



SAINT JOSEPH CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL  
STRIVE Mini-Lesson  
OPTIMISM

Objectives:

- Students will become aware of the meaning of optimism.
- Students will define the three facets of optimism
- Students will hear strategies on improving their optimism.

Procedure:

1. Ask students to brainstorm what being optimistic is...
2. Provide formal definition of optimism.

Optimism is the belief that good things will happen to you and that negative events are temporary setbacks to be overcome.

3. Read the story below.

A family had twin boys whose only resemblance to each other was their looks. If one felt it was too hot, the other thought it was too cold. If one said the TV was too loud, the other claimed the volume needed to be turned up. Opposite in every way, one was an eternal optimist, the other a doom & gloom pessimist.

Just to see what would happen, on the twins' birthday their father loaded the pessimist's room with every imaginable toy and game. The optimist's room he loaded with horse manure.

That night the father passed by the pessimist's room and found him sitting amid his new gifts crying bitterly.

"Why are you crying?" the father asked.

"Because my friends will be jealous, I'll have to read all these instructions before I can do anything with this stuff, I'll constantly need batteries, and my toys will eventually get broken," answered the pessimist twin.

Passing the optimist twin's room, the father found him dancing for joy in the pile of manure. "What are you so happy about?" he asked.

To which his optimist twin replied, "There's got to be a pony in here somewhere!"

4. Define the three facets optimism.

Facet 1: Temporary vs Permanent

- believing that the causes of bad events are temporary.  
My mom is in the crabbest mood ever. (temporary)  
VS  
My mom is the crabbest mom in the whole world. (permanent)
- believing that the causes of good events have permanent causes.  
Dad loves to spend time with me. (permanent)  
VS  
Dad has been spending time with me because he's been in a good mood lately.  
(temporary)

Facet 2: Specific vs Global

- believing that failures are specific.  
I stink at kickball. (specific)  
VS  
I suck at all sports. (global)
- believing that successes are global.  
I'm smart. (global)  
VS  
I am smart at math. (specific)

Facet 3: Behavior vs Character

- believing that bad events can be blamed on a behavior rather than on our whole character.  
I failed the test because I didn't study hard enough. (behavior)  
VS  
I failed the test because I'm stupid. (character)  
I got grounded because I missed curfew. (behavior)  
VS  
I got grounded because I am a bad kid. (character)

5. Read and complete the following to help students become more aware of optimistic self-talk.
- To be more optimistic, be aware of the language you use. In bad situations, avoid self-talk that makes the event seem
    - i. permanent (like this always),
    - ii. global (event will affect all areas)
    - iii. and/or about your character (event determines who we are)

For each statement below, identify if it is permanent, global or about character and provide a more optimistic statement.

- a) I can't believe I burnt my grilled cheese. I am the worst cook.
- b) This is the worst day ever.
- c) I am never going to pass this test because I am horrible under pressure.

Answers:

- I can't believe I burnt my grilled cheese. I am the worst cook. (global)
  - I can't believe I burnt my grilled cheese. I need to pay more attention.
- This is the worst day ever. (permanent)
  - I am having a tough time.
- I am never going to pass this test because I am horrible under pressure. (about character)
  - I am going to have a tough time with this test, but am going to try my best.
- Practice actively seeing your situation from a brighter, more positive perspective. Say "The good news is..." and complete your sentence.
  - Yes, your car broke down, but the good news is...you had a cell phone to call for help.
  - Yes, you forgot your assignment at home but the good news is...you completed it and will do well on the quiz.
- Your turn. Change the following sentences like the example above to be more optimistic.
  - Yes, you have to stay home for the long weekend but the good news is...
  - Yes, you woke up late for school but the good news is...

6. Share the benefits of being optimistic as per below.

Benefits of optimism:

- Longer life
- Superior health
- More resilience
- Stronger immune system
- Greater Achievement
- Increased persistence
- Less stress
- Lower chances of depression
- Lower cardiac risk

7. Finish by sharing the story below.

## One story, two perspectives

<http://tinybuddha.com/blog/of-bikes-and-bushes-a-tale-of-two-stories/>

I was walking down the street the other day looking for a new client's office and I was having a little trouble finding it. I really didn't know that end of town very well so I was concentrating more on the numbers on the buildings than where I was going.

As I turned the corner—hopeful I was headed in the right direction—I heard a loud clattering sound and looked up. Out of the corner of my eye I saw a huge man on a bicycle careening down the sidewalk, arms and legs flailing. He was obviously unable to steer, let alone stop.

Immediately realizing the danger, I dropped my briefcase and dove head-first into the nearby bushes, narrowly escaping an accident with an overweight hit-and-run cyclist.

I popped out of the shrubbery, branches in my hair, and looked down the sidewalk. He was gone.

What a jerk! What was he doing on the sidewalk with that bike? And anyway, what was he doing on a bicycle in the first place, when he clearly wasn't able to ride one. He should be off *learning* somewhere else. The nerve.

He could have killed me! How unbelievably dangerous. What on earth did he think we have streets for? Sidewalks are for pedestrians, not bikes – especially not for out of control ones. What if an old lady had been in his way? She would have had no chance at all. Imagine. The gall of this guy.

And look at my clothes. I was a mess. My jacket was torn, my knees were scrubbed, my hands were dirty and I broke one of my heels off. Damn shoes were expensive too. I couldn't possibly go to my appointment like this. I was really pissed off, and rightly so. The cyclist was clearly at fault.

I pulled out my telephone, which probably was broken, although it looked okay and cancelled my appointment. I found my briefcase lying in the dirt next to the bushes. The leather was scratched and all my papers had fallen out. The laptop was probably ruined, but I decided to check that later. I gathered all my things, took the broken shoe off and limped back to my car.

What a jerk.

**... One more time...**

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As I turned the corner, hopeful I was headed in the right direction, I heard a loud clattering sound and looked up. Out of the corner of my eye I saw a huge man on a bicycle careening down the sidewalk, arms and legs flailing. He was obviously unable to steer, let alone stop.

Immediately realizing the danger, I dropped my briefcase and dove head first into the nearby bushes, narrowly escaping an accident with an overweight hit-and-run cyclist.

I popped out of the shrubbery, branches in my hair, and looked down the sidewalk. He was gone.

Wow. That guy could have killed me. I couldn't believe it. My response time was unbelievable. Imagine. I was in those bushes within a fraction of a second. Incredible. And with high heels on. Oops. Make that high *heel* – one of them didn't survive. I broke the heel off of the other shoe so I could walk straight. Thank goodness I bought expensive shoes—they even looked good without heels.

I was impressed. My years of working with horses had definitely paid off; I could really get out of the way fast. I gave myself an emotional pat on the back. I'd like to see my son move like that.

Downright elegant the way I dove into those shrubs. I brushed the dirt off my pants, pleased I had worn brown.

Most people I know would have been flattened. They wouldn't have had a chance. I snickered smugly and plucked the leaves from my hair.

Feeling ever so athletic, I gathered all my scattered papers, shoved my laptop back into my briefcase and checked the address. Yep, this was the right building. Wasn't even late. I wiped my hands on the lining of my jacket and rang the buzzer.

Look out world, here I come.

**Same bike. Same bush. Different meaning. Different day.**

Happy diving.