



EduTrend Contents

P4C · HAPPINESS AND THE GOOD LIFE · HIGH SCHOOL

Pleasure or Flourishing?

Comparing theories of the good life

Ages 15–18

Level: Advanced

60 minutes

Circle and pairs · up to
30

Activity 05

Inside: activity at a glance · step-by-step session plan · facilitator notes · 3 student worksheets · assessment checklist

ACTIVITY 05 · AT A GLANCE

Pleasure or Flourishing?

Students compare two theories. Hedonism holds that a good life is one with the most pleasure and least pain. Aristotle argued in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that the good life is *eudaimonia*, or flourishing, which comes from living well and developing virtues over a whole life. Students test both theories with Robert Nozick's experience machine and invented life stories, and enquire into what makes a life go well.

Learning outcomes

By the end of the session students can:

- explain hedonism and *eudaimonia*;
- apply theories to cases;
- evaluate the experience machine;
- construct a reasoned position.

KEY WORDS

hedonism · *eudaimonia* · flourishing · Aristotle · Nozick · virtue

CURRICULUM LINKS

Philosophy: ethics. Psychology: wellbeing research. English: life writing.

1

STIMULUS

Share something to think about

2

THINK

Quiet thinking time

3

QUESTION

Create and choose a question

4

ENQUIRE

Reason together

5

BUILD

Agree, disagree, add

6

REFLECT

Last words

Materials (per class)

- Theory cards
- Experience machine card
- Life story cards
- Question and thinking-move cards
- Worksheets 1, 2 and 3

Before the session

- Read the stimulus and note possible concepts.
- Prepare question and thinking-move cards.
- Set out a circle so everyone can see each other.
- Print the worksheets.

SAFETY

Everyone may pass. Discuss ideas, not people, and use the story or invented examples rather than personal situations.

ACTIVITY 05 · SESSION PLAN

Step by step

Stay neutral: ask for reasons, examples and counter-examples rather than giving your own view.

Time	What happens	Say or ask
0–10 min Stimulus	Introduce the two theories and the experience machine.	<i>"What did you notice?"</i>
10–22 min Questions	Students create questions in pairs and vote on one.	<i>"Which question is most interesting to talk about?"</i>
22–52 min Enquiry	Enquire into the chosen question, building on each other's ideas.	<i>"What makes a life go well?"</i>
52–60 min Last words	Each person says one last thought or passes.	<i>"Has your thinking changed?"</i>

CHALLENGE CARD (print or copy onto the board)

Defend a theory of the good life against the experience machine.

ACTIVITY 05 · FACILITATOR NOTES

The philosophy in brief

Robert Nozick described the experience machine in *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (1974) to challenge the idea that only experiences matter.

Aristotle held that flourishing depends on activity in line with virtue across a complete life.

Common ideas to listen for

- “Hedonism means only selfish pleasure.” Hedonists can value others’ pleasure.
- “Flourishing means being rich or successful.” Aristotle meant living well.
- “The experience machine proves hedonism wrong.” It is debated.

Adapting the activity

Support

Compare two life stories.

Stretch

Propose your own theory of the good life.

WORKSHEET 1

Our questions

Name: _____

Class: _____ Date: _____

Write questions the stimulus makes you wonder about.

Our questions

Question	Who asked	Votes

WORKSHEET 2

Test the theories

Apply.

Test the theories

Case	Hedonism says	Aristotle says

WORKSHEET 3

Last words

Before and after.

Is pleasure the only thing that is good for us? Before the enquiry I thought...

Now I think... because...

FOR THE TEACHER

Assessment checklist

Use during the session. One sheet covers up to eight students; copy as needed.

Student	Asks a philosophical question	Gives reasons and examples	Listens and builds on others

Suggested codes: W = working towards · E = expected · G = greater depth

ABOUT THIS ACTIVITY

Pleasure or Flourishing? is a sample activity from the EduTrend Contents P4C Happiness and the Good Life programme (high school, level: advanced). Every activity in the programme follows the same format: a practical challenge, a clear session plan, facilitator notes and ready-to-print worksheets, so that teachers, club leaders and parents can run it without extra preparation.

Full 15-, 20- and 32-week programmes are available from EduStore at edutrend.org.

© 2026 EduTrend Contents. This activity may be printed and copied for use with students in your own school, club or home. It may not be resold or published elsewhere. Photos: Matías Villacura / Unsplash.