

Lesson Six – More Good News: Emotions Can Also Help Us Make Changes in Our Lives

“ It is only with the heart that one can see... what is essential is invisible to the eye.

– Antoine de Saint-Exupéry ”

CREATIVE ACTIVITY – Artist’s Statement

Lesson Intention:

We have discussed that sometimes emotions are asking us to witness and express them, and sometimes emotions are asking us to take action or make a change in our lives. In the previous lesson, we saw the way emotion often shows up when we need to take action or make a change in the world. This lesson is an extension of that idea, but it shifts the focus from a global level to a personal level. **In this lesson, we focus on identifying emotion and linking it to something in students’ lives that needs attention and might require them to make a change.** Of course, at this age, young people won’t be able to change every aspect of their lives. Students might not be able to move out of an unsafe home or solve a larger problem that is outside of their control. However, this lesson offers the important message that their emotions can help them to see areas of their lives that they would like to change – and in some cases may in fact have some control over changing. For example, anxiety might be tied to taking too many challenging courses at once, and a change in the class schedule might be beneficial. If a young person is engaging in self-harming behaviors such as cutting, an eating disorder, or an addiction to a harmful substance, then taking action and asking for support is a crucial aspect of moving forward on a healthy path.

Learning Goals:

- Recognize that sometimes emotions are messengers which can raise awareness that it may be time to make a change.
- Connect emotions with underlying issues in students’ lives that are calling for attention.

Materials for Lesson:

- [Featured Videos \(2\) Emily Balsley and Dr. Arjune Rama](#)
- [Additional Videos \(5\)](#)
- Lesson Plan (this document)
- [Lesson PowerPoint](#)
- [Student Examples of Creative Projects](#)

In Preparation for Lesson:

*Prior to teaching this lesson, **watch the guest artist and expert videos**, and please note that this particular video is ten minutes in length; however, it is well worth the ten minutes! The artist shares both his creative form of emotional expression as well as touching upon several important SEL goals from this curriculum. Also, draw or paint your own art and write your own artist's statement example.*

Gather paper, colored pencils, crayons, or markers for the warm-up activity. If your school does not have access to these materials [Kleki.com](https://kleki.com) offers fast access to a digital drawing tool.

Featured Videos:

1. Emily Balsley describes the way drawing supported her when she felt overwhelmed.
2. Dr. Arjune Rama describes how important it is to reach out for support, and he shares a story about how and when he decided to see a therapist to help him with his own challenges.

Additional Videos:

1. Jaden shares a letter from his papa that helped him change his perspective and describes the way writing letters to his papa helped him throughout his life whenever he needed wisdom and advice.
2. Milja describes the way drawing and writing helps her with issues like self-harm, PTSD, OCD and with the process of returning to school during the pandemic.
3. Peyton describes the pressures to fit a certain beauty standard in high school, and the way her drawing helped her realize that she wants to resist these pressures.
4. Jay describes a difficult time in his life when an injury prevented him from playing soccer, and shares the way his emotions helped him reflect on changes he could make in his life to manage that challenging time.
5. Paty Abril Gonzalez describes the way her unaddressed traumas from her childhood led her to unhealthy behaviors as an adult, such as insomnia and drinking alcohol. She explains that her artwork helped her see that she needed to make changes in her life.

Lesson Plan:

Display the 'welcome slide' from the Lesson 6 PowerPoint as you begin.

**Slide 1*

As discussed in the teacher training, remember to make the suggested language below authentic to yourself and meaningful for your students.

Launching the Lesson:

** Slide 2*

Begin class with an activity that supports students in taking a quick emotional check-in. Invite the class to ponder how honestly we, as a culture, answer one of the most commonly asked questions in our daily interactions: "How are you?" Share an example of your drawing with the students. Explain that students will answer this question in the form of a drawing.

Example of What You Could Say:

"How are you today? (pause and see if students actually answer, and how they answer). Isn't it interesting that we ask automatically, many times throughout the day, "How are you?" but we don't actually expect people to answer us, let alone tell the truth. Instead, it is just a friendly automatic greeting that we ask out of habit.. And when we are asked that question, we assume people don't really want to hear the honest answer. We respond out of habit as well, saying "fine", or "good" or "okay" without thinking. Sometimes, this makes sense because it doesn't feel like a safe context or relationship for vulnerability. But, sometimes, it is the result of the cultural message that everyone needs to feel "fine" all the time. This is a missed opportunity to really connect with each other and be honest with ourselves."

Notes on What You Plan to Say:

Introducing the Warm-up Activity:

Have your students put this concept into practice by actually answering the question of "How are you?" and considering how rare a true, authentic answer is considered in their daily lives.

Example of What You Could Say:

"Let's try an experiment now together. Let's *actually* answer this question "How are you?" Pause for a second and, in your own mind, think about how you would answer this question honestly. (pause) Okay, does everyone have their answer? Now, I want you to try a new way of expressing that feeling. I want you to draw or doodle your answer. Your drawing can be abstract if you would like. You can also use color and shape in your doodle to show the way you feel. I made a drawing of my own to represent the way I was feeling this morning and I would love to share it with you now. (Shares your drawing with the students). Today I am feeling _____ and so I chose to draw _____ (Describe the way the colors and shapes and design of the drawing represent your feelings.) Okay, now you will get the chance to make a drawing to answer the question: How are you?"

Notes on What You Plan to Say:

Warm-up Activity:

Students spend five minutes drawing a picture to answer the question of "How are you?" and express how they are actually feeling today.

Introducing the Guest Artist Video:

Connect this lesson with the previous one by reminding students that the protest art offered a new way of thinking about emotion – as a messenger that points to a problem in the world that needs to change. The protest art was a way of speaking out about that issue or problem. Today's lesson shifts the focus from what we can change in the world to what we can change in our personal lives. Explain that the guest artist video will explore this new way of looking at emotion, as a signal to change something in our own lives.

Example of What You Could Say:

"Thanks for trying that new way of honestly representing emotion through a drawing. Hopefully, you were able to express some of what you were feeling through your visual art. Remember in our previous lesson, we talked about this idea with our protest art as it relates to the emotions we feel about something in the world that we want to change. Today we are shifting the focus to our own lives. I want to make sure it is clear that sometimes emotions arise and it is important that we express them, and find a witness who can listen to us as

we share them, but they don't require us to take any action. We are meant to feel them and simply honor that they are there. That is a really important idea. But, as we discussed in the previous lesson, sometimes emotions offer us information about something we *do* need to change. Today's lesson is focused on the idea that emotions arise in order to help us see areas where we can make changes in our own personal lives. We are going to watch a video from a guest artist who feels that his drawings helped him see that he needed to make a change in his life."

Notes on What You Plan to Say:

Play Guest Artist Video:

The guest artist describes the way his drawings helped him see an area in his life where he needed to get some additional support. The guest artist explains that art can offer insight into these unacknowledged issues in our lives. Reflecting on our artwork by writing the artist's statement is a way to help students notice the message that is expressed within their art.

Before you play the guest artist video, remember to give students a description of the video content, so that they can decide if they would like to view the video. The video descriptions are listed above each video. Prior to playing the video, you will remind students- "Stories hold potential for various forms of connection to the lives of those who hear them. This story may connect deeply to others who have had a similar experience. In this video, (read the one sentence description that is above the video). At this moment, you may welcome that connection or you may wish to make a different choice to delay or opt out."

Introducing the Creative Activity:

Students will create an artist's statement that corresponds to the drawing that they created at the start of the class. In their statement, students reflect on the way their drawing might point to an emotion they are feeling and that this emotion might be showing up because something in their life is not working and requires attention. If their drawing from the warm-

up activity at the start of class does not speak to an aspect of their life that is calling them to make a change, invite students to create a new drawing that *does* represent an emotion that calls for reflection and change. Then, invite students to write an artist's statement about that drawing. Reflecting on our artwork by writing the artist's statement is a way to help students notice the message that is expressed within their art.

Example of What You Could Say:

"We're going to use the guest artist's story as inspiration for today's creative activity. The guest artist explained the way he doesn't always notice an issue or problem in his daily life until he looks at the themes that emerge in his paintings and drawings. As he notices these emerging patterns in his artwork, he is able to observe areas of his life that are calling for greater attention. Maybe this is true for you too? I wonder, when you look at the drawing you made at the start of class, are you able to see an area of your life that might require additional attention? Remember, the focus of our lesson is the idea that sometimes emotions are calling on us to make a personal change. Artists often write something called an "artist's statement" where they describe the message and meaning of their drawing. We are each going to write an artist's statement to go with the drawings we made at the start of class. The artist's statement will be just a few sentences that will allow us to explore our drawings and uncover what they might be telling us about an aspect of our life where we need to make a change. If you are having trouble with this concept looking at your original drawing from our warm-up activity, you can draw a new picture. Here is the drawing I made and my accompanying artist's statement." (Show students your drawing and read your artist's statement).

Notes on What You Plan to Say:

Creative Activity:

* Slide 3

Students write an artist's statement to describe the drawing they created at the start of class in response to the question, "How are you?" In their artist's statement, students describe their artwork. How does the artwork express an emotion? Does it use color or design to speak to

specific feelings? Is the drawing connected to a specific experience, memory, or challenge? Students explore the way their artwork contains an important message for them about their life, something they want or need to change. Finally, they begin to reflect on the steps they can take to address this concern. Do they need to reach out to a trusted mentor for support? Do they need to make a change in their school or after school schedule in order to alleviate anxiety? What steps can they take to begin making changes in order to feel better? Give students 10–15 minutes to work on this.

Example of What You Could Say:

“Today’s lesson helped extend our understanding of the role that emotions play in our lives, and we reflected on the potential that emotions can help us see when we need to take action and make a change. Dr. Rama’s story was such a good example of what this can look like because he had the courage to walk to the college counseling office to ask for support with the challenges he was experiencing in his life. His story really speaks to the idea that even though it takes bravery to reach out for help, it can be a life-changing action. I hope that, if you feel inspired by his video to ask for support, you will feel comfortable following up with me, looking at the resources page on the Kevin Love Fund website, or reaching out to our school counselor.”

Notes on What You Plan to Say:

Reflecting on the Creative Activity:

Invite students to share their drawing and artist's statement with the class. They can read their artist's statement aloud or just give a general sense of what they learned about themselves as they composed the statement. This might be a creative activity that is a little more vulnerable for students because it could potentially point to difficult issues in their life, so, as always, students can decide if and how much they would like to share.

Because of the possibly sensitive nature of this lesson, it is important that the resource page is accessible to students. Also, this may be a lesson where students are reminded that they can always come chat with you privately after class if they would like.

Example of What You Could Say:

"Thank you for taking the time to reflect on your artwork for this activity. I know it can be difficult to look at the parts of our lives where we might need to take action. I want to mention that if, as you were writing your artist's statement, you realized you need extra support but you don't know where to get it, I am always available if you'd like to chat with me individually. Also, on the curriculum website there is a resource page that is accessible to you to access. My hope is that at this point in the curriculum we all feel comfortable sharing some of what's on our mind with each other. But, of course, you always get to choose! Would anyone like to share their artist statement or did anyone have a moment where they discovered something new about themselves? Having said that, this might be a lesson that is a bit more introspective and it is completely understandable if we have fewer students share."

Notes on What You Plan to Say:

Introducing the Expert Video:

Introduce the expert video by explaining that the video clip will provide a reminder of the message of the lesson; the importance of reaching out to a trusted adult if students feel they need additional support.

Example of What You Could Say:

"We are going to end class a little bit differently than we have concluded other lessons. We are going to watch an expert video as a way to help remind us about the message of this lesson; sometimes emotions help us see that we need to make a change in our lives. Often, the change we need to make is to reach out for support from a trusted adult. We are going to watch a short video from a psychiatrist who will share his own story about when and how he decided to get help during a time when he was struggling."

Notes on What You Plan to Say:

Play Expert Video:

The expert describes how important it is to reach out for support, and he shares a story about how and when he decided to see a therapist to help him with his own challenges.

Lesson Closure:

After the expert video, reflect on how incredible it was that Dr. Rama was inspired to walk to the college counseling office and ask for help. Hopefully, this can inspire students to notice if and when they need help and to have the same bravery to seek it.

Remind students that sometimes emotions call us to take action and make a change in our lives, and reaching out for support can be a life-changing change to make.

Supplemental Information:

If you or your students would like to learn more about the ideas in this lesson, additional resources and third party links are included below.

1. Students may be led to make personal changes as a result of this lesson and that may include setting boundaries with their family and friends. Therapist Nedra Glover Tawwab has written an excellent book on creating boundaries that may help students learn how to navigate relationships that create emotional distress: *Set Boundaries, Find Peace: A Guide to Reclaiming Yourself*
2. Marshall Rosenberg developed a framework called Nonviolent Communication in order to support people as they identify the way emotions are connected with unmet needs. The framework involves four stages: identifying emotion, communicating those feelings to others, identifying the way those emotions are tied to unmet needs and making a request to get support with meeting those needs. There are many online sources that describe how to support youth with practicing these steps, and his introduction of the method is also an incredibly useful text for teachers hoping to teach these methods to their students. One book by Marshall Rosenberg that teachers might want to explore is [*Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Compassion*](#).
3. Frank Warren created an art project where he invited anyone to write a secret on a postcard and mail it to him. His instructions to participants were to write a regret, fear, betrayal, desire, or confession. They could reveal anything as long as it was true and they hadn't shared it with anyone before. He shares many of these postcards on his website and in the book called *PostSecret: Extraordinary Confessions from Ordinary Lives*. Though many of these postcards may not be appropriate for school, they could help normalize the unique challenges that young people are experiencing.