

Lesson Eight – Understanding Your Narrative About Yourself

“It’s like a mother, when the baby is crying, she picks up the baby and she holds the baby tenderly in her arms. Your pain, your anxiety is your baby. You have to take care of it. You have to go back to yourself, recognize the suffering, embrace the suffering, and you can get relief.

– Thich Naht Hahn

CREATIVE ACTIVITY – Found Poem

Lesson Intention:

At this point, we are more than halfway through our journey exploring our emotions. We are looking at which emotions lie beneath the surface for us, and also examining the way our emotions influence our lives. This lesson draws on a blend of Byron Katie’s Inquiry Based Stress Reduction and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy to support young people as they learn more about the way their thoughts and feelings interact. We also introduce students to the concept of cognitive distortion, and the types of cognitive distortions that are most common.

1. Identify inaccurate thinking.
2. Focus on which parts may be inaccurate by asking “Is this thought 100% accurate?”
3. Reshape those thoughts by developing a new, more accurate thought.

In this lesson, we want to help students identify and reshape thoughts that are causing them difficulty: thoughts about their physical appearance or abilities that are negative, thoughts about their lives that are painful, worries about their future, etc. For this lesson students will focus on thoughts about themselves. In the next lesson, students will be supported in re-examining thoughts regarding their relationships with others.

Social Emotional Learning Goals:

- Recognize the connection between thoughts and emotions.
- Learn a technique for examining thoughts and questioning their truth.

Materials for Lesson:

- [Featured Videos \(2\) - Bryan Cranston, Dr. Nina Vasan](#)
- [Additional Video \(1\)](#)
- Lesson Plan (this document)
- [Lesson PowerPoint](#)

In Preparation for Lesson:

*Prior to teaching this lesson, **watch the expert and guest artist videos** and write a found poem that you will share with your students.*

Featured Videos:

1. Bryan Cranston shares the way he learned to reframe negative self-critical thoughts when he was auditioning for roles at the start of his career.
2. Dr. Nina Vasan describes the relationship between emotions, thoughts and behaviors. She uses the example of feeling insecure about her body to illustrate this idea.

Additional Video:

Dani Silva describes her life-long struggle with feeling insecure about her body and the way writing poetry finally allowed her to feel heard and understood for the first time.

Lesson Plan:

Display the 'welcome slide' from the Lesson 8 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

Review the way earlier lessons explored emotion. First, we explored the idea that emotion is an important aspect of the human experience – something to honor and express. Next, we looked at the way emotion can be informative and can bring about change in our lives or in the world. In this lesson, we are discussing a third way to think about emotion – as feelings tied to thoughts. Introduce a video from an expert in mental health who will talk more about the way emotions are connected to thoughts.

Example of What You Could Say:

“We have thought about emotion in two different ways so far: The first is as an important part of the human experience – for our emotions to be acknowledged, felt, honored and expressed. Next, we explored emotion as information, our feelings acting as a messenger telling us that something needs to be changed in the world or in our personal lives. Today, we are going to look at emotion in a new way. This lesson explores the way our thoughts are connected to and influence our feelings. These thoughts can be about ourselves or about those around us. This is really quite a different way to think about emotion, so it requires a little bit of reflection. I am going to let someone who is an expert in this technique explain this idea and share their approach.”

Notes on What You Plan to Say:

Play Expert Video:

The expert introduces the idea of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and cognitive distortions. The expert shares an example of a specific thought that was upsetting in her life, and the way she was able to question if it was true.

Reflecting on Expert Video:

Reflect on the way expert modeled a process for checking to see if painful thoughts are accurate. Share an example from your life of a thought that turned out to be inaccurate, and the way you revised this thought.

Example of What You Could Say:

“The expert described the way she has learned to question difficult thoughts. She has learned to take a step back, identify these feelings, and ask herself if they’re accurate. She even shared that sometimes she chooses a different thought that is less distorted and more accurate. I have my own example from my life to share. A thought that I used to think is _____ but I changed the thought to be more accurate _____. (Share your example with the students).

So, what I learned to do (or need to do, depending on the example) is to cross out the negative and inaccurate thought in my mind and reframe this thought in a way that is more accurate. This concept is exactly what we are going to practice in our creative project today.”

Notes on What You Plan to Say:

Introducing the Creative Activity:

**Slide 3*

Introduce the creative activity– writing a “found poem”. Explain the way writing a “found poem” is similar to the process we can do (and already do) with our thoughts. We can cross out some thoughts and revise them.”

Example of What You Could Say:

“The creative activity we are going to do will help you practice “crossing out” some inaccurate thoughts and “rewriting” them. Has anyone ever made a “found poem” before? It’s actually simpler than writing a poem. It just involves taking text that someone else has written and crossing out certain words in order to create a poem with the words that remain. (*Share examples of found poems.*)

The interesting thing about this activity is that it is similar to what happens in our brains when we are deciding which thoughts to revise. We are essentially training our minds to cross out the inaccurate thoughts and replace them with more accurate ones. This does not mean your painful feeling should be avoided. As we have discussed, it is important to allow ourselves to feel and express emotions – but after you have experienced the feelings, you can move forward by looking at the thoughts to see if they are actually true. Punch the pillow if you’re mad, or cry if you’re sad, but then have a check in with yourself to see how “true” or accurate the thought behind your emotion is, or if there is something you can do to reframe those thoughts – knowing it will have a positive influence on your emotions.

For the creative project, we’re going to create a poem. The first stanza in your poem is a representation of the inaccurate thoughts of what you used to believe. The second stanza is a representation of the more accurate thoughts that you now know to be more true. This second stanza shows that you’re now thinking about a previous negative thought in a new way. Your poem does not have to be an exact depiction of the actual thought. Rather, it can simply be words that describe a poetic sense of that thought. For instance, if you have trouble falling asleep at night, the poem can be made of the words “alone, afraid, awake, tired, frustrated, noise outside my room.” I created a found poem and would like to share it with you right now.” (Read your poem to the students and briefly explain the way the second stanza in this poem illustrates a change in your thinking).

Notes on What You Plan to Say:

Creative Activity:

* Slides 4 and 5

Give an additional example of a “found poem” by sharing slides 5 and 6 on the PowerPoint. Read the poem out loud to your students as well as pointing out the inaccurate thought that inspired the poem. Students will then create their own found poem by crossing out words from an existing text. The first stanza in the poem is a representation of the inaccurate thoughts students used to believe. The second stanza is a representation of the more accurate thoughts that you now know to be more true. The powerpoint includes one example text that students can use to create their found poem, but if you would like to individualize this lesson further, you can offer your own texts or encourage students to search for and choose a text that they would like to use.

Example of What You Could Say:

“Since this is a unique assignment and a type of poem that you may not have written before, let’s take a look at an additional example before we begin. This poem was inspired by the inaccurate thought ‘I’m not beautiful and I feel insecure about my body’. The first stanza of the poem represents what you used to believe. I’m going to read that stanza aloud to you now _____ (*read the first stanza of the poem on slide 4 aloud to your students*). Now let’s read the second stanza where the writer reframed the thought in a more accurate and positive way. The writer now seems to be focusing on the things she likes about herself. Notice how much more empowering the second stanza feels _____ (*read the second stanza of the poem on slide 5 aloud to your students*). Now we are going to take 10–15 minutes to work on our own found poems. Let me know if you have any questions or need any help.”

Notes on What You Plan to Say:

Reflecting on Creative Activity/ Introducing the Guest Artist Video

Invite students to share their poem. Encourage students to describe the inaccurate thought that inspired the poem if they would like to share this information as well.

Example of What You Could Say:

“Does anyone want to share their found poem? If you feel comfortable, you might also want to describe the thought that inspired your poem.”

Notes on What You Plan to Say:

Explain that class will conclude in a unique way- with a short video clip from a guest artist, Bryan Cranston, who explains the way he has transformed his own self-critical thoughts to be more affirming.

Example of What You Could Say:

“Now that we’ve had the opportunity to hear a few found poems, and to learn the way we can rethink some of our thoughts so that they are more accurate and positive, we are going to end class with a really great example of someone who really practices what Dr. Vasan described during the expert video at the start of class. This is a short video from an actor who many of you will recognize! In this video, Bryan Cranston describes the way he used to be really hard on himself during auditions, but he learned how change those critical and deceptive thoughts! I think this is a great way to end class- with an example that will hopefully help you continue to remember this important skill!”

Notes on What You Plan to Say:

Play Guest Artist Video

Bryan Cranston shares the way he learned to reframe negative self-critical thoughts when he was auditioning for roles at the start of his career.

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. Byron Katie developed a framework for questioning thoughts called Inquiry Based Stress Reduction or The Work. She shares her method for free [on her website](#) and also provides many links to interviews and videos where she describes The Work.
2. Richie Davidson has completed extensive research on mindfulness and [this is a quick TED talk](#) describing the way mindfulness impacts well-being. How Mindfulness Impacts the Emotional Life of Our Brain.
3. The American Psychological Society offers a succinct overview of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy [on their website](#).