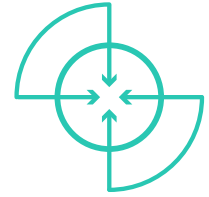


## Student Activity

# Finding Our Purpose



**Happiness Skill:** Purpose

### Time

60 minutes

### Overview

In this activity, students will explore their sense of purpose. Students begin by brainstorming their individual interests and strengths. They then watch a video and complete an interactive reading that introduces them to the idea of purpose and the science behind it. This leads to a discussion around the benefits of finding one's purpose, as well as the connection between happiness and purpose. Next, students will begin to reflect on their own purpose as they consider the intersection between their strengths, interests, and needs in the world. As a concluding activity, students will create a brief personal purpose statement designed for them to glance at whenever they need a reminder of their own purpose. They will also share something that gives them a sense of purpose on a bulletin board designed to motivate their peers to find their sense of purpose as well.

### Objectives

Students will:

- Identify their own strengths and interests
- Explain purpose—how it can be achieved, and the scientific benefits behind it
- Consider the connection between purpose and happiness
- Define their purpose and create a personal purpose statement

### Materials

- Device with the ability to play and project video
- Personal Reflection handout, one per student
- Happiness, Health, and Purpose Stop and Jot handout, one per student
- My Purpose handout, one per student
- Purpose Bulletin Board handout, one for the educator
- Scissors and art supplies, for the class to share
- Empty bulletin board, one

## Standards

### National Health Education Standards

- Standard 1: Students will comprehend concepts related to health promotion and disease prevention to enhance health.
- Standard 7: Students will demonstrate the ability to practice health-enhancing behaviors and avoid or reduce health risks.

### **Next Generation Science Standards**

#### MS-LS1 From Molecules to Organisms: Structures and Processes

- Disciplinary Core Idea:
  - LS1.A: Structure and Function
    - In multicellular organisms, the body is a system of multiple interacting subsystems. These subsystems are groups of cells that work together to form tissues and organs that are specialized for particular body functions. (MS-LS1-3)

#### HS-LS1 From Molecules to Organisms: Structures and Processes

- Disciplinary Core Ideas:
  - LS1.A: Structure and Function
    - Systems of specialized cells within organisms help them perform the essential functions of life. (HS-LS1-1)
    - All cells contain genetic information in the form of DNA molecules. Genes are regions in the DNA that contain the instructions that code for the formation of proteins, which carry out most of the work of cells. (HS-LS1-1)

### **Common Core English Language Arts Standards**

#### Reading:

- R.1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

#### Writing:

- W.4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

#### Speaking & Listening:

- SL.1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
- SL.2: Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

## Procedure

1. Begin the activity by passing out one Personal Reflection handout to each student. Instruct students to focus on the “My Interests” and “My Strengths” sections, and encourage them to spend the next couple minutes filling these two circles with things they are interested in and things they are good at. It may be helpful to remind them that their strengths could be anything from a personality trait such as, “I am friendly” to a specific skill such as, “I am good at dribbling in soccer.”
2. Once a couple minutes have passed, invite all students to share one of the strengths or interests that they recorded.
3. Once everyone has shared, explain that being aware of their own strengths and interests will help students in many parts of their lives. Today, knowing their strengths and interests will be useful as they begin to explore their own sense of purpose.
4. Introduce students to the idea of purpose by playing the *LG Discover Your Happy (Purpose) video*. As students watch, encourage them to listen for the definition of “purpose.”
5. When the video is complete, be sure students understand the following:
  - When you have a sense of purpose, you feel like what you do and who you are matters. What gives one person purpose may not give another person purpose. It depends on how you can use your own strengths and interests to do something that you believe makes a difference in the world, big or small!
  - Purpose is also linked to happiness. When we do something that gives us purpose, our brains release neurotransmitters like dopamine and oxytocin, which are hormones that increase our happiness.
6. Pass out one copy of the Happiness, Health, and Purpose Stop and Jot handout to each student. Review the directions together. Then divide students into pairs and instruct them to complete the reading and Stop and Jot sections with their partners.
7. When the reading is complete, bring the class back together and discuss this question: According to what you learned from this article and the video, what positive effects can purpose have on our lives?

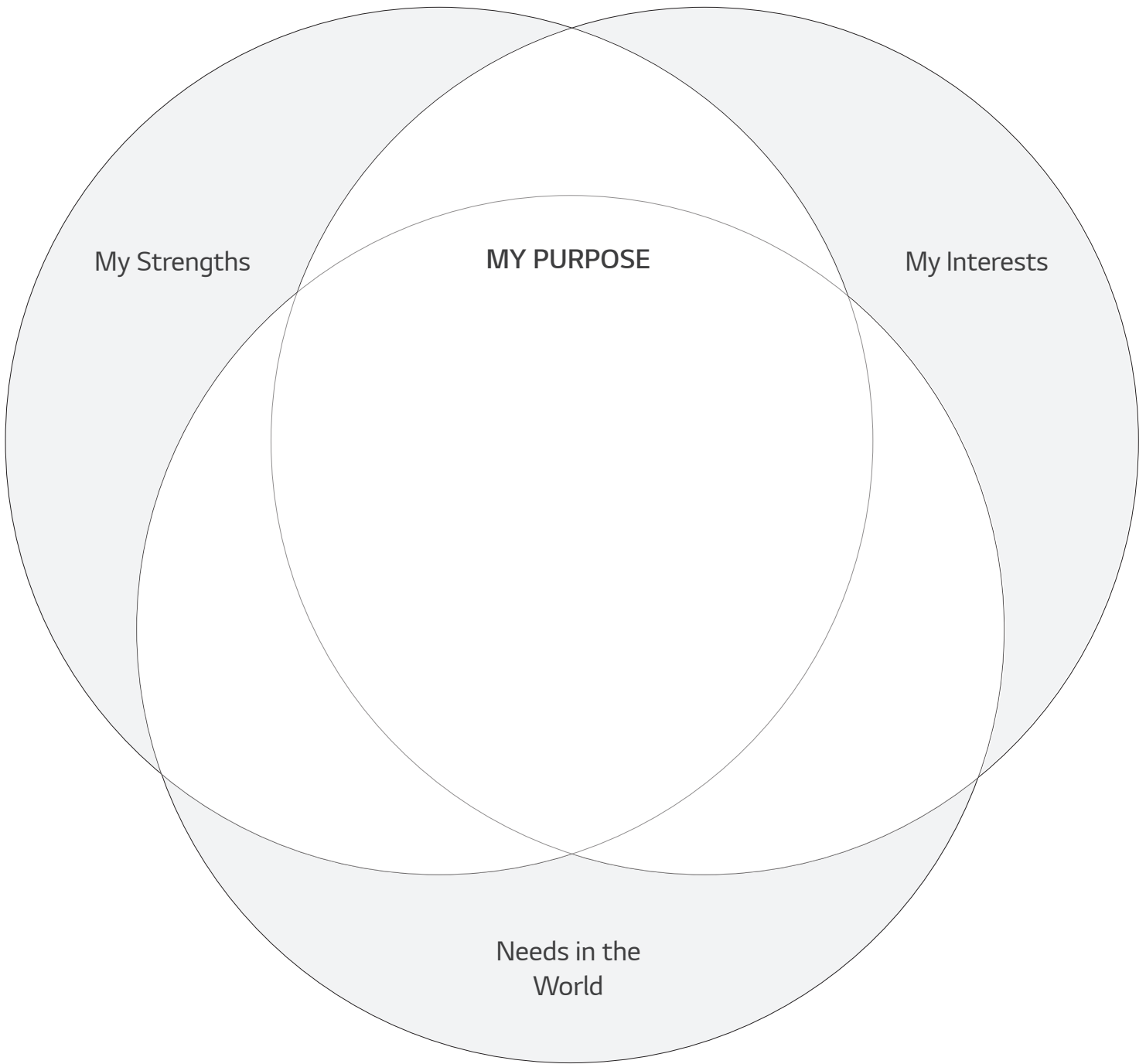
Be sure students understand that happiness produced by fulfilling our sense of purpose is not only good because it makes us happy, but it also appears to protect our health. This may be because the dopamine and oxytocin that our brain releases in response to fulfilling our purpose create feelings of pleasure, reward, and happiness that can lower our stress levels. Lower stress levels have a range of benefits, including better mental and physical health.

8. Explain that now that students understand the benefits of purpose, they will focus on their own sense of purpose. Bring their attention to the “Needs in the World” section of their Personal Reflection handout and explain that this section is key to helping them reflect on their own purpose.

Work as a class to brainstorm needs for this section together. Encourage students to think of needs at different levels. For instance, needs may include those essential for survival, such as the need for shelter and food, but also personal needs, such as the need to be happy, healthy, to learn, to be active, or to have good friends.

9. Once students have recorded several needs, guide the students in reflecting on their own purpose:
  - Explain that students should use the three categories on their Personal Reflection handout (“My Strengths,” “My Interests,” and the “Needs in the World”) to reflect on what gives them purpose. In other words, what do they *do* or what *could* they do that uses their strengths and/or interests while fulfilling a need? Encourage them to brainstorm different ways to find purpose that draws from any combination of two or three categories.
  - If helpful, remind students that something gives them purpose if it makes them feel like who they are and what they do matters. It usually involves a combination of what they are good at, what their interests are, and what the world needs. This could be anything from helping their friends, to working toward a specific goal, or performing community service. What gives someone purpose is personal!
  - As they brainstorm, they should jot their ideas in the middle “Purpose” section provided on their handout.
10. Explain that the session will wrap up with an activity intended to help them remember their sense of purpose *and* motivate their peers to search for their purpose as well. Do the following to prepare students for the wrap-up activity:
  - Distribute one My Purpose handout to each student.
  - Review the directions provided and encourage students to work individually.
11. Conclude the class session by collecting the cutouts for the bulletin board\* and encouraging willing students to share their personal purpose statements. Then instruct the students to place their personal statements somewhere they will see them often as a reminder to work toward fulfilling their sense of purpose!

\* Following the class session, ask a few student volunteers to help you create a bulletin board using the Purpose Bulletin Board handout thought bubble and the class’s purpose cutouts.



**About:** The reading below is excerpted from the article “A Heathier Kind of Happiness” by Jill Suttie, available [here](#).

**Directions:** Read the paragraphs below with a partner. Some vocabulary words have been defined in parenthesis for you. When you get to a Stop and Jot, pause to discuss and answer the question with your partner before moving on.

---

Researchers have long known that happiness and good health go together. Happier people experience less depression and stress, stronger immune systems, lower heart rates, and longer lives. But are all forms of happiness equally good for your health? If you feel elation because the Giants win the World Series, does that produce the same health benefits as the satisfaction that comes from helping a friend in need?

According to a new study published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, the answer is *no*. Instead, happiness that comes from doing good or fulfilling your life purpose may be better for you than happiness that comes from self-gratification [*satisfying your own needs*] or pleasure seeking. When it comes to your health, it seems, not all forms of happiness are created equal.

**Stop and Jot: Record a one-sentence-summary of the section above.**

---

---

---

The study, which was conducted by Barbara Fredrickson of the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, and Steven W. Cole of the ULCA School of Medicine, assessed 80 adults for either “eudaimonic” well-being—the kind that arises from a sense of purpose or service—or “hedonic” well-being, which we get from a good time.

If, for example, study participants often described themselves as “happy” or “satisfied,” the researchers characterized their happiness as hedonic. But if, on the other hand, participants said their lives “had a sense of direction and meaning” or “had something to contribute to society,” their brand of happiness and well-being was deemed [*called*] eudaimonic.

**Stop and Jot: What is the difference between eudemonic happiness and hedonic happiness?**

---

---

---

The researchers also measured the participants’ overall health and depression levels and collected a blood sample from each person. The blood samples were run through a series of tests to look for patterns associated with something called the “conserved transcriptional response to adversity” or CTRA. In prior research, Cole and his colleagues have found that a high CTRA—a pattern of high expression of genes involved in inflammation and low expression of antibody and antiviral genes—is what one might expect in a person subjected to chronic stress, threat, or trauma, and it’s associated with increased risk of cardiovascular disease, neurodegenerative disease, infections, and other poor health outcomes.

**Stop and Jot: When looking at blood samples, patients who had a high CTRA also tended to have . . .**

---

---

---

Results of the study show that, while both types of happiness correlated with [*seemed to be connected to*] lower depression levels, only those people with high levels of eudaimonic happiness had a low CTRA or a better immune response profile [*stronger immune system*]. In contrast, those with high levels of hedonic happiness had a high CTRA profile.

In other words, happiness derived [*that comes from*] from leading a life full of purpose and meaning seemed to protect health at the cellular level, while happiness derived from pleasure or self-gratification did not.

Fredrickson and Cole’s results could also explain the connection found in prior studies between helping others and good health. Research has shown that acting in generous ways lights up areas of the brain associated with pleasure and reward and can lead to positive health outcomes, like lower stress and better cardiovascular health.

**Stop and Jot: What kind of happiness seems to better protect your health?**

---

---

---

Despite these results, Fredrickson and Cole don’t suggest giving up on seeking personal pleasure. Both types of happiness have emerged for a reason, they argue, with hedonic happiness probably important for motivating us to take action in the short run for our own survival and eudaimonic happiness probably encouraging more social interaction and complex cultural adaptations [*adjusting to other cultures*], which ultimately benefit us, too.

Nevertheless, that doesn't mean we shouldn't try to increase our eudaimonic happiness when possible. Clearly, it's in our own interest—not to mention our society's interest—to do so.

According to Fredrickson, it's also within our power. "Finding happiness in a sense of purpose or meaning does not need to be grand or grandiose," she says. "Simply making an effort to connect with others with empathy and compassion could make this shift in your day."

**Stop and Jot: What effect does helping and connecting with others have on our brains?**

---

---

---



**Part 1:** Share Your Purpose

Motivate your peers to find their own purpose by writing or illustrating something that gives you purpose in the rectangle below. Then cut out your rectangle so it can be used for a bulletin board titled "What gives you purpose?"

**Part 2:** Create a Personal Purpose Statement

For your personal purpose statement, elaborate on the purpose you recorded above. Think about who you are, what your skills and interests are, and why the action above matters to you. Then create a statement that you can cut out and place somewhere you will see it often to remind YOU of your purpose.

Personal Purpose Statement examples:

- **To use my** sense of humor **to** make those around me smile and laugh.
- **To use my** interest in science and my skills in math **to** work toward becoming an engineer.

**My Personal Purpose Statement**

To use my \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

to \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



**What gives  
you purpose?**