

The Chain of Smiles

..... source unknown (adapted and modified by Amy Fox)

One day, a teacher gave her pupils a new assignment: an assignment on happiness. Her pupils would be "happiness collectors", and were to see what would happen when they tried to bring happiness to those around them. As part of their assignment, all the students did really delightful, wonderful things, but what Carla did left everyone astounded. Several days after the assignment had been handed out, Carla came to school carrying a big sack.

"Here in this bag I have all the happiness I've collected so far," she said, smiling.

Everyone was filled with expectation, but Carla didn't want to show anyone what was in the sack. Instead, she pulled out a small box and gave it to her teacher.

When her teacher had taken the box out, Carla took an instant camera out of her own pocket and stood with it at the ready.

"Open it," she said to her teacher.

The teacher slowly opened the box and looked inside. A big smile shone on her face, and at that moment Carla snapped a photo. Carla's photo popped out the camera, and she offered it to her teacher along with a sheet of paper. The teacher read the paper in silence, and when she had finished she gestured over at the sack.

"Oh, so the sack is filled with...."

"Yes!" interrupted Carla, undoing the knot which sealed the sack, "It's a great big pile of smiles!"

Carla opened the sack and hundreds of photos fell out, all of different smiles, each one of them beautiful.

The rest of the class tried to figure out how Carla had managed to create such a great big chain of happiness. All there was in the box– the same box that the teacher had opened– was a photo of a big smile. But everyone who had seen the picture of the smile had felt happiness being transmitted to them, and in return, without even thinking about it, had responded with a smile of their own.

And so it was that Carla had managed to spread a chain of smiles because she understood a simple truth: every time you smile, you are sending a gift to the world and that gift, once received, keeps giving.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS & PROMPTS

OPENING CLASS

Take a moment and allow yourself to arrive in this space.

Feel your physical body. Notice what's present for you.

Notice your breathing body, your natural breath.

Allow the corners of your mouth to curl up slightly. See if in the space you arrived, you can smile. Even if you don't "feel" a certain way, try putting a smile on.

Something as simple as smiling– for no reason at all – is enough to transform our mood and boost feelings of happiness.

Start to deepen your breath here and perhaps see if a light smile can stay with you throughout practice.

DURING CLASS

After Telling the Story

Back in the 1800s, Charles Darwin was among the first to come up with what modern scientists further developed into the "facial feedback hypothesis." That's the idea that smiling can make you happier and frowning can make you sadder or angrier – that changing your facial expression can intensify or even transform your mood.

Smiling stimulates the brain's reward mechanisms in a way that even chocolate– a well-regarded pleasure inducer– cannot match.

Maybe the corners of your mouth curl up here. Notice what shifts or changes.

What if you already had the power to change your day and life and nothing in your life has to change?

CLOSING CLASS

Every time you smile, you are sending a gift to the world and that gift, once received, keeps giving.

Take a moment, put a smile on your face and let yourself revel in the magic of this moment– magic you have the potential to create each day.

EXTRAS

Smiling reduces stress that your body and mind feel, almost similar to getting good sleep, according to recent studies. And smiling helps to generate more positive emotions within you. That's why we often feel happier around children – they smile more. On average, they do so 400 times a day. Whilst happy people still smile 40-50 times a day, the average of us only does so 20 times.

Challenge your students to smile on purpose throughout their week and if they want an added challenge, ask them to smile at strangers and see what transpires.