

# How to Teach Happiness at School: Sample Well-Being Lessons

by Ilona Boniwell



*Pupils of École Jeannine-Manuel. France, playing the [Strengths Cards](#) game as part of their Personal Well-being Lessons.*

## **Class Activity 1: What is Happiness? (10 min)**

*Individual Activity*

Teacher to ask students what happiness means to them; specifically (a) what does it feel like to be happy? And (b) what are you doing when you feel happy? After discussing some of the answers, students to record their responses in one or two words on Post-It notes and keep them on their desks for the time being.

## **Class Activity 2: In the Eyes of the Wise (10 min)**

*Small Group Activity*

Teacher to ask students to split into small groups and give each group a selection of quotes from philosophers, writers, scholars, and other thinkers to discuss. Students to summarize each quote on a Post-It note in one or two words. For example, if the quote is “Happiness is not a matter of destination, but a matter of traveling,” the summary might be “traveling” or “journey.” Each student should have no more than two quotes to summarize. The completed Post-It notes should also be left on their desks for the time being.

## **Main Body: What is Happiness? (20 min)**

### *Teacher Presentation and Whole-Class Activity*

Psychology and philosophy recognize two major ideas of happiness and well-being: feeling good (or hedonic well-being) and flourishing (or eudaimonic well-being). *Feeling good* is what we usually understand as happiness; it means experiencing good emotions and pleasure, engaging in fun pursuits, having good relationships, and enjoying life in general. *Flourishing* is an idea that came from Aristotle who believed that just feeling good is not enough for happiness; one also needs to live a good life to be truly happy. So flourishing is about leading a life that appears good not only in one's own but also in other people's eyes. Both ideas of happiness are important as together they make our lives more balanced.

Feeling good (or hedonic well-being) is about positive experiences (having fun and positive feelings), positive mindset (using one's thinking to challenge negative thoughts), positive relationships (friends and family), and positive energy (feeling fit, healthy, and looking after one's body).

Flourishing (or eudaimonic well-being) is about developing oneself, setting and achieving individual goals (positive direction), and also making a difference to other people.

Students to place their Post-It notes onto two flipchart sheets or two sides of a whiteboard, corresponding to both perspectives of well-being. If students need help to sort the statements out, everything concerning experiences (e.g., 'fun') and relationships (e.g., 'my family') will go on the first sheet, whilst anything related to achievement, aspirations, and helping on the second.

## **Class Activity: The Strengths Cards (20 min)**

### *Small-Group Activity*

Students to form themselves into groups of four and teacher to give each group a pack of Strengths Cards. Students to lay out all the cards where these can all be seen (floor or desks) and to examine each card in detail. Each student is to pick out their three highest strengths (it doesn't matter if two or more students choose the same strengths) and present themselves to the groups with concrete examples of using these strengths in their lives.

Next, students are asked to give strengths feedback to each other. Using the cards, students are asked to choose one Strength Card per person in the group and give feedback to each individual highlighting the strength and how that person has demonstrated it. It is important the students identify the strength, as well as an example of how they have seen this being used, as research has demonstrated that knowledge together with usage makes for a useful strength.

For example, a student might choose kindness for one of their classmates and then explain how this student was kind to them or to someone else recently.

Teacher discusses with students whether this activity made them happier. This is likely to be the case given that strengths identification is associated with increased well-being and positive affect.