward and say, "Excuse me, Miss. We've been talking about these very feelings in my English class. Here is what I learned." Using at least five of the sources you encountered in this unit, write an essay giving advice through what the sources said. Provide them in the order in which you think the advice is best. 2) Using five of the sources, write a more straightforward piece in which you evaluate the advice that is given.

- 2) Each student will produce one creative piece (poster/their own TedTalk/comic book) that delivers a message on happiness. If students choose to work in partnership with another student, each student of the team must have recognizable tasks that has been done by each one.
- 3) Notebook to be graded showing all of the work completed.

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