

Student Activity | Judge Less, Reflect More

Happiness Skill: Positive Outlook

Time

45 minutes

Overview

In this activity, students explore the effects of making snap judgments. The session will begin as students review images and record what immediately comes to mind. Students will then consider whether their judgments were positive or negative, as well as their potential accuracy. This will lead to an introduction of the brain science behind these split-second assessments. In a full group discussion, students will be introduced to the idea that positive outlook plays a key role in our happiness—and the class will consider how making quick judgments about people can be both beneficial and detrimental to our happiness and the happiness of others. The activity will then conclude as students create a list of self-reflection questions that they can use to keep their snap judgments in check and foster a more positive perspective.

Objectives

Students will:

- Analyze their own snap judgments.
- Explore and explain the science behind why people make judgments.
- Consider the connection between judgment, positive outlook, and sustainable happiness.
- Create self-reflection questions that encourage introspection and challenge negative gut reactions.

Materials

- Snap Judgments handout, one per student
- *First Impressions & The Brain* article, one per student:
 - Our Brains Immediately Judge People [article](#)
 - or**
 - Neuroscience of First Impressions [article](#) (for more advanced readers)
- Stop & Think handout, one per student

Standards

[National Health Education Standards](#)

- Standard 5: Students will demonstrate the ability to use decision-making skills to enhance health.
- Standard 8: Students will demonstrate the ability to advocate for personal, family, and community health.

Next Generation Science Standards

- MS-LS1 -8 From Molecules to Organisms
 - Structures and Processes: LS1.D: Information Processing: Each sense receptor responds to different inputs (electromagnetic, mechanical, chemical), transmitting them as signals that travel along nerve cells to the brain. The signals are then processed in the brain, resulting in immediate behaviors or memories.

English Language Arts Common Core State Standards

- Speaking and 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..

Resources

- [How Happy Brains Respond to Negative Things](#)
- [How Many Seconds to a First Impression?](#)
- [LG Experience Happiness: Positive Outlook](#)

Procedure

1. Begin the activity by passing out one Snap Judgments handout to each student. Review the instructions and give the class a couple minutes to independently record their initial thoughts.
2. Next, instruct students to review what they wrote and place a (+) or (-) next to each image to indicate if their initial thoughts (or snap judgments) were positive or negative.
3. Then read the following and allow time for student reactions:
What if I tell you...
 - The child in the first image may have a learning disability that causes him to become easily overwhelmed in social situations?
 - The person in the second image may be able to get away with scams because people trust him?
 - The person in the third image may have been out of work for a year and is about to go on another job interview?
 - The person in the fourth image may volunteer at an animal shelter every weekend?
4. Go on to tell students that you don't actually know the people in these images—but you do know that the scenarios you presented may be different from what the students had in mind.
5. Distribute one copy of the *First Impressions & The Brain* article to each student. Instruct students to read the article with a partner and annotate (underline or highlight) for details that explain the brain science behind these snap judgments.

6. When students are done reading, ask them to explain the science behind snap judgments and call on students to summarize their annotations.

Be sure students understand that the amygdala is a part of our brain located deep within the temporal lobe. The amygdala's main job is to help us respond to and remember emotions (especially negative ones like fear) in order to keep us safe. The amygdala processes the images we see and *immediately* assesses whether they are trustworthy—often before our pre-frontal cortex has a chance to think about what we've seen and consider the best course of action.
7. Go on to tell students that while this may be the amygdala's main job, it is *not* its only job. The amygdala is also wired to recognize people in need. Therefore, the amygdala may also be responsible for the compassion (or concern) we have for others.
8. Ask students: How may the amygdala help or hurt our wellbeing?
9. Go on to explain that one key component to our overall wellbeing is our happiness. Explain and/or review that there are Six Sustainable Happiness Skills we can work on to improve our overall happiness: positive outlook, human connection, mindfulness, purpose, generosity, and gratitude.
10. Lead the class in a discussion around the connection between happiness, a positive outlook, and snap judgments with the following discussion points:
 - Ask: What does it mean to have a positive outlook?
 - Ensure students understand that positivity is one's ability to imagine a fruitful outcome and have a readiness to experience or see the positive in any situation.
 - Ask: Why may having a positive outlook contribute to our happiness?
 - Explain that when people have a positive outlook, they tend to be creative, more resilient to adversity, more likely to perform better in school, and are more socially connected. It's therefore no surprise that having a positive outlook plays a key role in our happiness!
 - Ask: Do you think making snap judgments about people could help us cultivate a positive outlook and be happier? In what circumstances?
 - Ask: Do you think making quick judgments about people could take away from our positive outlook and our happiness? How so?
 - Ask: Taking a step away from ourselves, do you think making snap judgments is more likely to help or hurt the happiness of others? How?
11. Tell students that we can practice having a positive outlook by doing our best to be more open, curious, kind, and optimistic. In fact, research states that we can compensate for our tendency to react to negative stimuli and situations by consciously choosing to focus on the positive. When people choose to do this, researchers have found that their amygdala activity is equally high for positive and negative stimuli—demonstrating that these people are able to recognize both the negative *and* positive parts of life.

12. Pass out the Stop & Think handout to each student, and review the directions. Then instruct students to brainstorm questions with a partner and complete the handout.
13. Conclude by reassembling the class and asking students to share the questions they developed. Remind students that our brain is equipped to make judgments for a reason, and sometimes our snap judgements may prove to be accurate. However, by approaching our lives with a positive outlook and questioning our snap judgements, we are doing the best we can to be open, kind, optimistic and—ultimately—happy!

Directions:

Review the images below. As you do, immediately write down what comes to mind, regardless of whether it is positive or negative. Don't filter your thoughts...Just jot them!!



Initial thoughts:



Initial thoughts:



Initial thoughts:



Initial thoughts:

Directions:

Though our brains are wired to make split-second judgements about other people, these judgements don't always foster a positive outlook. It's important to recognize the snap judgements that your amygdala forms and give your frontal lobe a chance to make reasoned decisions.

Below, brainstorm a list of questions that you can ask yourself to keep your snap judgements in check and foster a more positive perspective.

For example: What do I really know about this person?

