



## **Ball State Philosophy Outreach Project Lesson Plan**

**Topic:** Emotions

**Time:** 45-60 min

**Sources:** Brady, Michael. 2019. *Emotion: The Basics*. London and New York: Routledge.

**Credits:** Inspired by a lesson by Rachel Fredericks, PhD

**Materials:** [Emotions PowerPoint](#)

### **Learning Objectives:**

1. Students will reflect on their emotions by referencing personal experiences.
2. Students will listen to their peers in an attempt to build off of one another's ideas.
3. Students will express ideas about the philosophy of emotion to their peers.
4. Students will collaborate with their peers in a discussion-based format to explore the philosophy of emotions.

**Warnings:** Some images and content may be controversial. This should be addressed through open communication, intellectual humility, and mutual peer respect.

**Activity:** Start by pulling up the Emotions PowerPoint. Each PowerPoint slide includes images intended to provoke emotions. Recommended discussion points for each slide are included below. Finally, facilitate a final discussion on the questions listed below. Throughout the final conversation teachers should expand on students' thoughts by asking clarifying questions and offering insight and connections to other notable philosophers as appropriate. Throughout this activity, teachers should act as facilitators to ensure that all students have opportunities to share their thoughts.

**Slide 1:** Introduce philosophy of emotion. It may be beneficial to indicate that historically emotions have been conceptualized as experiences, evaluations, and motivations and that students can focus on these three areas throughout the context of the lesson.

**Slide 2:** This image will likely be associated with positive emotions. Students are asked to discuss these emotions.  
Possible questions: How does it make you feel? Why do you think it makes you feel that way? Do you think other people could have different reactions associated with this picture?

**Slide 3:** This image will likely be associated with negative emotions. Students are asked to discuss these emotions.

**Slide 4:** This image will likely be associated with neutral emotions. Students are asked to discuss these emotions.

**Slide 5:** This image will likely be associated with positive emotions. Students are asked to discuss these emotions.

**Slide 6:** This image will likely be associated with negative emotions. Students are asked to discuss these emotions.

**Slide 7:** This image will likely be associated with positive emotions. Students are asked to discuss these emotions.

**Slide 8:** Students should be asked to circle up. The face-to-face format is beneficial for the collaboration expected throughout this discussion.

**Discussion Questions:** This should take 20-25 minutes. The teacher does not have to ask or discuss every question. These questions are a recommended guide for the conversation.

- What do you think an emotion is?
  - What evidence do you have to support that definition?
- Where do emotions come from?
- How do humans express emotions?
- Do you think the distinction between positive and negative emotions is true or useful?
  - If so, how would you make this distinction?

The James-Lange theory suggests that emotions are experiences of physiological states. This is in contrast to the traditional view of emotions that envisions them as cognitive experiences that lead to physiological responses, physical actions, and further emotions. William James, one of the philosophers the James-Lange theory is named after, offered three arguments to defend his position:

1. **Innateness Argument:** certain bodily reactions are closely associated with certain emotions, like rapid breathing with fear. This is combined with highly controversial evidence implying that some emotional reactions are consciously experienced after bodily changes, to argue that natural bodily responses to the environment caused us to experience emotions.
2. **Subtraction Argument:** removing the bodily experience of an emotion numbs that emotion. For example, Methaqualone (sold under the brand-name Quaalude), is a muscle relaxant that can also have the effect of facilitating sleep and decreasing anxiety.
3. **Generation Argument:** changing some element of one's physical state can alter one's emotional state. For example, slumped shoulders, bent neck, and lowered voice can cause a more melancholic mood.



However, not all conceptualizations of emotions view them as discreet feelings separate from rational consideration. Some evaluative theories of emotions state that emotions are based in conscious or unconscious appraisals of people, situations, or the world as a whole. Often, this includes the belief that moods are appraisals of either the world as a whole or of one's position in the world. Here are some examples how these theorists explain emotions:

1. **Anger:** anger can be viewed as a response to the evaluation that someone is being slighted, undermined, or threatened.
2. **Happiness:** happiness is based on the interpretation that one's goals are being met or moved towards.
3. **Remorse:** remorse comes from the evaluation that oneself has previously acted incorrectly.

In contrast to these more rigidly defined ideas, many modern theories suggest blending together multiple conceptualizations of emotions, forming hybrid theories. There are too many distinct versions of this to give any comprehensive list, but you can guess what these might be and formulate your own. These are some of the questions you can ask to facilitate developing an understanding of this sort of theory:

1. What portions of the aforementioned theories do you think are useful, which portions do you think aren't?
2. Are different explanations better at understanding different emotions?
3. How might feelings, evaluation, and motives interact in the context of emotions?

**For the Teacher.** If you believe you have enough time this may be a good point at which to encourage discussion. Feel free to skip around and choose which questions you like best.

Discussion Questions:

- What do you think about James' arguments?
- Can there be an emotion without a physical feeling?
- Do automatic reactions come before or after emotions?
- Do automatic reactions cause emotions? Do emotions cause automatic reactions?
- Do you agree that bodily changes affect emotions in these ways? Why or why not?
  - Why might someone disagree with you?
- Do bodily changes always affect emotions?
  - Only some emotions? Only in certain situations? Only to some degree?
- If James is right, what does that say about the control we have over our emotions?
- Does this argument imply more or less control over emotions?

Additional Questions:

1. How do people develop the ability to recognize or regulate emotions?
2. How do our emotions influence our actions?
  - a. Should our emotions influence our actions?
  - b. To what degree can we control how our emotions influence our actions?
  - c. Should people be held responsible for their emotional actions?



- i. Can emotions justify an action? Why?
  - ii. Can emotions excuse an action? Why?
3. How do emotions impact our thoughts/opinions?
  - a. Should our emotions influence our thoughts/opinions?
  - b. To what degree can we control how our emotions influence our thoughts and opinions?
4. How do emotions or patterns of emotions relate to one's personality?
  - a. For example, if I often feel angry, is angry a personality trait of mine?
5. Are human emotions intentional or unintentional? How so?
6. In what ways are emotions useful?
7. What do emotions add to the human experience?
8. In what ways are emotions harmful?

