☀ OPTIMISTIC THINKING

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Optimistic Closure

TEACHER NOTES

Dr. Martin Seligman writes about "learned optimism," underscoring the field of research that supports the power of optimistic thinking in developing resiliency, enhancing health, and increasing achievement. It's encouraging to realize that as educators, we can intentionally help our students build a more proactive, positive approach to dealing with the adversities that will come their way.

"Learning to be optimistic comes...not through mindless devices like whistling a happy tune or mouthing platitudes...but by learning a new set of cognitive skills. Far from being the creations of boosters or of the popular media these skills were discovered in the laboratories and clinics of leading psychologists and psychiatrists and then rigorously validated."

–Martin Seligman

By participating in a consistent and optimistic closure to each school day, students learn to anticipate a positive ending to their time in your classroom and to build affirmative anticipation for returning to their school community. When they reflect on specific positive experiences that are personally meaningful, they cultivate the skill of Optimistic Thinking.

DURATION: 3–6 minutes (once daily routine is established)

PREPARATION: Teacher and Student

MATERIALS:

- Chart for recording student responses (laminated if desired)
- Optional: Sticky notes or Exit Tickets

MAIN POINTS

- Research supports positive outcomes from developing the habit of cultivating and expressing optimism. That means that by regularly thinking about what's going well for us and talking about it to others, we actually build new pathways in our brains that make us more likely to be able to stay upbeat and find solutions when hard times come our way.
- To build a new habit, we have to repeat a behavior many times. Whatever behaviors we do over and over tend to get stronger, so we want to choose our thoughts and actions carefully.
- To help build an optimistic way of being in the world, you and your students will be closing each day with an opportunity to think about good things from your day.
- Vary the content of the reflection prompt and the process for telling to keep the strategy fresh. Our brains love both routine and novelty!

OPTIMISTIC THINKING

GUIDING LANGUAGE

Scientists have studied ways that people can help themselves become stronger, happier people. It turns out that the same thing that makes us get better at riding a bike or writing our letters is what helps us get better at thinking in positive ways: practice! The more we think about good things we have seen and done, and talk about them to others, the stronger our brains grow at looking at the world in a positive way.

We're going to practice thinking about and saying something good from the day before we go home. Most days have some good times and some hard times in them. That's true for kids and for grownups. So, even if the first thing that comes to mind during our private thinking time is something that wasn't great about today, give your brain a chance to remember one of the really good moments.

Maybe it will be something nice someone said to you, or that they played a game with you, or helped you when you needed it.

Pause.

Maybe it will be a wonderful feeling you had—happiness or pride—when you were kind to someone or when you worked hard.

Pause.

Maybe you learned something new today and you can't wait to tell someone about it after school!

Pause.

We're going to give each other a minute of silent, private thinking time about a really good moment from today. Give students about a minute of thinking time. Turn to a neighbor and tell them the really good thing from today that you thought of. Pause while students tell their partners.

Today we are going to put some of our ideas onto this "Great Things Happened Today!" chart. Model by telling your own brief response and recording it with a phrase on the chart. Solicit responses from all of the students who want to tell their good moments.

Repeat a version of this daily, keeping enough similarity that students understand it as a routine, balanced with enough variety that it stays fresh and engaging. To build a strong habit, don't skip days even when time is short. Taking one minute for everyone to be silent together and think of something wonderful from the day, or something they're looking forward to doing when they come back tomorrow, is a quick and powerful way to keep true to the goal of daily optimistic closure.

While this strategy is still new to your students, invest some extra time so you can hear them each of them voice their responses. Accept responses without praising or judgment, either with a slight nod and smile, or "Thank you for telling us your idea." Once the group is confident in the process, the optimistic closure can be completed in 2–5 minutes.

OPTIMISTIC THINKING

You may wish to begin this practice by using the same question each day for a week, with some variation in the sharing strategies (see variations below). In the second week, repeat the same sharing strategies with a new prompt. This provides a pattern they can anticipate, along with enough novelty to keep engagement high.

As the year progresses, you might switch to a different question for each day of the week, repeating the same pattern of questions in subsequent weeks.

Sample reflection prompts

- Something I especially enjoyed doing today at school...
- Something I'm looking forward to about school tomorrow and why...
- Something I learned today...
- Something I can do better now than when I got here this morning...
- Something I will do tonight (or this weekend) that will make me happier or healthier
- Something I did well today was...
- Something I saw someone else do today that impressed me and why...
- Something I appreciate about someone here at school...
- Something I appreciate about someone who doesn't go to our school...
- Something I will do tonight (or this weekend) that others will see as kind or helpful...

ADDITIONAL SHARING STRATEGIES

VERBAL

- Stand at the door while students exit, giving each student a thumbs-up as they say their response aloud.
- Read the Reflection Question of the Day to the group.
  Turn to a partner near you and share your answers with each other. Each of you should start your sharing with these words...
  Restate the prompt.
- Have students seated in a circle before giving the question. Each person in turn responds to the question. Go first, modeling a very brief response, and tell students they have the right to say "Pass." If one student passes consistently, check in privately to hear his or her responses.

WRITTEN

- Have students trade their 'Exit Ticket' to you at the door for a high five.
- Have students write or draw their response on a sticky note and add it to a group chart that builds a smiley face.

OPTIMISTIC THINKING

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Teacher / Student Goals

Optimistic Thinking: A child's attitude of confidence, hopefulness, and positive thinking regarding herself/himself and her/his life situations in the past, present, and future.

My students are aware of the power of optimistic thinking.

- I am aware of my individual students' abilities to verbalize optimistic statements.
- The environment I create supports my students' growth related to developing a habit of expressing optimism.

Student: Optimistic Thinking goals and demonstrated behaviors

Students will:

- Reflect on their school experiences
- Express positive comments about self, others, and/or aspects of their school day

DESSA OPTIMISTIC THINKING INDICATORS
(Highlighted indicators are directly addressed in this lesson.)

I can:

Carry myself with confidence
Say good things about myself
Speak about positive things
Look forward to classes or activities at school
Say good things about my classmates
Say good things about the future
Express high expectations for myself

EXIT TICKET

Date: _____   Name: _____

_____

_____

Something I enjoyed doing at school today...

_____

_____

EXIT TICKET

Date: _____   Name: _____

_____

_____

Something I enjoyed doing at school today...

_____

_____

APERTURE EDUCATION

EXIT TICKET

Date: _____   Name: _____

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Something I'm looking forward to at school tomorrow and why...

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EXIT TICKET

Date: _____   Name: _____

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Something I'm looking forward to at school tomorrow and why...

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EXIT TICKET

Date: _____   Name: _____

Something I learned today was...

_____
_____
_____
_____

EXIT TICKET

Date: _____   Name: _____

Something I learned today was...

_____
_____
_____
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