



## MAN'S SEARCH FOR MEANING

*"We are visitors on this planet. We are here for ninety or one hundred years at the very most. During that period, we must try to do something good, something useful, with our lives. If you contribute to other people's happiness, you will find the true goal, the true meaning of life."*

—the 14th Dalai Lama

### OVERVIEW

Students watch a short video of a celebrity describing his life purpose, and then reflect on a Viktor Frankl quote about why meaning in life is important.

### PLANNING FOR IT

#### WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- Any time during the school year, but especially at the beginning of the year to help students discover or start on the path to finding their purpose
- To help students develop content for college entrance essays. Visit [www.purposechallenge.org](http://www.purposechallenge.org) for more information.

#### TIME REQUIRED

- 30 minutes

#### LEVEL

- Middle School
- High School
- College

#### MATERIALS

- Internet and monitor to watch a video: "[Jimmy Fallon Explains His Finger Injury](#)" (2:54-4:57)
- Writing materials

## LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students will:

- Reflect on the importance of meaning in life

## ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

- [Making Practices Culturally Responsive](#)
- [Adapting Practices for Students with Special Needs](#)
- [Making Classrooms and Schools Trauma-Informed and Healing-Centered](#)

## SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-Awareness

## HOW TO DO IT

### REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

Take a moment to reflect on where you find meaning in life. How does what you reflected on give you strength to bear the challenges in life?

### INSTRUCTIONS

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### THE PRACTICE

Before you begin:

1. This practice can be used on its own, but is meant to be the third in a series of practices that help students discover or begin their search for purpose.
  2. Students can also do the entire series of practices online for free at [www.purposechallenge.org](http://www.purposechallenge.org). Have them click on "Toolkit" and then register for an account. When they finish the practices, they will receive a digital record of their written answers for each exercise in addition to instructions on how to take these answers and turn them into a college entrance essay.
- If using this practice on its own, review the definition of purpose with students using the instructions from the first four bullets in *Discovering Your Strengths and Talents--Purpose Challenge, Exercise 1*
  - Tell students:
    - *Today you will be watching a celebrity you may know talking about what matters most to him.*
  - Have students watch the [video of Jimmy Fallon](#) (2:54-4:57).
  - After the video, ask students for their reaction to Jimmy Fallon's purpose in life.
  - Say to students:

- *In the video, Jimmy Fallon mentioned the book "Man's Search for Meaning" by Viktor Frankl. You may also remember Viktor Frankl from the introductory video about purpose [see Discovering Your Strengths and Talents--Purpose Challenge, Exercise 1].*
- *In his book, Viktor Frankl describes the terrible experiences he faced and witnessed as a prisoner of a concentration camp during WWII.*
- *I'm going to read a quote from his book. I invite you to close your eyes or look at a spot on the floor in front of you as I read this quote. Think about what the quote means and how it relates to your life.*
- *"Those who have a 'why' to live, can bear with almost any 'how.'"*
- Give students a moment to reflect on this quote. You might write it on the board, as well.
- Ask students to take a sheet of paper and write responses to the following questions:
  - What does this quote make you think of?
  - What does it mean to you?
  - Think about the things that matter most to you. How does this quote relate to those things?
- Have students share their writing with a partner or in a small group, and then share with the class.

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## CLOSURE

- Ask students to reflect on whether this exercise confirmed their sense of purpose or, if they aren't sure of their purpose, did it give them any clues or insight into what their purpose might be?

## REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

How did students respond to this practice? Did they find it helpful in helping them decide what their purpose might be?

## THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

### EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

A study of almost 2,000 [Romanian adolescents](#) found that having a sense of meaning in life both increases psychological well-being and protects teens from risky behavior, such as drug and alcohol use, sexual activity, and unhealthy exercise and eating habits.

### WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Having meaning in life means that one's life makes sense and matters -- relationships, spirituality, attaining goals, and/or having a purpose (i.e., engaging in something larger than oneself) can all contribute to [one's sense of meaning](#). Like purpose, meaning in life is associated with a myriad of [health and psychological benefits](#).

While meaning and purpose are separate constructs in research, scientists have found that they can [inform one another](#). For example, knowing where one finds meaning in life can give clues as to how a person might use their gifts to make a positive contribution to the world (purpose). Giving students opportunities to reflect on both meaning and purpose sets them on the path to creating thriving and fulfilling lives.

## SOURCE

The Purpose Challenge Toolkit was created by [Dr. Kendall Cotton-Bronk](#) in partnership with the Greater Good Science Center and [Prosocial](#). For more information, visit [www.purposechallenge.org](http://www.purposechallenge.org)