

# The Pursuit of Unhappiness

*Developed by Michelle Muncy-Silva and Jennifer Fletcher*

## Reading Selections for this Project

McMahon, Darrin. "In Pursuit of Unhappiness." *New York Times*, 29 Dec. 2005. Web. 15 Sept. 2012. <[http://www.nytimes.com/2005/12/29/opinion/29McMahon.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2005/12/29/opinion/29McMahon.html?_r=0)>.

"Overall Results for Youth Inside the Church." *CenterforYouthStudies.com*. Center for Youth Studies, n.d. Web. 26 Jan. 2012.

"Overall Results for Youth Outside the Church." *CenterforYouthStudies.com*. Center for Youth Studies, n.d. Web. 26 Jan. 2012.

<b>Suggested 3-Week Pacing</b>
<b>Week 1:</b> Activities: 1-8
<b>Week 2:</b> Activities: 9-14
<b>Week 3:</b> Activities: 15-18

# Reading Rhetorically

## Prereading

### Activity 1: Getting Ready to Read

Watch the short YouTube video entitled “What makes you happy?” found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B8XLzqQx478>. Then list two to three ways that people can achieve true happiness.

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Discuss your ideas with one or more classmates or partners of the opposite gender. Take notes on their ideas.

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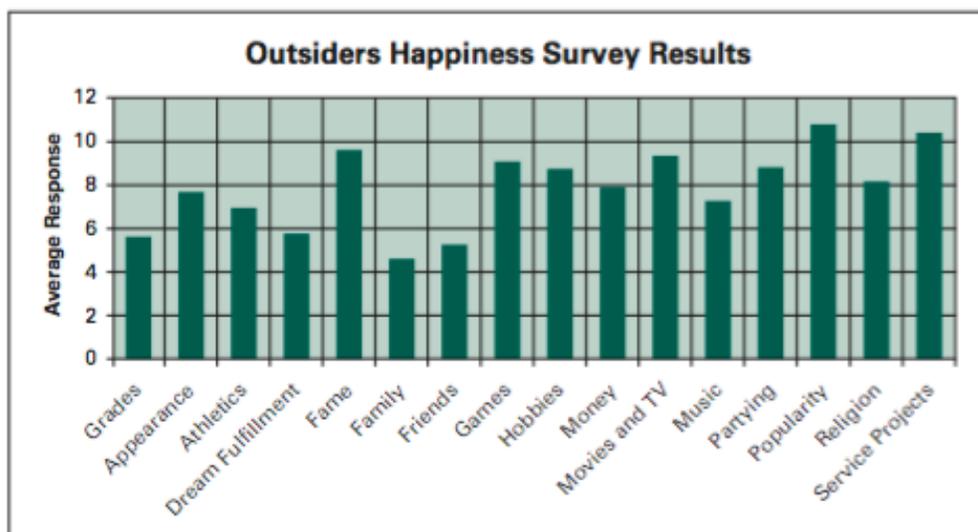
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After hearing what others think will create happiness, take a look at the following graph. 66 youth rated what they believe makes or would make them happy.

**Happiness Survey Results:** A total of 66 youth (35 Males and 31 Females), aged 11-19, were surveyed using questionnaires. Youth were asked to rate 16 items on a scale of 1 to 16, 1 being that which makes, or would make, them most happy and 16 being that which makes them least happy. The following graph indicates the average results for each item:





## Grade 11 Expository Reading and Writing Project

Below are four excerpts from the text you are about to read. Before you continue on to the next quote, answer these questions for each:

- (a) What do you notice?
- (b) What words and ideas seem to be important?
- (c) What do you predict the next section will be about?

1. “‘HAPPY New Year!’ We seldom think of those words as an order. But in some respects that is what they are.”

(a)

(b)

(c)

2. “Doesn’t every American want to be happy? And don’t most Americans yearn deep down to be happy all of the time?”

(a)

(b)

(c)

3. “The right laid out in our nation’s Declaration of Independence— to pursue happiness to our heart’s content—is nowhere on better display than in the rites of the holiday season. With glad tidings and good cheer, we seek to bring one year to its natural happy conclusion, while preparing to usher in a happy new year and many happy returns.”

(a)

(b)

(c)

4. “So in these last days of 2005 I say to you, ‘Don’t have a happy new year!’...If you’re so inclined, put in some good hours at the office or at your favorite charity, temple or church. ...With luck, you’ll find happiness by the by. If not, your time won’t be wasted. You may even bring a little joy to the world.”

(a)

(b)

(c)

Consider some additional questions on the reading selection:

1. What do you think McMahon will have to say about the American goal to be happy?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Why do you think the author spent so many lines introducing the American goal of happiness and then title the piece “In Pursuit of Unhappiness”?

### Activity 3: SOAPSTone

Based on your discussions and reading of the title and first and last paragraphs, complete the SOAPSTone tool to begin to identify the important components of the text you will be reading. Make generalizations based on what you have read so far.

#### Appendix 1: Reading for SOAPSTone

<b>What is the Subject?</b>	The general topic, content, and idea contained in the text
<b>What is the Occasion?</b>	The time and place of the piece, the current situation
<b>Who is the Audience?</b>	The group of readers to whom this piece is directed
<b>What is the Purpose?</b>	The author's reason behind the text
<b>Who is the Speaker?</b>	The voice that tells the story
<b>What is the Tone?</b>	The emotional attitude the writer expresses toward the subject

<b>S (Subject)</b>	<b>This article is about . . .</b>
<b>O (Occasion)</b>	<b>The events which led up to the writing of this piece include . . .</b>
<b>A (Audience)</b>	<b>From the words _____ and _____, we can assume the author's intended audience is . . .</b>
<b>P (Purpose)</b>	<b>The main purpose of this article is to . . .</b>
<b>S (Speaker)</b>	<b>From the words _____ and _____, we can assume the author is . . .</b>
<b>Tone</b>	<b>In the introductory paragraphs, the author's attitude is one of . . .</b>

### Activity 4: Understanding Key Vocabulary

Read the definitions and sentences provided. Then use your knowledge of the words to add a synonym, a picture of the word, and a description of what the word is NOT (this last section may need the support of your teacher). To demonstrate your understanding of each word, use each word correctly in an original sentence.

Word	Synonym	Description of what the word NOT	A Picture of the Word	Sentence
<b>rite-</b> A formal ceremonial act	ritual	An informal, spur-of-the-moment party		My friend is planning her Quinceañera, a young girl's coming of age celebration on her 15 <sup>th</sup> birthday.
<b>right-</b> That which is due to anyone				
<b>stagnancy-</b> The state of being inactive, Dull, sluggish				
<b>undermine-</b> To injure or destroy by indirect means				

<p><b>resign-</b> (onself) to- to submit, to give up</p>				
<p><b>pursuit-</b> An effort to secure or attain</p>				

## Reading

### Activity 5: Reading for Understanding

Thorough understanding of a text requires reading it more than once. The first reading should be fairly quick to get the main idea. During this reading, you do not need to understand every word or sentence. Later, you will reread the text again more slowly and carefully and deal with those difficult parts.

1. Review the predictions you made about the reading.
2. As you read the first section of the article (1-5), circle any new vocabulary words you recognize from activity 4.
3. Put question marks by words, sentences, or paragraphs that are confusing, but do not take the time to try to figure them out now.
4. Put square brackets [ ] around the most interesting sentence in the section. Be able to explain why you chose that sentence.

Repeat the above steps for each subtitled section of the article.

After reading the entire article, discuss the following questions in small groups:

1. Which of your predictions turned out to be true?
2. Which sentence in each section did you find most interesting?  
Did others also choose those sentences?
3. Compare parts that you found confusing. Somebody in your group may offer a



5. Which section is most persuasive? Least persuasive? Explain.
  
6. From your chart of the text, what do you think is the text's main argument? Is it **explicit** or **implicit**?
  
7. In what ways is the final paragraph a style imitation of the second-to-last paragraph?

### **Activity 7: Annotating and Questioning the Text**

Follow the directions below for annotating this essay:

1. **First Highlighting:** Use a yellow highlighter to mark all of Thomas Carlyle's quotes in the article. Explain how these quotes support McMahon's argument.
  
2. **Second Highlighting:** Use a pink highlighter to mark John Stuart Mills' quotes in the article. Explain how these quotes support McMahon's argument.
  
3. In what ways are Thomas Carlyle and John Stuart Mill similar in their thinking about happiness? In what ways are they different? What facet of the argument does Carlyle serve? What does the Mills quote provide to McMahon's argument?

3. *continued*

### Activity 8: Analyzing Stylistic Choices

This particular line of questioning is offered to help you see that the linguistic choices writers make create certain effects for their readers. These questions are divided into three categories: words, sentences, and paragraphs. Please discuss the following questions with a small group, if possible, or write your responses as an individual journal assignment.

#### Words

1. What does the word *paradox* mean to you?
2. What synonyms for *happy* does the author use in this essay?
3. What synonyms for *unhappy* does the author use in this essay?
4. Does the author make more mention of happiness or unhappiness in this essay? Why do you think so?

#### Sentences

The author makes a handful of statements that are surprising. The title “In Pursuit of Unhappiness” is an example of that.

1. Why does the author use this contradictory statement as his title?

2. What is the effect on the reader of that contradiction?

The author states, “But before we take such steps, we might do well to reflect on the darker side of holiday cheer: those mysterious blues that are apt to set in while the streamers stream and the corks pop; the little voice that even in the best of souls is sometimes moved to say, ‘Bah, humbug.’”

3. What is the effect on the reader of the imagery that author uses in those lines?

## Paragraphs

In the introductory paragraphs, the author uses a distinct tone of voice. He states the following:

‘HAPPY New Year!’ We seldom think of those words as an order. But in some respects that is what they are.”

Doesn’t every American want to be happy? And don’t most Americans yearn, deep down, to be happy all of the time? The right laid out in our nation’s Declaration of Independence – to pursue happiness to our hearts’ content – is nowhere on better display than in the rites of the holiday season. With glad tidings and good cheer, we seek to bring one year to its natural happy conclusion, while preparing to usher in a happy new year and many happy returns.

1. Why did the author choose to write the first word in capital letters? And how many times is that word repeated throughout the introduction? What is the effect of that repetition?
2. Why did the author choose to open the second paragraph with two rhetorical questions?
3. What is McMahon trying to do in writing this way?



## Postreading

### Activity 10: Thinking Critically

Please discuss the following questions with a small group, if possible, or write your responses as an individual journal assignment (use separate paper).

#### Questions about Logic (Logos)

1. Why does McMahon use the example of the holiday season?
2. In the third paragraph, what assumption about happiness does the quotation from Thomas Carlyle challenge?
3. According to McMahon's paraphrase of Thomas Carlyle in the fourth paragraph, what caused the change in the concept of happiness? Why is this historical discussion important to McMahon's argument?
4. What assumptions does McMahon make about the cause and effect relationships between self-help books and the percentage of happy people? Are there any factors McMahon doesn't mention that might also explain the demand for self-help books?

#### Questions about the Writer (Ethos)

1. What is McMahon's profession? Does that make him more or less believable?
2. What do McMahon's references to Thomas Carlyle and John Stuart Mill do for his own image and credibility?
3. Why does McMahon make Thomas Carlyle's views and personality such a prominent focus in his article? To what extent does McMahon seem to agree with Carlyle?
4. Why does McMahon say that "Carlyle's arithmetic was essentially sound"? How does his verification of Carlyle's claim that in 1843 the new preoccupation with happiness was "not yet two centuries old" contribute to McMahon's authority as a historian?

#### Questions about Emotions (Pathos)

1. What feelings do the opening paragraphs create in the reader? Is there a genuine sense of "glad tidings and good cheer" in the first two paragraphs, or is something else going on?
2. In paragraph nine, McMahon describes the "mysterious [holiday] blues that are apt to set in while the streamers stream and the corks pop." How does this paragraph affect the reader? What kind of sadness does McMahon describe in this paragraph?
3. In the final paragraph, McMahon lists several activities that he suggests are better ways of spending our time than trying to make ourselves happy, including having dinner with family, volunteering, or spending time with your child. What emotions do these examples create in the reader?

#### Other Questions to Develop Critical Thinking

1. What do you think Carlyle would say about economists Layard and Kahneman's assumption that "gross national happiness" can be increased?
2. What does McMahon imply was the old, pre-17th century view of happiness? What's your view of happiness?
3. What are the similarities and differences between "morally acceptable" and "commendable" behavior (paragraph 4)? Why do you think McMahon makes this distinction?

## Connecting Reading to Writing

### Discovering What You Think

#### Activity 11: Reading the Assignment

Plan, write, and revise an essay on the following prompt:

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I never, indeed, wavered in the conviction that happiness is the test of all rules of conduct, and the end of life. But I now thought that this end was only to be attained by not making it the direct end. Those only are happy (I thought) who have their minds fixed on some object other than their own happiness; on the happiness of others, on the improvement of mankind, even on some art or pursuit, followed not as a means, but as itself an ideal end. Aiming thus at something else, they find happiness by the way. The enjoyments of life (such was now my theory) are sufficient to make it a pleasant thing, when they are taken *en passant*, without being made a principal object. Once make them so, and they are immediately felt to be insufficient. They will not bear a scrutinizing examination. Ask yourself whether you are happy, and you cease to be so. The only chance is to treat, not happiness, but some end external to it, as the purpose of life. Let your self-consciousness, your scrutiny, your self-interrogation, exhaust themselves on that; and if otherwise fortunately circumstanced you will inhale happiness with the air you breathe, without dwelling on it or thinking about it, without either forestalling it in imagination, or putting it to flight by fatal questioning. This theory now became the basis of my philosophy of life. And I still hold to it as the best theory for all those who have but a moderate degree of sensibility and of capacity for enjoyment, that is, for the great majority of mankind.

John Stuart Mill (1806–73). Autobiography.  
Chapter V, A Crisis in My Mental History: One Stage  
Onward. *The Harvard Classics*. 1909–14.

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**Prompt→ Explain John Stuart Mill’s argument, and discuss the ways in which you agree or disagree with his views. Support your position by providing reasons and examples from your own observations, experiences, or readings.**

#### Activity 12: Taking a Stance

As you prepare to write, think carefully about your reactions to the various viewpoints you’ve read on the issue of creating happiness. Begin to formulate a thesis by answering the following questions:

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1. What specific question will your essay answer? What is your tentative response to this question? (This will turn into your thesis.)
2. Which views on creating happiness most closely mirror your own?
3. What support have you found for your thesis?
4. What evidence do you have for that support?
5. How much background information do your readers need in order to understand the topic of creating happiness?
6. If readers were to disagree with your thesis, what would they say? How would you address those concerns?

Now draft a possible thesis for your essay. As you write, be open to the idea of possibly changing your thesis as your argument develops.

**Working Thesis:**

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### Activity 13: Gathering Evidence to Support Your Claims

Look back at the textual evidence you've gathered so far over the course of this module. This includes your quickwrites, annotations, and responses to questions. For each piece of evidence, consider the following questions:

How closely does this piece of evidence relate to the claim it is supposed to support?

Is this piece of evidence a fact or an opinion? Is it an example?

If this evidence is a fact, what kind of fact is it (statistic, experimental result, quotation)?

If it is an opinion, what makes the opinion credible?

What makes this evidence persuasive?

How well will the evidence suit the audience and the rhetorical purpose of the piece?

Now, put a checkmark by the items that will serve as good evidence based on these criteria.

### Activity 14: Getting Ready to Write—Discussion

This activity is designed to help you become aware of how McMahon, an experienced writer, uses the words of others to build/enhance his argument. This can be done through:

- a) **direct quotation** (saying precisely what the original author said)
- b) **paraphrasing** (providing a specific idea from another source but putting it in your own words)
- c) **summarizing** (providing the primary ideas from a source in generalized form)

For each of the following examples from “In Pursuit of Unhappiness,” identify the source of the comment (who said it), and decide whether the remark is a direct quotation, paraphrase, or summary.

Source: \_\_\_\_\_ Type: \_\_\_\_\_

Paragraph 7 – “Sociologists like to point out that the percentage of those describing themselves as ‘happy’ or ‘very happy’ has remained virtually unchanged. . .”

Source: \_\_\_\_\_ Type: \_\_\_\_\_

Paragraph 3 – “As Thomas Carlyle observed in 1843, ‘Happiness our being’s end and aim is at bottom, if we will count well, not yet two centuries old.’”

Source: \_\_\_\_\_ Type: \_\_\_\_\_

Paragraph 8 – “economists like Lord Richard Layard and Daniel Kahneman have argued that the apparent stagnancy of happiness in modern societies should prompt policymakers to shift

their priorities from the creation of wealth to the creation of good feelings. . .”

Source: \_\_\_\_\_ Type: \_\_\_\_\_

Paragraph 10 – “‘Ask yourself whether you are happy, and you cease to be so,’ Mill concluded after recovering from a serious bout of depression.”

## Writing Rhetorically

### Entering the Conversation

#### Activity 15: Composing a Draft

When you write an *argument essay*, choose an approach to the subject that matters to you. If you have strong feelings, you will find it much easier to gather evidence and convince your readers of your point of view (aka argument). Keep in mind, however, that your readers might feel just as strongly about the opposite side of the issue. The following guidelines will help you write a good argument essay:

**#1: State your position on your topic in your thesis statement.** To write a thesis statement for an argument essay, you must take a stand for or against an action. In other words, your thesis statement should be debatable—a statement that can be argued or challenged and will not be met with agreement by everyone who reads it. Your thesis statement should introduce your subject and state your stance on it.

**#2: Choose evidence that supports your thesis statement.** Evidence is probably the most important factor in writing an argument essay. Without solid evidence, your essay is nothing more than opinion; with evidence, your essay can be powerful and persuasive. If you supply convincing evidence, your readers will not only understand your position but also perhaps agree with it. Evidence can consist of facts, statistics, statements from authorities, and examples or personal stories. Examples and personal stories can be based on your own observations, experiences, and reading, but your opinions are not evidence. Other strategies such as cause and effect, comparison and contrast, as well as definition, can be particularly useful in building an argument. Use any combination of evidence and writing strategies that supports your thesis statement.

**#3: Anticipate opposing points of view.** In addition to stating and supporting your position, anticipating and responding to opposing views are important. Presenting only your side of the argument leaves half the story untold—the opposition’s half. If you acknowledge that there are opposing arguments and answer them, you will move your reader more in your direction. McMahon expresses the views of an opposing voice when he says, “Sociologists like to point out that the percentage of those describing

themselves as ‘happy’ or ‘very happy’ has remained virtually unchanged in Europe and the United States since such surveys were first conducted in the 1950s.” In the following paragraph, he chose to include the opinions of Lord Richard Layard and Daniel Kahneman who argued “the apparent stagnancy of happiness in modern societies should prompt policymakers to shift their priorities from the creation of wealth to the creation of good feelings, from boosting gross national product to increasing gross national happiness.”

### **Activity 16: Considering Structure**

Plan how you will organize your essay. The following is an effective and recommended structure to choose.

#### **Introduction**

- Background information
- Introduction of subject
- Statement of your opinion

#### **Body Paragraphs**

- State a topic that supports your opinion
- Present evidence (both logical and emotional)
- Address the opposing point of view
- Respond to opposing point of view

#### **Conclusion**

- Restatement of your position
- Call for action or agreement

Now it is time to write... Refer back to the writing assignment (Activity 11) often!

## **Revising and Editing**

### **Activity 17: Reviewing the Draft and Revising Rhetorically**

You now need to work with the organization and development of your draft to make sure that your essay is as effective as possible.

### **Peer Group Work**

Working with a small group, each student will read his or her essay aloud to other members of the group. Then discuss and write answers to the 'revising rhetorically' questions below. Use a teacher, tutor, or other adult listener if a student group is not available.

### **Revising Rhetorically**

The following questions will help you think about your audience, your purpose, your image as a writer, your argument, and the evidence that supports it.

1. Who will read your essay? What do readers probably think or believe about your topic? How much background information do they need to connect to/understand your essay?
2. What is your purpose in writing? What questions are you trying to answer? What are you trying to accomplish?
3. What sort of image, or ethos, do you as a writer want to project to your reader? How will you achieve it? What words or type of language might you want to use to help construct your ethos?
4. What is your main argument? What support do you have? What is your strongest evidence?
5. Are there any emotional appeals you want to use?
6. If readers disagree with your thesis or the validity of your support, what would they say? How would you answer them?

**Individual Work**

Revise the draft on the basis of the feedback you received from your partner(s) and to clarify and strengthen each of the areas you identified in your answers to the questions above.

**Activity 18: Editing the Draft**

Another aspect to improving an essay is correcting the grammar and usage, which is called editing. Read the following strategies to help you edit effectively. Choose at least two of the strategies to edit your paper, and then write a paragraph that reports the strategies you used and how well they worked (see directions below).

- If possible, set your essay aside for 24 hours before rereading it to find errors.
- If possible, read your essay aloud so you can hear errors and awkward constructions.
- Focus on individual words and sentences rather than on overall meaning. To do this, slow yourself down by covering everything but the line you are reading with a piece of paper, or start with the last paragraph of your essay and work backwards paragraph by paragraph, or sentence by sentence.
- With the help of your teacher, figure out your own pattern of errors—the most serious and frequent errors you make.
- Look for only one type of error at a time. Then go back and look for a second type and, if necessary, a third.
- Use an online dictionary to check spelling and confirm that you have chosen the right word for the context.

Write a paragraph that answers the following questions:

1. Which editing strategies did you use? Which one was more effective for you? Why?

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2. What is one type of error you make the most often? Write a sentence from your essay that contains the error.

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- **Write/print a final draft of your essay, correcting all the errors that you have found.**
- **Turn it in along with all the completed work from this packet.**