

Bhutan's Gross National Happiness

Subjects: Social Studies

Suggested Grade Levels: 5–9

Time Frame: Variable

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Overview

Applying the Philadelphia Folklore Project's approach to cultural education, students first reflect on their own personal understanding of happiness and activities that cultivate happiness. Transition to a study of Bhutan's approach to economic development, measured in Gross National Happiness, a signal of Bhutan's commitment to building an economy that serves Bhutan's culture based on Buddhist spiritual values instead of western material development (measured in GDP). This is used as a springboard to examine sustainable economic development, environmental conservation, Buddhist practices, and cultural values in Bhutan.

Connection to Philadelphia World Heritage Tool Kit's Goal

Explore Bhutan's unique approach to economic, environmental, religious, and cultural development through the concept of Gross National Happiness.

Core Curriculum Standards

- E06.B-K.1.1.1: Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences and/or generalizations drawn from the text.
- E06.B-K.1.1.2: Determine a central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through relevant details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments.
- E06.B-K.1.1.3: Analyze in detail how a key individual, event, or idea is introduced, illustrated, or elaborated in a text (e.g., through examples, anecdotes, or sequence of steps).
- CC.1.2.6.G: Integrate information presented in different media or formats (e.g. visually, quantitatively) as well as in words to develop a coherent understanding of a topic or issue.
- E06.B-C.3.1.1: Trace and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, distinguishing claims that are supported by reasons and evidence from claims that are not (e.g., fact/opinion, bias).
- E08.C.1.1: Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.
- E07.C.1.2: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.
- 3.6.11-12.C: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- 3.6.6-8.D: With some guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.
- 1.4.6.U: Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing as well as to interact and collaborate with others; demonstrate sufficient command of keyboarding skills to type a minimum of three pages in a single sitting.
- 1.4.6.V: Conduct short research projects to answer a question, drawing on several sources and refocusing the inquiry when appropriate.
- 1.4.6.W: Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources; assess the credibility of each source; and quote or paraphrase the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and providing basic bibliographic information for sources.

Objectives

Students will be able to use the concept of Gross National Happiness to examine sustainable economic development, environmental conservation, Buddhist practices, and cultural values in Bhutan.

Essential Question

Why does Bhutan measure development in Gross National Happiness instead of Gross Domestic Product? What does GNH tell us about Bhutanese values? How has GNH affected Bhutan's population, economically, environmentally, religiously and culturally? Should other governments place more of an emphasis on happiness (and if so, how)?

Materials Needed

Smartboard or projector to show videos, research resources (iPads, computers, books, pamphlets, etc.), presentation materials (dependent on type of presentation students choose)

Procedure

Step One: Through writing or discussion, students reflect on happiness: What is happiness? Do you consider yourself to be a happy person—why or why not? What brings you short-term happiness? What brings you long-term happiness? Do you think people can intentionally do things to make themselves or others happier? Guide students through a few activities that cultivate happiness.

Examples: Write a gratitude letter, gather a list of strengths that classmates see in them, deep breathing meditation, service-learning, etc. (See additional resources for ideas.)

Step Two: The U.S. Declaration of Independence says all individuals have the inalienable rights of “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness”. Student discuss if they feel as if the United States government is protecting our right to pursue happiness—why or why not? Do you think other governments around the world are protecting citizens' right to happiness—why or why not?

Step Three: Student find Bhutan on a map and explore its geographical features on Google Earth. Show images of scenery and people in Bhutan, with brief accompanying explanations of the environment, economy base, religion, and culture. Read aloud one of the children's books on Buddhism (See additional resources). Ask students what conclusions they might be able to draw about Bhutan based on their knowledge thus far.

Step Four: Introduce the concept of Gross National Happiness, a signal of Bhutan's commitment to building an economy that serves Bhutan's culture based on Buddhist spiritual values instead of western material development, measured in GDP. (See video links below in additional resources.) Discuss students' opinions of GNH and whether they think it's an effective approach to nation building.

Step Five: Divide students into small groups, and assign each group the task of researching one of the following aspects of Bhutanese culture and how it has been affected by GNH (or vice versa).

- Environmental conservation
- Buddhist principles
- Economy base and economic development
- Daily life and schooling

Criticism or drawbacks of GNH (One group could potentially explore the drawbacks of GNH, particularly in a world dominated by GDP.)

Step Six: Conclude by having a discussion about what the United States or western world might be able to learn from Bhutanese cultural values or ideas.

Outcome/Assessment

Student groups present their findings to the class, via a digital presentation, poster, pamphlet, skit, song, etc. Presentations should teach other students about Bhutan's economy, environment, religion and daily life, as well as how Bhutan's prioritization of happiness has affected each of these aspects.

Special Education and English Language Learners Accommodations

Graphic organizers, mixed-ability groupings, teacher support during research process

Additional Resources

Web:

Happiness Project: <http://www.edutopia.org/blog/sel-for-elementary-school-randy-taran>

News clip on Bhutan's Gross National Happiness: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sAtMqwh2IEo>

TED Talk on Bhutan's Gross National Happiness: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ICLJwYW6-Ao>

Children's books on Buddhism: <http://www.criticalcactus.com/best-books-on-buddhism-for-children/>