

Self-Awareness

Lesson Title: On Glasses, Fullness, and Emptiness

Grade Level: High School

Project and Purpose

Students build arguments to convince their peers of the best way to develop a strong sense of optimism.

Essential Question

How do you develop a strong sense of optimism?

Materials

- Clear cup, ½ full of water (or ½ empty of water, depending on how you look at it)
- Optimism Option cards — these are index cards with a quotation or a suggestion for improving one's sense of optimism (provided at end of lesson)
- Access to research in print or online
- Paper and writing tools or computer writing programs
- Open space

Teacher

1. Put the cup of water in a place where everyone can see it and ask students for observations and scribe their words.
2. Post the old saying, "The optimist sees the glass as half full, while the pessimist sees the glass as half empty" and ask students what this phrase means. Have they ever heard this phrase assigned to anyone—including themselves—as a reflection of behavior or attitude? Describe the situation. If not, provide examples from your own experiences or observations.
3. Next post the Ta-Nehisi Coates quotation: "My job is to look out on that world I write about and be as honest as I possibly can about the world. If that is optimistic and uplifting, OK. If it's not, OK." Compare/contrast to the old saying about glasses, fullness, and emptiness. What does it say about optimism and pessimism? Explain.
4. Next post the CASEL (Collaborative for Academic and Social Emotional Learning) descriptor for the core competency of Self-awareness:
"The ability to accurately recognize one's emotions and thoughts and their influence on behavior. This includes accurately assessing one's strengths and limitations and possessing a well-grounded sense of confidence and optimism."
5. Discuss why they think "possessing a well-grounded sense of optimism" is an important part of self-awareness. If they are not optimistic, does that mean they are not self-aware? Explain.
6. Explain that there are many theories out there about optimism, many of which are summed up by brief sayings or quotations by experts and others. In this session students will work with some of the theories of optimism and create a persuasive presentation to convince others their idea is the right one to live by.

7. Break the class into working groups of no more than five (5) people. Each group should select a facilitator, 2 scribes, at least one presenter, and a member at large. Their task is to create a persuasive presentation based on their assigned tenet that includes:
 - A strong claim
 - Support to make the claim believable and acceptable: data (but not an overwhelming amount), stories, anecdotes, quotations, research, etc. The support should be logical yet somehow appeal to the group's emotions. It should matter to them. They may use visual aids to illustrate their support information.
 - A concluding statement with a strong call to accept the tenet as the best.
 - A persuasive speech presented by one or more of the group members. The persuasive speeches must be between 1-3 minutes.
8. Distribute one tenet/quotation to each group and give them time to work on their persuasive arguments.
9. Determine the order of the presentations and discuss appropriate audience behavior.

Conclusion

Discuss: Which, if any of the tenets, defines the best way to develop a strong sense of optimism in life? Why?

Notes

[illegible]

Optimism Options

Fake it till you make it and smile.

Wear a smile and pretty soon your face will convince your brain that things are pretty good.

~ Idea by Susan C. Vaughan, MD

"Always look on the bright side of life."

No matter what, there is something good to find in every situation.

~ Monty Python, *The Life of Brian*

Choose not be the victim of unfairness.

"You may not control all the events that happen to you, but you can decide not to be reduced by them."

~ Maya Angelou

Choose to change your perspective on life.

"If you don't like something, change it. If you can't change it, change your attitude. Don't complain."

~ Maya Angelou

Redefine the bad moments

Believe that bad outcomes can actually be good, in that they can lead to change, greater resolve, or new opportunities.

~The USC Center for Work and Family Life

Live by the final tenet of the Optimist International Creed

"Promise yourself to be too large for worry, too noble for anger, too strong for fear, and too happy to permit the presence of trouble."

Embrace the negative — for a while

"Optimists still experience negative thoughts. What makes them optimistic is their belief that adversity is 1) temporary, 2) specific and 3) a result of various factors. Pessimists, on the other hand, are more likely to see adversities as 1) permanent, 2) universal, and 3) entirely their fault."

~Chase Mielke, We Are Teachers (www.weareteachers.com)

Always look forward with hope

"For what it's worth...it's never too late, or in my case too early, to be whoever you want to be. There's no time limit. Start whenever you want. You can change or stay the same. There are no rules to this thing. We can make the best or the worst of it. I hope you make the best of it. I hope you see things that startle you. I hope you feel things you never felt before. I hope you meet people who have a different point of view. I hope you live a life you're proud of, and if you're not, I hope you have the courage to start all over again."

~F. Scott Fitzgerald (typewritten note)
