Ahimsa Center K-12 Lesson Plan

Title: Happiness

Name, School Affiliation, Location: Charlotte Donkersgoed, Danube Elementary School, Granada Hills, CA

Grade Level/ Subject Area: Kindergarten/Health

Related Standards:
California Health Education Standards
Health 1.1 Identify a variety of emotions. 7.2 Describe positive ways to show care, consideration and concern for others.

Lesson Abstract: Students will learn to recognize emotions on other student’s faces. They will be able to understand feelings and discuss the things that make them happy. Finally, they will produce a product that will show what makes them truly happy.

Guiding Questions: What makes you happy? How do you know when someone is happy? What kinds of emotions do people experience and how do we recognize them? What was Gandhi’s concept of happiness and what does it mean to us today? How does the well-being of others affect our personal happiness?

Content Essay
When people think of happiness they get a picture of their life being carefree and having wealth. Especially in the Western world happiness is synonymous with wealth and power. We teach our children from a young age that stuff equals happiness. So more stuff must equal greater happiness? The problem is that when we do arrive at the goal of having a multitude of things we are still not as happy with it as we had hoped it would be. Gandhi came to the conclusion that the very happiest of people are those who live a consistently simple and balanced life. A balance is necessary in order to achieve real or sustainable happiness.

How can we come to know a happiness that is sustainable over time? We need to first find a peace within ourselves. A sense of morals and integrity is needed in order to obtain a connection to the community. Each of us has the moral responsibility to take care of our family and then to share some of our wealth with others who are less fortunate. The feeling we get from helping others in need causes a person to have true and lasting happiness. If a person decides to buy a huge home and ignore the needs of others, those things will not make a person any happier. In the article, “A Right, From the Start”, a quote from Samuel Adams states, “we too often mistake our true happiness, and when we arrive to the enjoyment of that which seemed to promise it to us, we find that it is all an imaginary dream, at best fleeting and transitory.” (McMahon) It is the slow and steady pace or the journey that gives the most happiness.

One of the attributes that happy people have is one of a gracious heart. People who are sincerely happy are those who are thankful and positive. Living a life of gratitude is contagious. It takes time to step back and recognize that what we have been given is a gift and should be appreciated. On the contrast, people who are negative and do not recognize the good in their life will not be happy with money or monetary gain. Even people who win the lottery are not any
happier after winning than they were before it. In Hind Swaraj, Gandhi states, “The more we indulge our passions, the more unbridled they become. Our ancestors, therefore, set a limit to our indulgences. They saw that happiness was largely a mental condition. A man is not necessarily happy because he is rich or unhappy because he is poor. The rich are often seen to be unhappy, the poor to be happy. Millions will always remain poor. Observing all this, our ancestors have dissuaded us from luxuries and pleasures.” (Parel)

With the self in the proper place, which would include a centered, moral character, a person is now ready to do for others. If we help someone who has a great need, we can carry the happiness that comes from the satisfaction that we took part in their needs being satisfied. This sense of sustainable happiness can be obtained through service in the classroom as well as the larger community. Through the incorporation of classroom jobs students take ownership of their classroom. Without their help, the jobs are not done and the class suffers. Students can help with many of the classroom duties including being the line leader or leading the pledge of allegiance or taking out the trash at the end of the day. Each student has a job and all jobs are important to the good of the community. Each student is equally valued and the jobs rotate on a weekly basis in order for all students to be able to learn how to serve and to experience service in varying capacities. They also learn to do this as a cooperative pair as each job is done by two students.

Something happens to the classroom community when all students are sharing jobs; everyone feels a sense of happiness as they have contributed to the good of the community. It has been my experience that as students’ help they feel a responsibility to take care of their classroom environment and this spreads outside to their playground as well. It is surprising that even a very young child can do so much to help, and this results in a lasting sustained happiness or personal swaraj.

Sustainable happiness needs to be experienced at a young age through example of adults. The media plays a big role in influencing our children from a young age to be consumerists. It relates that if we have more toys we will be happier. This is not limited to children but adults also buy into these ads on television. We purchase more than we need and then expect it to bring happiness but it only gives brief periods of pleasure.

In the book, Engineering Happiness there are six “Laws of Happiness” (Sarin). Each of these laws is the result of many studies on happiness or the lack thereof. The first law is Relative Comparison. We are only as happy as compared to our friends/colleagues. If they have more than we do then we must not be as happy. The second law is Motion of Expectation. What we have experienced in our past influences our future expectations. Our expectations change, always moving toward a new reality. Happiness equals what I have today minus what is had in the past. The third law is Aversion to Loss. If our reality is better than our expectations then we have a gain in happiness. If our reality is worse than our expectations then we experience a loss of happiness. The fourth law is Diminishing Sensitivity. If we have a bite of ice cream then it will not be a better experience if we have two bites, but diminish as we eat more and more over time. If we eat ice cream every day we will not be as satisfied as when we took that first bite. The fifth law is Satiation. Recent consumption reduces the happiness intensity of subsequent consumption; and recent abstinence increases the happiness of subsequent consumption. And the sixth law is Presentism. We predict that our future emotions and preferences will be the same as we presently expect. However, since our expectations are ever changing, so is our reality.

Children also need to understand emotions in order to interact with others since display of emotions and what someone finds humorous or sad differ by culture. As we understand what
makes each of us happy, sad or excited we can cause connections within each of us that are lasting and meaningful.

Lasting or sustainable happiness can be found when we live a simple life of service and occasional variety. As we help others we can gain an intrinsic happiness that can give a lasting feeling of fulfillment and happiness. If we are to live a life of happiness we must get involved in the lives of those in need around us. Being involved in a church congregation or other service organization can help to bring about opportunities that will help us to be truly happy.

**Bibliography:**

**Teaching Activities**
Share pictures of emotions to student. Discuss the emotions and what makes them feel each of these emotions. Then draw a circle with Happy in the middle. Have students give ideas of what makes them happy and add to circle surrounding the word “Happy” in the center. After discussing this do the same for each of the other emotions including anger, sadness, excitement and being scared. In order to help students recognize that different things may make one happy and another sad or scared, ask questions and have students show their emotion or expression when asked the following questions: 1. Mom is going to take you to the park. 2. A friend moves away. 3. You find a snake in your garden. 4. A dog licks your face. 5. A letter comes for you in the mail. 6. Your little brother breaks your new toy. 7. A new friend comes up to play with you at school.

How do they make you feel? Recognize the different emotions people feel. Some feel excited while others may be afraid. Though this exercise the students are becoming aware of others in his classroom community.

Another activity involves being a member of the classroom community through responsibility. This is best done at the beginning of the school year but can be incorporated anytime. Each student has a classroom job. They are paired up by 2 in order to help them to be accountable to each other to take care of the job if one of them is absent. Some of the jobs include: attendance monitor, flag salute, librarian, open/close gates and the door, turn on/off lights, pass our supplies, line leader, etc. as needed in your own classroom. This really develops a sense of ownership of the community.