Lesson Plans for Things to be Happy About

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As a teacher, one is always looking for creative projects and using the theme of "things to be happy about" is ideal. Lists can help us open our minds to new thoughts. As the author of 14,000 things to be happy about, I have thought about being happy in many different ways.

Students in various schools have compiled their lists and sent them to me. For example, students in a South Carolina school made a list of 100 things that make them happy, put it on a poster, and hung it up in the classroom. A school in Massachusetts had each student compile a list of 25 things to be happy about in their notebooks and then sent a copy of the notebooks to me. Sending a copy of the finished project to me can add to the lesson because I respond personally to the teacher and class. It is fun and great positive reinforcement for a class to hear back from the author.

The ice-breakers and lesson plans below are built on this theme: there is no "right" or "wrong" in creating, using, and sharing happy lists or creating writings or artwork based on happy lists. Teachers should encourage students to carry out these exercises with attention to detail, creating thoughtful and insightful work.

Ice-Breakers

At the beginning of each year or term, you get introduced to a new set of students. The following activities are ice-breakers, ways of discovering who the students are and what makes them tick.

**Ice-Breaker 1:** Sometimes in life you have to stop and smell the roses. We often forget to note what little things make us happy in a day. This ice-breaker is designed to make the student think about and note what things make them happy.

Ask each student to create a list of 14 things to be happy about. After the lists are completed, have each student read five happy thoughts out loud. Depending on the grade level and the general atmosphere, you may want to add a little instruction on keeping this a clean and fun exercise.

**Ice-Breaker 2:** Everyone gets a little nervous when the school year starts. Summer is a time for freedom and with school beginning, each student must refocus and adjust to getting back to work. This ice-breaker is designed to get the students thinking about things that make them happy about school.

Have the students list 14 things that make them happy about school. After the lists are completed, have each student read five of their thoughts to the class.

**Ice-Breaker 3:** Being a teacher is one of the most rewarding yet difficult professions a person can choose. A key element in creating a successful teaching environment is to
make sure that students know what is expected of them. This ice-breaker is designed to let the students think about what makes the teacher happy in the classroom.

Ask the students to list 14 things that would make teachers happy. After the lists are completed, have each student read a couple of those thoughts to the class.

**Ice-Breaker 4:** Help the students get to know each other. Getting off on the right foot with fellow classmates is important to classroom management.

Set up groups of 2-3 students and ask them to collaborate on a list of 14 things to be happy about. The students are to work together and get to know each other. They do not necessarily have to agree within the group that they like all the items, but have each group read five of their happy thoughts to the class that they do agree upon.

**Lesson Plans**

A lesson plan can be fun and effective at the same time. Here are some lesson plans that will help you create a positive environment while teaching important skills.

**Lesson Plan 1:** Written Composition (pre-writing skills, writing skills, or organizational skills).

Goal: Each student will put together a notebook of happy thoughts.

Objective: Given his/her happy notebook and a writing instrument, the student will write in his/her notebook for 10 minutes and come up with at least 10 happy entries.

Materials: happy notebook, writing instrument

1. The teacher will tell the students to take out their happy notebooks. The teacher will tell the students they have 10 minutes to write entries into their notebooks and to come up with at least 10 happy thoughts.

2. The teacher will also write in a happy notebook.

3. After 10 minutes, the teacher will ask the students to share some of their happy entries. The teacher will share some of his/her happy entries.

Adaptation: This project can last as long as the teacher wants. It can be used around special times like holidays or seasonal change, once a week or month, or last the entire year. This project can also be based on a theme such as sports, pets, towns. This project can be completed in a notebook or on a computer.

Evaluation: It is important for the teacher to periodically review the students' happy notebooks. This offers the teacher tremendous insight into how their students think. It also gives the teacher tools for positive reinforcement. For example, if a student's
notebook mentions horses frequently, you have a way to effectively use horses to better communicate with the student.

**Lesson Plan 2:** Poster with written composition (pre-writing skills, writing skills, organizational skills, design skills).

Goal: Each student or group of students will design a poster with a happy theme.

Objective: Given a poster board, paints, markers, crayons, scissors, etc., the student or group of students will design a poster with a happy theme.

Materials: Poster board, paints, markers, crayons, scissors, etc.

1. The teacher will pass out materials to students. The teacher will explain the theme of the happy poster to be completed. The teacher will tell the students to design a happy poster.

2. The teacher will display the completed posters in the room.

Adaptation: This project can be based on happy thoughts or around a theme. Theme examples could be holidays, season, interests, school subjects, school events, or the school itself. Each student focuses on visual or written content, but combines both on the poster.

Evaluation: Review the students' posters for creativity, use of color, use of materials, use of variety in composition.

**Lesson Plan 3:**

One of the hardest parts about teaching art is helping others unlock and come up with unique, thoughtful, contemplative ideas for artworks. The book *14,000 things to be happy about* or the website [thingstobehappyabout.com](http://thingstobehappyabout.com) can help students and teachers discover and generate ideas for their artworks. The book and website offers a treasury of "word pictures," that can be a great source of inspiration in creating art.

Goal: Each student uses *14,000 things to be happy about* or [thingstobehappyabout.com](http://thingstobehappyabout.com) as a source of inspiration/stimulation, a jump-start for studio art (drawing portfolio, 2D design, 3D design), as recommended by AP Central Teachers' Resources.

Objective: Given the book or website, a student creates a piece of art.

Materials: *14,000 things to be happy about* or [thingstobehappyabout.com](http://thingstobehappyabout.com), the sky is the limit as far as media used.
1. Have the students select a page or pages from the book or the Happy House on the website. The content tends to grab individuals’ attention based on their feeling a connection to entries they randomly see.

2. The students will write up what they intend to create, along with a materials list.

3. The teacher will give the students a time frame for completing their artworks.

4. The students will create artworks and share them with the class.

Adaptation: Students can make their own lists of things to be happy about instead of using the book or the website. These can be part of the students' sketchbooks. To their own lists or to the lists from the book or website, students can add notes about sense perceptions (smells, sounds, tastes) and details they think should be added. Students could also illustrate the book pages themselves.

Evaluation: Did the student create an artwork that is original, has profound content, and is emotionally expressive as well as technically proficient? Did the student convey a discovery or realization from doing this project? Did the project help the student appreciate or be grateful for the little things in life as well as for the ability and freedom to create art?

**Activities**

Annotate a copy of the book with your own likes and experiences.

From a page in the book or a page on the website, pick one item that jumps out or "speaks" to you or is particularly relevant to your life today.

Make a chronological list of things you are happy about in a journal, three per day, starting now.

Make a poem out of entries from the book or website.

Pick a theme and compile a list of things to be happy about related to that theme.

Pick an everyday object and compile a list of 3-5 things to be happy about that object.

Search the happy database to see if your favorite things are there: [https://thingstobehappyabout.com/neighborhood/idea-bank.php](https://thingstobehappyabout.com/neighborhood/idea-bank.php)

Suggest new happy entries at: [https://thingstobehappyabout.com/neighborhood/idea-bank.php](https://thingstobehappyabout.com/neighborhood/idea-bank.php)

Take a page in the book or a page on the website and share it with a group. Ask those in the group to tell what entry jumped out at them or "spoke" to them.
Use the happy database for ideas of things to do:
https://thingstobehappyabout.com/neighborhood/happy.php
https://thingstobehappyabout.com/neighborhood/karma.php

Use the happy food database for ideas of things to cook or eat:
https://thingstobehappyabout.com/neighborhood/happy-food.php

Videotape yourself reading a page or pages of happy things and post it online.