

Happiness (Part 1)

Are we all gripped by 'Status Anxiety'?

INTRODUCTION

Philosophers have devoted countless hours to analysing the nature and purpose of happiness and it seems only fit and proper that any philosophy club should do the same. This series of sessions is designed to get young people to consider what happiness actually is and to reflect on whether the pursuit of happiness is all that it is cracked up to be!

ACTIVITY

Given that this unit is all about 'Happiness' it is well worth beginning this first session by placing the word 'Happiness' on the board and simply asking the question:

- *What makes you happy?*

The best thing to do at this point is to simply listen to the students' responses and allow them to politely challenge each other on their various answers. Then ask them:

- *What do you think makes some people unhappy?*

Once the students have discussed their responses to this question explain that they are going to watch a video about something that the modern day philosopher, Alain de Botton, thinks makes most of us unhappy. He calls it 'Status Anxiety': www.youtube.com/watch?v=t1MqJPHxy6g

The video is relatively self-explanatory but it may be worth explaining that, essentially, Alain de Botton believes that most people are unhappy because they have a deep seated 'Status Anxiety'. By this he means that people constantly judge themselves and each other according to their social status instead of according to what type of person they are.

ACTIVITY

Show the first 26.47 minutes of the video up to the point just after Alain has drawn his diagram about 'Self-esteem'. You may find it useful to spot and discuss the following questions as you go along or just watch the 26 minutes and then ask the students to respond to such questions as:

- *Do you agree with Alain de Botton's analysis?*
- *Are people in our modern world really riddled with 'Status Anxiety'?*
- *Are we really all a bit like Blaise (the bloke in the SpongeBob suit!)?*

Once this discussion has drawn to a close, focus on the questions:

- *So how can we make ourselves happier?*
- *What do you think Alain de Botton suggests?*

Explain that Alain de Botton appears to suggest that we:

1. lower our expectations
2. take pleasure in the simple things in life
3. go back to the 'Christian idea' that there is no link between how rich somebody is and how significant and valuable their life is
4. go out into nature and realise how insignificant we really are as human beings.

CONCLUSION

Encourage the students to reflect on the film and to offer some thoughts on such questions as:

- *What do you think of de Botton's suggestions?*
- *Is there anything you will take from today's lesson to make you happier in your own life?*