

# An Outline of the Science of Happiness mini-lessons

**Perspective 1: Happiness through self-awareness** – students will explore different ways of increasing happiness through self-awareness.

## a. Character Strengths and Virtues

- i. Essential Question: How do strengths and virtues contribute to happiness? Aristotle once claimed that virtue was THE essential ingredient to happiness. By the end of this mini-lesson, students should have formed an opinion about Aristotle's claim
- ii. Pre-Reading Assignment – introductory and intermediate content on the character strengths and virtues section of the Science of Happiness (SOH) pages.
- iii. Discussion Topic - watch the Interview with the Experts video on Seligman and Aristotle. How do these two experts – an ancient philosopher and contemporary Psychologist – compare in how they view the essential ingredients of happiness?
- iv. Application – have students take the VIA Character Strengths and Virtues online assessment (free) and discuss results in small groups. Then, students can write and present to the class (or create a class blog or YouTube video) on a topic like: *in what ways do my signature strengths contribute to my happiness?*

## b. Flow Mini-Lesson

- i. Essential Question: How does being in a Flow state – being so absorbed in an activity that you completely lose track of time – contribute to happiness?
- ii. Pre-Reading Assignment: Introductory and intermediate content on Flow (SOH).
- iii. Discussion topic: Students will begin mini-lesson by watching an Interview with the Expert on Csikszentmihalyi about his deeper study. Students will break into pairs and discuss how they define the term “flow” and what they consider to be flow activities in their lives.
- iv. Practical assignment: Students will conduct a 1-week experiment in pairs by text messaging each other at regular intervals and writing down the level of their flow state. Pairs will present findings to the group, including suggestions for ways to increase flow in their daily lives.

## c. Optimism Mini-Lesson

- i. Essential Question: The truth is that some people are more naturally optimistic than others. How does optimism contribute to happiness? And is there hope for the pessimists of the world?
- ii. Pre-Reading Assignment: Introductory and intermediate content on Optimism (SOH).
- iii. Discussion Topic: Students will read a chapter of Seligman's Authentic Happiness that includes a self-assessment. Students will select a current event issue and analyze the optimism/pessimism of the character using the definition provided by Seligman.
- iv. Practical assignment: Students will conduct an experiment for one week where they collect “evidence” of optimistic/pessimistic thinking from sources of their choice, including news media, friends, family, self, teachers, celebrities, academic characters, etc. They can either a) write an essay or daily blog entries, b) present to the class, or c) create a documentary short video that discusses trends they noticed during their data collection.

**Perspective 2: Happiness through the senses** – students will explore different ways of increasing happiness through the senses.

## d. Exercise Mini-Lesson –

- i. Essential Question: Some doctors now prescribe exercise as one effective treatment for depression. How and why does physical exercise promote happiness?
- ii. Pre-Reading Assignment: Intro and Intermediate content on Exercise modules (SOH).

- iii. Discussion Topic: Students will read a study about the impact of exercise on depression and mood, and discuss in small groups.
  - iv. Practical Assignment: Students will divide into groups and develop an ad campaign for the school to identify the benefits of exercise on mind and body.
- e. **Meditation Mini-Lesson** –
- i. Essential Question: How and why does meditation enhance happiness? How does the happiness resulting from meditation compare to happiness gained from Flow?
  - ii. Pre-Reading Assignment: Intro and Intermediate content on Meditation (SOH) plus Intro content on Buddha (HOH).
  - iii. Discussion Topic: Students will explore the Buddha module that includes an audio meditation they will try out in class and discuss in small groups.
  - iv. Practical Assignment: Students will try out a 3-minute meditation once a day for the following week, writing daily entries about their experience on the class Weblog.
- f. **Positive Reminiscence and Savoring** –
- i. Essential Question: How does Positive Reminiscence promote Savoring? And how does Savoring promote happiness?
  - ii. Pre-Reading Assignment: Intro and Intermediate content on Positive Reminiscence and Savoring (SOH).
  - iii. Discussion Topic: Students will read an article about the impact of positive reminiscence (savoring a peak memory) on well-being.
  - iv. Practical Assignment: Students will write about a past peak experience in great detail. Students will give presentations on their peak memory.

**Perspective 3: Happiness through others** – students will explore different ways of increasing happiness through relationships with others.

- g. **Intimate Relationships Mini-Lesson** –
- i. Essential Question: How do intimate relationships contribute to happiness? And in what ways can we foster happiness in our relationships with others?
  - ii. Pre-Reading Assignment: Students will read the module on intimate relationships discussing the research findings in this area (SOH).
  - iii. Discussion Topic: Using *Psychology* (Myers, Worth Publishing), students will take a relationship inventory to determine what traits they feel are most important in intimate relationships.
  - iv. Practical Assignment: Students will then create an essay or video blog discussing the similarities and differences in what men and women want in friendships, romantic and familial relationships.
- h. **Altruism Mini-Lesson** –
- i. Essential Question: What does altruism mean and how does it contribute to happiness?
  - ii. Pre-Reading Assignment: students will read some excerpts of Confucius' writing (HOH) and the introductory content on about volunteering (SOH).
  - iii. Discussion Topic: Students will watch the Interview with the Expert video on Confucius and discuss how his philosophy on altruism compares to the current scientific evidence on volunteerism and wellbeing.
  - iv. Practical Assignment: Students will be asked to create and conduct their own experiment about caring for others and produce a newsletter/video/slideshow of their results. For example, students might visit local nursing homes and produce a video of their involvement to share with the rest of the school in a public service announcement. Or, students might interview volunteers at the local hospital and present a slideshow profiling a day in the life of the volunteers.
- i. **Expressing Gratitude** –
- i. Essential Question: How does gratitude contribute to happiness?

- ii. Pre-Reading Assignment: students will read the Intro and Intermediate content on Gratitude (SOH).
- iii. Discussion Topic: Students will watch the Interview with the Experts video of the Dalai Lama, discussing afterward the different types and frequencies of gratitude. Gratitude can be expressed in many different ways – what comes most naturally to each of them?
- iv. Practical Assignment: students will be asked to keep a gratitude journal for two weeks and present results to the group. As an alternate or additional activity, students can write a letter to someone (parent, teacher, coach, friend) expressing their gratitude before they graduate.

**Perspective 4: Happiness through purpose** – students will explore different ways of increasing happiness through having a sense of purpose. Students will choose one of the topics listed below, doing the related readings and activities, and keeping a class blog of their experience and progress. After finishing all of the activities, students will develop their own presentation (in small groups) to share their findings with the class. Each group could focus on one of the topics below.

- j. **Religious & Spiritual Engagement** – students will read the introductory content in the Religious and Spiritual Engagement Module, and the intermediate level research results. Students will discuss in a small group how the research aligns with their own personal experience (or not) and present a preliminary hypothesis as to why religious and spiritual engagement impacts happiness.
- k. **Sense of Purpose** - First, students will watch the “Interview with the Expert” module on Victor Frankl and then read Man’s Search for Meaning. Students will complete a creative writing assignment about their most challenging life experience and how that has provided meaning for their life now. Students will then present their findings to the class.
- l. **Meaningful Goals** – After watching the “interview with the expert” video on Ed Diener, students will read a research article about goal setting. Then, students will identify short term goals (in the next 6 weeks) and long term goals (6 months; 6 years). Then, they will develop their list with a written explanation or they could develop a collage/montage of goals with pictures and symbols that they could share with the class.
- m. **Motivation, Humanistic Theory** – students will watch the “interview with the expert” video on Maslow and read the introductory content of the Maslow Modules. Students will complete a self-guided activity to identify their needs at all the levels and to identify how they were met and to what degree they satisfied them. Students will then present their hierarchy of needs to the class using visual aids.