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Happy Thoughts = Happy Classroom

Happy Thoughts = Happy Classrooms

A 21-day transformative experience for students and teachers to solve for happiness and discover the JOY of teaching and learning!

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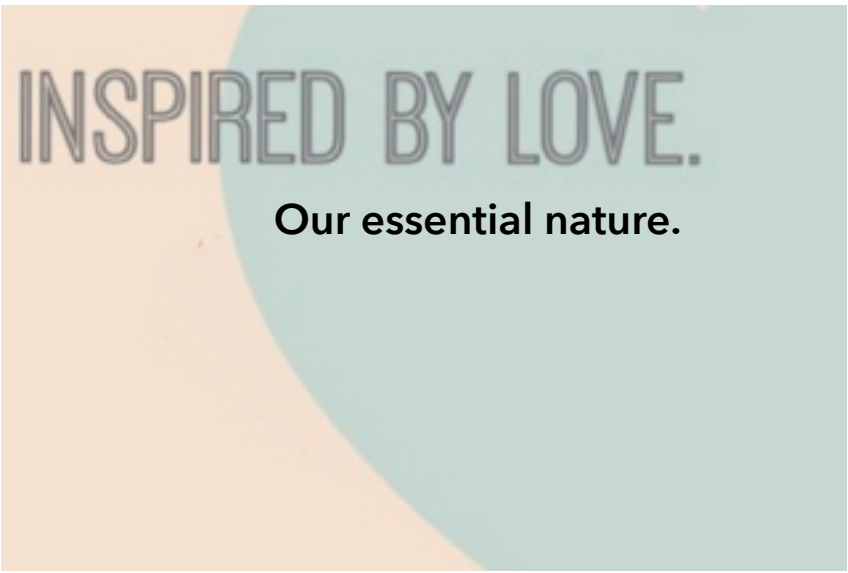

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"If you fill yourself with thoughts of love, you will get it."
Robert Emmons, Author of Gratitude Works!

Goals and Objectives

- Discover the science of happiness and the six sustainable skills of happiness (mindfulness, gratitude, positive outlook, human connection, generosity and purpose)
- Understand what mindfulness is and what a deliberate mindfulness practice looks like
- Explore gratitude and its connection to mindfulness and happiness
- Discover the health benefits of gratitude journaling
- Explore social emotional themes and skills related to self and social awareness
- Increase connectivity and collaboration in the classroom and community
- Increase gratitude, compassion and kindness toward self and others
- Integrate breathwork and body awareness to reduce stress and anxiety
- Integrate team building activities
- Learn how to define and measure mindfulness outcomes and to evaluate practice
- Understand what the latest research on gratitude, mindfulness and happiness means for the self, the school culture, families, and community

Language Arts Florida Standards

1. LAFS.68. WHST. 4 : Range of Writing: Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences. Cognitive Complexity: Level 3: Strategic Thinking & Complex Reasoning
2. LAFS.8.SL.1.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 8 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly. a. Come to discussions prepared, having read or researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence on the topic, text, or issue to probe and reflect on ideas under discussion. b. Follow rules for collegial discussions and decision-making, track progress toward specific goals and deadlines, and define individual roles as needed. c. Pose questions that connect the ideas of several speakers and respond to others' questions and comments with relevant evidence, observations, and ideas. d. Acknowledge new information expressed by others, and, when warranted, qualify or justify their own views considering the evidence presented. Cognitive Complexity: Level 3: Strategic Thinking & Complex Reasoning
3. LAFS.8. L. 2.3 Use knowledge of language and its conventions when writing, speaking, reading, or listen

Course Overview

Description

Ideally, at the beginning of the school year or 21 days before the FSA Writing/Reading Assessment, when anxiety is high, students are introduced to a powerful 15-20 minute mindfulness journaling routine to help them visualize and verbalize everyday things that they are grateful for. Through these brief, weekly sittings in stillness, writing, listening, and reflecting students and teachers begin a journey of awareness, self-discovery, and inner peace. Each day of gratitude journaling will teach one mindfulness concept or theme to deepen awareness of thoughts and judgments, overcome obstacles in the way of happiness, and create space for new insights and creativity. This project provides students and teachers a research based approach to strengthen thought patterns as well as writing skills. Guided mindfulness practices are used to help calm and relax the mind, and increase a flow of ideas during the journaling process. Gradually, through deliberate practice, integrating mindfulness, gratitude and writing will release roadblocks and negative thinking. Through this 21 day inner exploration, students and teachers will learn that the path to joy and happiness isn't about searching for anything outside of ourselves. It's about discovering the love already within us, and-with gratitude-expressing this love in all of our relationships and everyday actions.

Purpose

The purpose of this project is to show the connection between mindfulness and gratitude as vital keys to happiness. Students will use writing skills, technology, and critical thinking about real-world social emotional issues. Through mindfulness, or the awareness of thoughts and feelings, students will be prepared to make conscious choices. Solving for happiness is easy by tapping into the present moment, and allowing gratitude and love to be our inner guides.

Rationale

Why teach mindfulness and gratitude? As an ELA teacher, I am always looking for ways to engage my students to write. This project has motivated reluctant writers to express themselves without fear. Usually, students put the pen down after a few minutes (if they even get started at all), but during this exercise they don't want to stop. There is nothing more satisfying as a teacher than when a student connects with an assignment and asks for more. It's also gratifying to see how many are willing to share their thoughts and express their feelings as the group begins to trust and support each other more. In addition to increasing writing fluidity and creating classroom connections, I have noticed that students are writing with more detail and using specific word choices. With consistent practice, these grateful moments have changed the culture of my classroom and helped to reduce test anxiety and antisocial behavior. The whole energy of the classroom is more positive. As attitudes improve, negativity, complacency, and feelings of entitlement, transform to optimism, hope and happy thoughts. Through awareness, students learn they will never be in complete control of what happens to them, but they can always control their feelings about the situation, as well as their response. I trust the process because of the transformation I myself have experienced. Gratitude has empowered me to become more compassionate, and to appreciate each individual student. It has profoundly impacted my sense of purpose, and the enjoyment of my profession. I feel fortunate to be able to model how to live in the present, with a joyful attitude-especially during challenging situations.

Research

What is Mindfulness?

According to the Justus Liebig-Harvard Report (2011), awareness-the source of both attention regulation and body awareness-is the foundation of mindfulness practice or being present in the moment. This awareness encompasses the following: the breath, the body, emotions, thoughts, the five senses of seeing, hearing, touching, tasting and smelling as well as our actions and how they affect ourselves and others in a nonreactive and nonjudgmental way. Simply put, "Mindfulness is paying attention to your life, here and now, with kindness and curiosity". (MKM)

What we've learned?

Research demonstrates that mindfulness training for children and teens

- Increases attention and focus-resulting in higher academic achievement
- Reduces stress-allowing children to learn more and perform better
- Improves impulse control-increasing teaching time in the classroom
- Develops emotional regulation-teaching children to respond rather than react
- Builds empathy and compassion-cultivating greater tolerance; reducing cruelty, bullying, and violence resulting in safer and happier schools

How can teachers make the most of the present moment inthe classroom?

Our thoughts create our reality. Most of us live our lives "on automatic pilot" triggered into reactive mode by old habits of thinking that we aren't even aware of. Everything we experience is a reflection of our mind so it's important to pay attention to our thoughts, feelings and body sensations. By becoming aware of their thoughts, we give students the tools to free themselves from old thinking patterns and make better, less reactive choices.

What is the impact on teaching and learning?

Researchers have found there are ways to retrain the brain to become more positive. What they discovered is that when gratitude, journaling, exercise, meditation and random acts of kindness are practiced for 21 days, the brain can actually be rewired by simply implementing these small changes(Achor):

Creating lasting positive transformation and big ripples of positivity

- 3 Gratitude's
- Journaling
- Exercise
- Meditation
- Random acts of kindness

According to Robert Emmons, author of Gratitude Works, and the world's leading scientific expert on gratitude, people are 25% happier if they keep gratitude journals. That means if you were to rate your happiness on a scale from 1 to 100, and you said 70, a journaling practice would bring you up to 95!

Developing and sustaining a grateful life can be easier said than done because the choice for gratitude rarely comes without some real effort, but a number of evidence-based strategies, including self-guided journaling, reflective thinking, letter writing, and gratitude visits have shown to be effective in creating sustainable gratefulness. (Emmons)

Keeping a gratitude journal enables both students and adults to be more optimistic, experience more social satisfaction, exercise more often, have less envy and depression, have fewer physical complaints, and sleep better. Keeping a gratitude journal helps students achieve higher grades; higher goals; more satisfaction with relationships, life, and school; less materialism; and more willingness to give back. (Edutopia)

Lesson Plan

TOPIC: Acquiring Gratitude and Happiness

Objectives:

- Discover the science of happiness and the six sustainable skills of happiness (mindfulness, gratitude, positive outlook, human connection, generosity and purpose).
- Explore gratitude and its connection to mindfulness and happiness
- Understand what mindfulness is and what a deliberate mindfulness practice looks like
- Discover the health benefits of mindfulness and gratitude journaling

Essential Question: Why does being grateful and mindful lead to happiness?

The truth, for so many people is that happiness is found externally (in our relationships and material things). But in reality, happiness starts with thoughts, and what we tell ourselves every day. Everything begins and ends with our thoughts. As a result, it is important to begin and end each day with a grateful heart according to the science of happiness. Change the perspective or way you look at things, and observe how what you are looking at transforms.

Students deserve to know the latest research about the brain and our capacity to reshape our thinking about our relationships, our world, and ourselves.

They need to become aware of the false, destructive, and unkind thoughts in their head. Believing that we are worthy, kind, and loving will manifest back to us in miraculous ways. If we want to find happiness, then we must recognize and practice gratitude. If we want a happy classroom, then we need to cultivate a culture of happy thoughts. For the next 21 days, students will be encouraged to reflect on the questions "What is the connection between gratitude, mindfulness and happiness?" " What stops you from acquiring gratitude and happiness?" "How can we cultivate a grateful heart?" "How can we practice gratitude even in a negative situation or disappointment?" "Why does being grateful and mindful lead to happiness?

Duration: 15-20 minutes weekly (once or twice a week) within a span of 21 days infused within the class period as a writing activity

Before the Inner Journey

Day 1)

Set a purpose-Tell the class that for the next 21 days we will explore ways to be grateful and happy. Watch the video, Gratitude and Happiness, (Discovery Education) and engage students in thoughtful conversation about the video and the latest research on the science of happiness. Post the SIX SUSTAINABLE HAPPINESS SKILLS reference sheet, then have students test their happiness rating scale. Close by creating or personalizing their gratitudejournals.

Day 2)

Introduce Mindfulness. Review the Six Sustainable Happiness Skills, focusing on Mindfulness. Define new vocabulary terms for the students-Mindfulness, Stillness, Awareness, Presence, Gratitude. Explain there are many ways to practice mindfulness-including walking, eating, and sitting. Model for students, the S.T.O.P and Loving Kindness mini mindfulness practices. For example: Ask "Are you awake?"

"Are you present, engaged in the here and now?" Say, let's begin by sitting quietly with eyes closed (or open if you prefer) . At this moment focus on your breath, breathing in and out like soft ocean waves-breathe in and out (3x). Notice how your body is feeling? Are you tense and tight, or are you feeling calm and relaxed. Just notice. As a class, set the intention to pay attention, be awake and aware, and take action to become more present and grateful. Invite students to trust the process and share their present moment experience. What did they notice, how do they feel? Simply observe and answer any questions they might have. Are you ready to begin the 21-Day Inner Journey?

During the Inner Journey (Weekly Journaling Procedure)

(5-minute mindfulness practice, 10-minute journaling, and 5 minute reflection)

- Create a calm, peaceful classroom space with soft, relaxing music and invite students to sit in a circle with their gratitude journals ready
- Prepare for stillness-Silence phones, set limits, sit up straight, sound chimes
- Begin S.T.O.P. or other Mindfulness Practice such as Loving, Kindness
- Gently invite students to notice what they are grateful for today…(see suggested writing prompts) . Encourage them not to hurry through the exercise, but instead to think of it as a gift, paying attention to the feelings that arise, and taking the time to "relish" and "savor" the awareness and depth of their gratitude

After the Inner Journey-Reflection

Engage in reflective and collaborative discussions related to self-awareness, social awareness, loving kindness, positivity, generosity, compassion, human connection, purpose and gratitude ----connecting to the EQ-Why does gratitude and mindfulness lead to happiness?

Assessment

Formative Assessment: Teacher observation of discussion and questions presented during the journal reflections

Self-Assessment: Students will assess themselves using a pre/post happiness rating scale

Summative Assessment: With expanded awareness and understanding of what happiness really means, students will use the ideas presented during discussion to analyze the question "Why does being grateful and mindful lead to happiness?" in a thoughtful, expanded journal entry.

Homelearning

Before going to sleep or at the start of your day, think about your day and remember to say thank you. What are you grateful for today? Write about 3 gratitude's in your journal at least once week or more if inspired.

Standards

LAFS.68. WHST. 4 : Range of Writing: Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.

Cognitive Complexity: Level 3: Strategic Thinking & Complex Reasoning

LAFS.8.SL.1.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 8 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly. a. Come to discussions prepared, having read or researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence on the topic, text, or issue to probe and reflect on ideas under discussion.

b. Follow rules for collegial discussions and decision-making, track progress toward specific goals and deadlines, and define individual roles as needed. c. Pose questions that connect the ideas of several speakers and respond to others' questions and comments with relevant evidence, observations, and ideas. d. Acknowledge new information expressed by others, and, when warranted, qualify or justify their own views considering the evidence presented. Cognitive Complexity: Level 3: Strategic Thinking & Complex Reasoning

LAFS.8. L. 2.3 Use knowledge of language and its conventions when writing, speaking, reading, or listening.

Resources

21- Day Suggested Journaling Questions to establish the habit of paying attention to gratitude inspiring events and open ourselves to limitless possibilities for a richer,fuller life

Day 1-5 Focus -(SEL-Self/Social Awareness); Mindfulness Theme- Connecting to thoughts feelings, and strengths and recognizing how they influence choices and actions

I am... (simply notice what thoughts arise in the present, and write down any thoughts flowing about yourself).

For 5-minutes, set a timer, and start writing as many things as you can for which you are grateful now. (Don't over think, just notice what shows up) If you're having a good day, write about all the things you appreciate. If you're having a bad day, be grateful for getting home safely or having running water.

What brings you joy? Write with as many details as you can

Describe a negative situation or disappointment in your life, and how you were able to turn it around? How has that situation or disappointment led you to something better? Something you might not have ever imagined

Have you complained about anything today? This week? This year? Notice what you are complaining about. Is there a pattern of negative thought? How can you flip the complaint to a positive statement?

DAY 6-10 Focus-(SEL-Self/Social Awareness): Mindfulness Theme - Connecting to expressions of lovingkindness

Can you think of someone in your life that you are grateful for? Can you describe how the person's words or actions affected you? Did you have the chance to express your gratitude to this person? If you could talk to that person right now what would you say?

Recall a time when you did something kind,caring or helpful for another person. Replay that scene in your mind.

Write about a time that you acted in a kind way toward someone else that was perhaps challenging or difficult for you? What made this difficult? How were you able to deal with the difficulty and still act kindly? What was your intention for doing this? How did you feel?

Talk about a moment in your life that was or is pure love and light

How does it feel when you have a grateful heart? Give an example and notice your body sensations as you remember a grateful moment? Did you feel sorrow, pain, or joy and happiness? What does gratitude feel like to you?

Day 11-15-Focus- (SEL-Self/Social Awareness); Mindfulness Theme: Connecting to the wonders of nature and the universe.

What about nature are you grateful for? Say "thank you" to the Earth and send her good wishes in your gratitude journal today.

Be mindful of your five senses. How does each enhance your life? What if you didn't have one of your senses? Explore gratitude through your sense of taste? What do you notice about how you eat? How can you eat mindfully tomorrow?

Look around. Use your power of observation and mindfulness to really appreciate everything around you with wonder and write about what you see. Gratitude shows up in surprising ways- a bird chirping, a blooming tree, a smile, children's laughter, a kind word. Try this on your way to or from school and surprise yourself with abundant reasons for gratitude.

If you could talk to a tree, a bird, the ocean, what would you say? What do you think a tree, a flower, a bird might say to you? Invite this conversation into your journal now.

Think about the wonder of creation and miracle of life and who you really are. What is a unique quality about yourself that you are grateful for?

What is one thing about your health that you are grateful for? What is one thing about your health you would like to improve? How can we love and take care of our body?

Day 16-20-Focus- (Self/Social Awareness); Mindfulness Theme: Connecting to compassion for self and others

List 1 person and 1 small thing you take for granted. How can you express more appreciation for this person/thing?

What is one personality trait you are most thankful for?

Think about a time that you went out of your way to help someone? Relive that moment in your journal now.

Name 3 things you can start doing today to express your gratitude to others? (helping, volunteering, donating, posting a kind Facebook message ,etc.)

What are irritations in your life that could use a change in perspective? Can you take this irritation less seriously, or find humor in it? Not take it so personally? How can that shift or change in thought have a positive effect in your life?

Day21-CulminatingActivity

Connect to EQ? Why does being grateful and mindful lead to joy and happiness?" Write a thoughtful, expanded journal entry about your inner journey throughout these 21 days. What have you learned about joy, mindfulness and happiness? Notice and observe what feelings are showing up at this moment…notice what thoughts are showing up. What is one thing you can take away from this mindfulness experience? Write a thank you note to yourself for showing up and practicing self-care…send yourself love and friendly wishes as we begin the new school year/or prepare for our exams.

Close by inviting students to - revisit their happiness rating scale, and complete a post survey.

Materials and Set Up:

1. Clearing Subconscious Negativity, Meditation Music for Positive Energy, Healing Music https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gl3T3zW7gF8

2. Composition books or construction paper and miscellaneous art supplies to createjournals

3. Meditation chimes

4. Six Sustainable Happiness Reference Sheet and Rating Scale https://www.learnexperiencehappiness.com/sites/learnexperiencehappiness.com/files/educator-resource-files/LG-DYH-Y2-Educator-Activity.pdf

   https://www.learnexperiencehappiness.com/sites/learnexperiencehappiness.com/files/educator-resource-files/Classroom%20Activity_Measuring%20Happiness

5. Video: Gratitude and Positive Outlook-Discovery Education (4:56)

   https://app.discoveryeducation.com/learn/videos/ de75bd4e-5ca9-42c4-a5ef-8bdaae2a8376/

6. MindfulnessPractices(S.T.O.P.),LovingKindness,andmore…

   https://palousemindfulness.com/docs/STOP.pdf,

   https://www.stopbreathethink.com/wp- content/uploads/SBT_High-School-Intro-Packet.pdf

   Mindful Kids Miami Teacher Training Manuel

   Innerexplorer.org

Adaptability:

This project can be easily adapted and/or accommodated for any grade level

1. Simple, basic gratitude journaling prompt- For the primary and elementary grades as well as ELL or SPED students begin with a daily or weekly gratitude journal prompt such as "Today, I am grateful for…"

2. Pair journal prompts with books such as "An Awesome Book of Thanks", "Have You Filled a Bucket Today", "The Important Book", the "Thankful Book" and "The Secret of Saying Thanks". Students might be inspired to create a gratitude bulletin board, a gratitude tree or their own "Book of Awesome". Download FREE printable journal pages as well as the "I am thankful" activity at https://proudtobeprimary.com/gratitude-lesson/

3. Create a board of thanks with positive sticky notes, grateful cards or drawings schoolwide

4.Spread the Love- According to the research, gratitude begins with appreciation, but "giving back" makes the process complete. Motivational speakers can be invited to speak throughout the school year to share their unique life experiences. In addition, at my school, we solicited the help from community sponsorships to create a "Tranquility" room for teachers and students to relax and recharge. Teachers can also encourage kindness and gratitude community- based projects or clubs, as well as encourage students to text or email a "thank you" note to someone they appreciate. Students can also post a kind message on Facebook or Instagram.

5. Math and Science, 'Measuring Happiness', LG and Discovery Education https://www.learnexperiencehappiness.com/sites/learnexperiencehappiness.com/files/educator-resource-files/Classroom%20Activity_Measuring%20Happiness_PreVFT_DYH_FNL.pdf

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