



Lesson 1: Introduction to Optimism

Objective: The objective of this lesson is to introduce students to the concept of optimism. In addition, students will become aware of how they can begin creating a sense of optimism in their own lives.

Materials :

Dictionaries, thesaurus, chalk board or large paper and markers for webbing
A good story (check out the FEEDYOUROPTIMISM.COM website for stories)

Procedure :

1. Open the discussion by reading a few good (optimistic/pessimistic) stories. Ask students to define optimism and pessimism. Break the students into groups. Encourage use of the thesaurus and dictionary but tell students that their definitions must be recorded in their own words.
2. Create a web on the board. Encourage students to brainstorm a list of situations where they have felt optimistic (maybe at Christmas waiting for the ultimate gift) or pessimistic (waiting for the results of a test they feel badly about).
3. Take the web a step further and ask students to also attach emotions to the situations they have listed. For example, does one feel fear when optimistic? Does one feel excited when optimistic? Other feelings they may list could include joy, happiness, pride, successful, accomplishment, fear, depressed, sadness, failure, abnormal, different, hopeless, loneliness
4. Take the web one step further and ask students **why** they may have those particular emotions in those situations listed. Pay close attention to identify when students speak in terms of absolutes (I am ALWAYS bad at sports. I can NEVER be successful. I have NO HOPE of overcoming this failure.) With the students' assistance identify that in the face of adversity pessimists see the problem as:
 - Personal (it is MY fault)
 - Pervasive (it affects all aspects of my life)
 - Permanent (it will never change)
5. With the above (step 4) clearly established, talk with the students about how the pessimistic viewpoint can be transformed into an optimistic viewpoint. To do this, walk students through transforming statements to reflect a more positive outlook. Pay attention to the absolutes they may have used in the web brainstorming.

Some examples:

- "I am a failure at **everything**" to "I am having a hard time at this, but I am getting better"
- "I will **never** be a normal adult" to "I am having trouble right now, but I am good at lots of other things that I value"
- "There is **nothing** I can do to overcome this failure" to "Maybe if I work on something I am good at for a while I can face this challenge with renewed energy"

These transformations reflect the belief system of an optimist. In the face of adversity optimists see the problem as:

- Temporary
- Isolated
- Changeable

As students transform their own statements, ask them how they are feeling (or how the transformations change the emotions they have attached to situations). Make note to point out that with an optimistic attitude people feel hopeful, positive and much happier. Also, mention the fact that an optimistic outlook doesn't change the situation (although people do react differently to optimistic people) but it changes one's reaction to the situation.

Closing:

Ask students to write in their journal about a situation where they felt pessimistic and have them transform some statements as they did in step 5 above. If students prefer, they can write about an optimistic experience and identify the traits of an optimistic outlook.

Extension Activities:

As an optimistic community, students can assist each other in transforming their statements about things that take place in school. When students hear positive, optimistic statements, they can **feed the optimism** of their peers by presenting the optimist with a little reminder of the good job they are doing at maintaining their optimism (cut out stars, happy faces, etc).