



Optimism

Materials:

- Worksheet

Brainstorm

Ask students to list their responses (T/F) to the following questions on a sheet of paper:

1. When I am faced with a situation that is uncertain, I usually assume the worst will happen.
2. If there is a situation where something could go wrong, I assume that it will.
3. When I think about the future, I don't feel positive.
4. Things rarely work out for me.
5. When something doesn't go the way I had hoped, I usually give up.

Discuss

Raise your hand if you answered “true” to at least one of these statements. Keep those hands up! Now raise your hand if you answered “true” more than twice. Keep those hands up. Now, raise your hands if you answered “true” to three statements. Keep your hands up. Finally, raise your hands if you answered “true” to 4 or all 5 of the statements. A pessimist would say that this is a class of pessimistic people! But I'm an optimist, and I think we have a class full of people who are mostly optimistic! You can put your hands down now.

Dive in!

Detail: **Optimism** is an attitude of confidence that even though a situation may be challenging or troublesome, it will work out. You have probably heard the phrase, “When life hands you lemons, make lemonade.” This well-known saying exemplifies an attitude of optimism. In other words, though a situation might not be ideal, try to find a positive way to think about it or respond to it. Pessimism means the opposite. **Pessimism** is the belief that things will not turn out well in the future. A pessimistic view typically involves expecting the worst even in situations that aren't really that bad. Optimism and pessimism don't just have to do with how people think about the future. They also impact how people explain things that have happened in the past. When something goes well, an optimist is more apt to analyze and reflect on the situation to determine what they did that made things turn out well in hopes of using that information in the future. When an optimist experiences a setback or a failure, they don't blame themselves. They can recognize that just because something didn't go well doesn't mean that things will never go well. The setback isn't a reflection on them as a person, it's a result of the situation. A pessimist on the other hand will look back on a setback or failure and place blame.



High School

They may blame themselves, but they also might blame others involved or even just the circumstances. They can get stuck in this blame rather than reflecting on the situation in order to make changes in the future. Throughout your life, you'll be faced with challenges, and you're more likely to be successful if you have an optimistic attitude than if you are a pessimist. There is a lot of research to suggest that there are many health benefits to optimism as well.

Optimistic people live longer, are healthier, bounce back quicker if they do experience health concerns (after a cancer diagnosis, they even have a higher survival rate), and as an optimistic person ages, their quality of life is much better than those people who have a pessimistic outlook on life. In the next lesson, we'll learn about positive self-talk to help you get away from those negative thoughts, but in this lesson we'll first learn how to reframe situations where we might have a tendency to get negative. Let's take a look at how.

Activity

Pair or group students. Distribute the worksheet to students. Have students review each of the scenarios and identify a pessimist view first and then reframe it as an optimist. When students are done, call on volunteers to provide their responses.

Reflect

Have students respond to the prompt on the worksheet: Do you think of yourself as an optimist or a pessimist? Why?

Professional Development

Are you an optimist or a pessimist? Explain.

For Further Study:

- BuzzFeed: Are you an Optimist, Pessimist, or a Realist?
<https://www.buzzfeed.com/alexandreorrico/are-you-an-optimist-a-realist-or-a-pessimist>
- Edutopia: *Optimism is a Learnable Skill*
<https://www.edutopia.org/article/optimism-learnable-skill>
- Edutopia: *Tips for Teaching Realistic Optimism*
<https://www.edutopia.org/article/tips-teaching-realistic-optimism>