

An Educator's Guide

Seriously HAPPY

10 life-changing philosophy lessons from Stoicism to Zen to supercharge your mindset

by Ben Aldridge

9780711297807

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Ages 12-18, 176 Pages, Hardcover

- “ . . . show[s] readers how to be confident, decisive, and resilient.”—**Shelf Awareness**
- “ . . . instructive and conveyed in an accessible, conversational style.”—**Kirkus Reviews**
- “ . . . ultimately strengthen[s] readers' comfort levels.”—**Booklist**

About the Book

Seriously HAPPY is a philosophy book for teenagers and young adults. The book looks at several schools of philosophy and is packed with practical challenges to encourage young readers to build character and cultivate happiness.

About the Author

Ben Aldridge writes about philosophy, comfort zones, mental health and adventure. His message encourages others to build resilience by stepping out of their comfort zones in a host of different ways. His methods and thinking are inspired by ancient philosophy and modern psychology.

Ben's books have been translated into several languages and featured on a variety of bestseller lists. He is the author of *How to Be Comfortable with Being Uncomfortable*, *How to Control the Uncontrollable* and the *Get Out of Your Comfort Zone Cards*. *Seriously HAPPY* is his YA debut.



Learning Objectives

The goal of *Seriously HAPPY* is to introduce young minds to a variety of philosophies in a fun, engaging and highly practical way. The philosophy schools explored in the book include Stoicism, Zen, Taoism, Buddhism, Cynicism, Aristotelianism, Epicureanism and the Socratic School. This guide will allow young readers to explore these philosophies and put them into action in a tangible way.

Seriously HAPPY is an incredibly practical book with several challenges at the end of each chapter to help bring philosophy to life. A lot of these challenges would work well in a group setting and can be used to encourage students to connect with the ideas.





Classroom Discussion Topics / Questions

1. Happiness

Spend some time exploring happiness and what it means to everyone on an individual level. Start by discussing the philosophical concept of Eudaimonia in *Seriously HAPPY* (page 4). Where does the philosophy of Eudaimonia come from, and what are the basic tenets? How is happiness achieved for those who practice it? Can students come up with an example of this process of thinking? What are the upsides and downsides of this philosophy, and do students feel like it's something they can connect with? Why, or why not?

2. Mental Health

In the introduction of *Seriously HAPPY*, the author recounts his personal experience of struggling with anxiety and panic attacks. Use this as a springboard for discussing mental health and what local support networks are in place for those struggling. Encourage students to talk and think about the subject openly. The author used Stoicism as a tool to help him work through his anxiety (page 7). Do you think he could have approached things differently? What other methods could he have used? Options include talk therapy, reading relevant books, making lifestyle changes, etc. What other philosophies could someone explore if they were worried about their mental health?

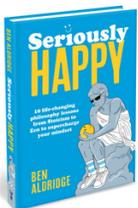
3. What Is Philosophy?

Philosophy means “love of wisdom” but there’s a lot more to the subject than this. Discuss how philosophy can be a practical tool for living a good life and is a diverse subject. Give some examples of philosophy in action, like how it can help us manage unkind people, control powerful emotions, make ethical decisions, and better understand ourselves. Encourage students to select specific ideas from the book that will help them in their daily lives. Get them to write these ideas down in one place so there is a clear list of tools they can use. A few examples:

- Box breathing when scared (page 43)
- Remember the idea of impermanence when struggling with something difficult / unpleasant (page 113)
- Delay response when angry (page 136)
- Be kind when dealing with difficult people (page 137)

4. Personal Philosophies

Have students split into groups to outline all of the philosophies discussed in the book and have a brief conversation about each one. Ask groups to discuss which philosophies spoke to them the most and why and to consider how they might use these ideas in their personal lives. Were there any philosophies that group members were already familiar with? Which philosophers had everyone already heard about?



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Student Activities

1. Make a Decision

Using Aristotle's 8 step decision making tool (page 99), collectively come up with a big decision that students will have to work through together. This could be an imagined scenario (like choosing a future career / university subject etc.) or an actual upcoming decision that someone in the group needs to make. Have students divide into smaller groups and work through the decisions with every student contributing ideas to each step. After the decisions have been made, have students all come back together and take time to review the process. Ask them about their group's decisions and their processes. Did they all come to the same decision? What unexpected challenges did they encounter? Do they feel Aristotle's 8 step process is still relevant and useful today?

2. Meditation

Inspired by Zen and Buddhist philosophy, complete a group meditation session. Start with 5-10 minutes of pure silence and then discuss how members of the group found the experience. This can then progress onto a guided meditation (either led by a group leader, or with pre-recorded audio with an app like Headspace). Before each meditation, be sure to review its intended benefits with students and discuss how the meditation can impact their overall wellbeing.

*A fun alternative: Gather students to listen to John Cage's piece of silent music and then discuss. See link on page 4 of this guide. The musical piece is a great introduction to the idea of silence and meditation, serving as a group meditation with a focus on the sounds around us and the music of the universe. What did students learn? What makes this type of meditation more unique?

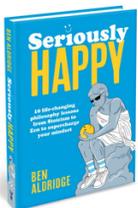
3. Tai Chi & Qi Gong

Encourage the group to learn a basic Tai Chi and Qi Gong form. Discuss how these practices have a connection to Taoism (page 68) and share some videos of the art form in action, like Master Gu. See link on page 4 of this guide. As you work your way through the videos, discuss the history of Tai Chi and Qi Gong with students and how each reflects the philosophy of Taoism. What sets this philosophy apart from others? How do students feel it applies to their everyday lives? Then, spend some time teaching the group a short routine. Five Animal Qi Gong is a good starting place for this.

4. Journaling

Encourage the group to start a journaling practice. The Stoics used journaling to reflect on each day (page 89), and the Stoic philosopher Epictetus suggests doing this by asking the following questions:

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- What went well?
- What went badly?
- What's left to be done?

Collectively come up with more ideas for journaling questions / prompts and get students to journal for the previous day. Set a challenge to keep it up for a week / month.

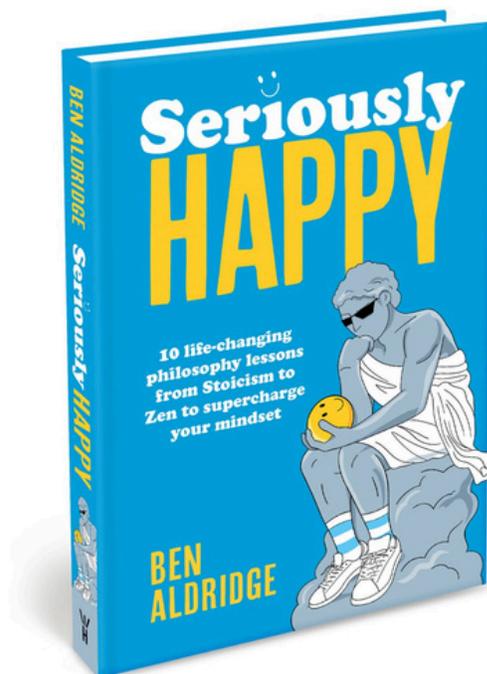
5. Shame Attacking

In Chapter 2, the author discusses the power of deliberately seeking out embarrassing situations to overcome anxiety. In modern psychology this is called “Shame Attacking” and is used to help patients build confidence and overcome social anxieties. The idea was inspired by the ancient Cynic philosophers and established in the modern world by Albert Ellis, the creator of REBT (Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy).

Explain the premise of Ellis’ pet banana walk (Page 37) and encourage students to come up with their own creative ways of deliberately embarrassing themselves. After the students have tested out the ideas, spend some time unpacking their experiences.

Additional Resources

- **4'33"** by John Cage: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yoAbXwr3qkg>
- **Master Gu**: <https://www.youtube.com/@mastergutaichi>



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