

The Letter

(Pursuing Happiness)

Purpose: To help students understand that 1. People will seek out counseling because they are unhappy in their lives and 2. Happiness might be founded on several underlying variables. Learning to identify and appropriately manage those variables may largely determine how successful their *pursuit of happiness* will be. *This activity is well suited for Honors class students.

Materials: An envelope and a handout (copy) of the last page of the activity for each student. You will need a computer, internet access for video link and projection/audio device. (Activity Handout is recommended.)

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zaIYGax8UBA&safety_mode=true&persist_safety_mode=1&safe=active

Student Materials: Pencil (and paper if the activity handout is not used.)

Time: 30-40 Minutes.

Key Words/Concepts: Happiness. Pride, Desperation, Rejection, Hope, Regret, Reputation, Redemption, Disappointment, Loss & Desire.

Introduce/reintroduce: Yourself not only as a counselor but also as a member of a larger Mental Health team. Explain that the team consists of several types of professionals including Licensed Clinical Social Workers (LCSW,) Marriage Family Therapists (MFT,) Psychologists, Psychiatrists and others. Tell the students that they're in for an exceptional counseling activity today one that will also be just as exceptional 20 years from now!

Part 1

Ask: Students to take out a pencil to write with.

Distribute: The last page of the activity (handout) to each student.

Direct: Students NOT TO write their name on their handout.

Part 2

Instruct: Students to write down their answers for the prompts on their handout. Encourage students to keep their answers brief and confidential. No talking please.

**(If using a blank sheet of paper instead of the handout, pause the video at the 0:07 second frame reading: This is what students are to write & answer:)*

1. My greatest accomplishment.
2. When I have nothing left I'd use my last dollar on...
3. A time when I wasn't accepted/good enough.
4. Ten years from now I will be...
5. A hurt I've caused someone.
6. Three words people know me as.
7. Given another chance I would...
8. A time I felt really let down.
9. Something of mine that's gone.
10. One thing I'd trade everything else for.

Allow: 10 to 15 minutes to complete answers. (Many will finish quickly.)

Ask: Does everyone have answers/questions 1-10 written down?

Have: Students turn their paper over when completed.

Part 3

Distribute: An envelope to each of the students.

Instruct: Students to:

- A. Write their name & mailing address on the front of the envelope.
- B. Write today's date in the upper left corner of the envelope.
- C. Leave room in the upper right hand corner of the envelope for a stamp.
- D. Fold and insert paper inside the envelope. Do not seal.
- E. On back of envelope draw a "Happy" face.

Gather: Envelopes. Have students pass envelopes to the front.

Part 4

Look: At the back of the envelopes you've gathered.

Remark: "The Happy face on back of your envelopes reminds me of a movie I'd seen the other day."

Ask: Raise your hand if you've ever seen "The Pursuit of Happiness."

Call: On a volunteer or two to tell about their recollections of the movie.

Tell: Students the movie is basically about a person's figuring out what it takes to be Happy & what Happiness is all about (for him.)

State: I want to share a video clip from that movie with you.

Play: (continue) Video clip but be sure to...

Pause: Video towards the end of the song when the picture goes black (4:32 mark.)

State: Will Smith's Pursuit of Happiness is probably no different than most peoples. In the movie he had to deal with the same questions you did in these (hold up) envelopes. His answers might be different than yours and most likely, your answers are different from each others.

(Resume: Video and pause on the next frame with the envelope and smiley face at the 4:34 mark.)

Announce: Here's what those questions you answered earlier are really all about.

1. Pride.
2. Desperation.
3. Rejection.
4. Hopes, Dreams & Goals.
5. Regret.
6. Reputation.
7. Redemption.
8. Disappointment.
9. Loss.
10. Desire.

State: In the movie clip we just watched, we saw just a little bit of how Will Smith dealt with *managing* his:

1. Pride (Feeling as good as anybody else no matter what he's wearing=)
2. Desperation (Sleeping in a public bathroom with his Son.)
3. Rejection (wife telling him she's leaving him.)
4. Hopes, Dreams & Goals (Becoming a stock broker.)
5. Regret (Putting his Son at risk.)
6. Reputation (Hard worker, Persistent & Achieving.)
7. Redemption (Making life better for his Son.)
8. Disappointment (kicked out of his apt./not getting across the street safely.)
9. Loss (No job.)
10. Desire (To be a successful person, father & man.)

State: If I mail your letters back to you in 5, 10 or 20 years from now and you took it with you to see a counselor/psychologist/therapist because you're unhappy, I know exactly what your counselor would do. The counselor may very well ask you the same questions that you answered today! Even though your answers may have changed by then, what the counselor *is really asking* you about will be about how well you're managing your:

1. Pride.
2. Desperation.
3. Rejection.
4. Hopes, Dreams & Goals.
5. Regret.
6. Reputation.
7. Redemption.
8. Disappointment.
9. Loss.
10. Desire.

State: For example here are some of those things that a few of you are dealing with (anonymously open, pull and read aloud several of the letters while avoiding reading any identifying names of students, teachers or classmates. *You may want to have a letter already prepared to read from another class or an accumulation of responses you've put together):

(Spend some time on this. Some of these kids have dealt with tremendous disappointment & rejection. Some may have also have had substantial losses and regret in their lives. Again, avoid any identifying information.)

Part 5

Ask: Volunteers to offer more variables that might influence a person's happiness.

Suggest: Faith, Forgiveness, Appreciation, Anger, Resentment, Health and Incarceration as other variables.

Inform: Students that there may be a day in their futures where they find themselves very unhappy for long periods of time (depression.) Money, gangs, drugs, alcohol, self mutilation (cutting) and suicide ideation/attempts will not change your unhappiness so don't go there.

Share: Counselors, Social Workers, MFT's, MFCC's, Therapists & Psychiatrists will work with you to sort through some of the variables we've talked about today even if it's twenty years from now.

In Closing: Tell students they may either take their letters with them today (ask teacher to distribute just to make sure everyone gets their own letter) or leave them with you to be privately reviewed then mailed (or shredded.)

Remind: Students of how you can be reached=)

1. *My greatest accomplishment.*
2. *When I have nothing left I'd use my last dollar on...*
3. *A time when I wasn't accepted or good enough.*
4. *Ten years from now I will be...*
5. *A hurt I've caused someone.*
6. *Three words people know me as.*
7. *Given another chance I would...*
8. *A time I felt really let down.*
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