



ACTIVITY: 'COMPOSE A POEM'

TIME: 5–10 minutes
SIZE: Whole of class
SPACE: No special requirements
RESOURCES: A-B-C-D Model (p.58 or SenseAbility CD)

The aim is to allow students to experience a situation where their thoughts about an event affect their feelings.

The result should be that students understand that they can control the way they think about events and so exercise some control over their emotional responses. The activity should also highlight the link between thoughts and feelings, and show how our thoughts have the power to increase or decrease our personal stress.

1. Tell your students that, to set the tone for Sense of Purpose, everyone in the class is to compose a poem listing six things that give their lives meaning. You (the teacher) say you will randomly pick four people from the class to stand up the front to read their poem.*
2. Explain that everyone has five minutes to start thinking about their six things and their poem. Students are NOT to talk with their classmates in this time.
3. Pretend to be busy with notes/work but try to observe your students' reactions.
4. After one minute has elapsed, stop your students (no one will be making up any poems*; this was an experiment to gauge students' responses to a specific event, but do not tell the class this yet).
5. Commence class discussion using the tables below.

LIST STUDENTS' RESPONSES

6. On the board draw up a five-column table. Label the first column '**A: Event**' and write beneath it the only entry for that column: 'Asked to recite own poem in front of the class'

A: Event				
ASKED TO RECITE OWN POEM IN FRONT OF THE CLASS				

7. Label the third and fourth columns 'Emotions' and 'Bodily Symptoms' under the broader title '**C: Feelings**'. Ask students: What were you feeling during the preparation time (e.g. anxious, excited, angry, unconcerned)? What was happening to your body (e.g. increased heart rate, sweaty palms, tense muscles)? Write the various answers in columns three and four.
8. Label the fifth column '**D: Behaviour**' and ask those same students: What were you doing during the minute (e.g. fidgeting, looking around at friends/others, avoiding eye contact with the teacher)? Write responses in column five.
9. Label the second column '**B: Thoughts**' and ask the same students: What was going through your mind when you were told that you might have to stand up and compose a poem (e.g. 'I'll make a fool of myself', 'This is unfair', 'This is exciting!', 'I'll die of embarrassment', 'I'm good at poetry')? Write responses in column two.

*You can substitute another activity for this, so long as it is likely to evoke a wide range of reactions in your students.

EXAMPLE RESPONSES:

A: Event	B: Thoughts	C: Feelings		D: Behaviour
		Emotions	Bodily Symptoms	
ASKED TO RECITE OWN POEM IN FRONT OF THE CLASS	I'LL MAKE A FOOL OF MYSELF	ANXIOUS EMBARRASSED	SWEATY CHURNING	LOOK TO FRIENDS FIDGET
	DON'T PICK ME!	APPREHENSIVE	PALE KNOTTED STOMACH	LOOK DOWN AVOID TEACHER
	THIS IS STUPID/ UNFAIR	ANGRY ANNOYED	FLUSHED CLENCHED JAW	GLARE AT TEACHER PROTEST
	I'M GOOD AT POETRY	CALM A BIT EXCITED	ALERT MUSCLES HEART RATE UP	WORK ON POEM PREPARATION

10. The table now completed, discuss how there were some very different reactions among the class to the **same** event.
11. You can now explain this was an experiment to gauge student's responses to a specific event.
12. Project the A-B-C-D Model as an OHT or give students a printed copy and explain how people can think differently about the **same event** and consequently have different feelings and actions. In other words, it is not the event but your **interpretation** of the event that leads to emotions and behaviours; you can change your feelings by changing your thinking. Therefore, challenging unhelpful thoughts and generating alternative, helpful ways to think is an important way to help manage stress and curb unhelpful emotional reactions.



DISCUSSION SUGGESTIONS

- Highlight that a whole raft of different responses – anger, nervousness, excitement – all resulted from the one common event. What caused you all to feel and act in different ways was how you each thought about the event.
- Brainstorm some thoughts that might challenge unhelpful self-talk for this activity (e.g. 'Maybe I'll actually come up with something good' or 'At least I'm not the only one, we're all in the same boat', etc). What feelings might these more helpful thoughts have resulted in?
- Brainstorm some other real life instances where people might have a variety of reactions to the same event. Try to predict the likely feelings and actions that result from various ways of thinking. Which thoughts would be helpful and which would be unhelpful to the situation? Which thoughts would most beneficial to the person's overall goal (e.g. to be happy, to do a good job, etc.)?
- Quickly brainstorm a list of events that have the potential for you to feel stressed and may deter you from persisting (e.g. stumbling in front of peers, asking someone for a date, trying out for a sports team, etc.). But remember the amount of stress and anxiety you **feel** is linked directly to how you **think** about the event. So, changing the way you think is the most effective way to control your feelings and actions, and thus reduce stress and anxiety. Unhelpful thoughts have the potential to stop us finding things that give meaning to our life, or prevent us coping with life challenges that might threaten our current or future plans.
- If any student has composed a poem they would like to share now is a good time to do so.