

Grade 11 Narrative

The ACT Pre-Test

Brrrrnng! For the 152nd time this year, you hear the obvious stated, “Class, the bell has rung.”

Amazingly, and somewhat inexplicably, this declarative sentence—nearly shouted by your teacher at the top of his lungs—has to be exclaimed every single day. Quite a few cell phones are jammed into pockets and purses; bookbags are slung heavily onto the floor; fresh gum is unwrapped, passed around; a few notebooks are flung carelessly upon fairly-clean desktops. A few of your classmates, however, seem perplexed, and even miffed, by this daily ritual as they drift through each school day perpetually baffled at the notion that other students actually engage in this thing called school.

“Hey, do we need a pen today?”

“Dude, you ask that every day.”

Your teacher, who, like many teachers, actually misses nothing, states, “As I told you yesterday and the four days prior to that, all you need today is a pencil—which I will provide—and your thinking cap.”

Despite the chipper delivery of this information, a collective groan, accentuated with exasperated sighs, fills the room. Today, all of you “get” to take an ACT pre-test; even you find it bewildering that the school and your parents pay so much attention to you and your performance on this test. Students are supposed to be fired up, psyched up, pumped up for these sessions. Protein for breakfast was suggested yesterday, even for the pre-test. After all, your life in just two short years will “change significantly.” How this multiple-choice test prepares you for that life-altering change escapes you. “Trust us” and “This is for your own good” seem to be slogans of both your teachers and your parents. A counselor came in last week, or was it a month ago, to explain how much money can be tied to an ACT test score. This particular enlightened teacher of yours has even spent copious amounts of time explaining it to you as a formative assessment, one that will inform his future instruction. You perceive the next 40 minutes akin to torture.

“O.K., class, please clear off your desks. Remember what I have been saying: No pressure; just do your best.” Even though you feel quite a bit of affection for this singular teacher, you hear his voice droning on and on and on and on. You catch words and phrases that you have heard numerous times before: “read directions thoroughly,” “don’t agonize,” “keep an eye on time,” and “just relax.”

“The #2 pencils are now being passed out. No need to poke your neighbor to check its sharpness. I will give directions, which must be followed explicitly, in just a few minutes.”

“Wait....what are we doing?”

“Just take a pencil, dude. We are only taking a test that could determine how the rest of our lives turn out.” No pressure!

Grade 11 Informational

The Happiness Effect

Happiness may be the primary goal of human existence. Philosophers have wrestled with the concept of happiness. Legislators create laws to support citizens' rights to pursue happiness. Television, radio, and print advertisers assure consumers that various products will guarantee happiness. Interestingly, people have a tendency to believe they are happier than their neighbors, and they are optimistic about their happiness in the future. Most people assume that they will be happier a decade from now than they are today.

Clearly, everyone from writers and philosophers to legislators and the average person on the street thinks a great deal about happiness. What makes happiness so important to human existence?

Why Be Happy?

Not only does happiness feel good, but it appears to provide a variety of psychological and physical benefits. Happiness plays a significant role in enhancing good health, strengthening the immune system, promoting longevity, improving productivity and performance, and increasing resilience. Happy people work hard, play hard, have an active social life (and a social conscience), experience good health, and live longer. A happy person lives an average of nine years longer than a miserable one.

The Opposite of Happiness

When studying happiness, it makes sense that its opposite condition would also be a topic of examination. Scientists have observed that there are two unfortunate life events that induce profound unhappiness, perhaps over the course of many years: the loss of a spouse and the loss of a job.

What Causes Happiness?

However, good news abounds in the study of happiness. Fortunately, humans experience happiness from a wide range of stimuli, from traveling to an exotic destination to redecorating one's home or from winning a game of soccer to eating a delicious meal. Simply watching a favorite television show or laughing at a funny joke can boost a depressed mood. While the happiness produced by such experiences tends to be short lived, certain conditions do promote a more long-lasting and durable state of happiness as a lifestyle: a wide social network, believing in a meaningful reason for one's existence, and establishing goals and working to achieve them.

With a Little Help from My Friends

Surprisingly, income is not a primary factor in determining a person's level of happiness once the basic needs of food, clothing, and shelter have been met. More important is one's social network. Being socially active may be more effective in increasing one's immunity to illness than a vaccine. Misery may love company, but so does happiness, and having close friends and family is vital to one's overall level of happiness. (If friends and family are crucial, so is a loving partner. Research suggests that being married increases one's potential for happiness.) Even sharing one's home with an animal companion can make a person happier.

Why Am I Here?

Scientists report that believing in some kind of meaning for one's life is necessary to living a happy life. This may be a religion, a code of ethics, a particular value system, a philosophy, or any other reason for being that lifts people out of the mundane routine of daily existence and gives their life meaning beyond a weekly paycheck.

The Habit of Happiness

Happiness is not an innate characteristic but may actually be developed as a habit. Scientists suggest that incorporating new habits and practices can go a long way in increasing one's state of happiness. While people generally do not transform their basic temperaments, people can learn to become happier by participating in a variety of activities, including socializing, watching funny movies or reading funny books, keeping a gratitude journal (writing a daily list of three to five things for which one is grateful), involving oneself in pleasurable activities, such as sports, hobbies, or the arts, focusing on positive outcomes, and performing acts of kindness for others. Apparently, doing something to make someone else happy will make you happy, too.