Big Ideas For This Lesson

"Teflon & Velcro" is referring to the brains’ negativity bias - an evolutionary throwback that means our brains are hardwired to remember negative experiences and quickly forget positive experiences. While this once kept us alive, in modern times it is more often just a source of anxiety, irritability, and sadness.¹

Put simply, what are you more likely to remember at the end of the day: the 50 positive experiences you had or the one negative interaction? Research suggests that it takes 5 positive interactions to make up for a single negative interaction in a relationship; the same is true of self-talk. This means we need a conscious, active process of taking in the positive - something like mindfulness - in order to make up for our brains negative wiring.

This interactive lesson² will provide students with the opportunity to identify both positive and negative self-talk and provide tips on how to override the negativity bias. You can help your students this week by cuing them to notice their negative self-talk, replace it with a positive thought, and reminding students that it takes 5 positive thoughts/interactions to make up for 1 negative thought!

This lesson has been adapted from the work of Dr. Rick Hanson.

**Teaching Note:** This lesson requires more materials and preparation than most. If you are short on materials or time please see the preparation note at the beginning of the lesson for an alternative approach.
Essential Vocabulary
- Hardwired
- Lizard/Wizard Brain
- Mindfulness
- Negative
- Positive
- Simile
- Taking in the Positive
- Teflon
- Velcro

Materials
- Velcro strips (or magnetic paper).
- Large plate or platter (or magnetic whiteboard).
- Negative Thoughts printed on cardstock or laminated.
- Small pieces of blank paper or note cards (or sticky notes).
  *See materials note at the beginning of the lesson.

Preparation
1. Print negative thoughts on cardstock and attach one side of Velcro strips to back of cards.
2. Attach the other side of the Velcro strips to the plate.
3. Box for storing positive thought strips.

Teaching Script
BUILDING BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE & CONCEPT MODELING (I DO)

Teaching Note: This lesson is best taught after students have already learned about thoughts, positive self-talk, and lizard-wizard brain. The lesson uses similes to compare positive thoughts to Teflon and negative thoughts to Velcro.

Materials note: This lesson can also be successfully taught using common classroom materials such as magnets, instead of Velcro, and sticky notes, instead of Teflon/note cards. If you have magnetic paper (magnetic business cards work well), write the negative thoughts on it. Draw a brain on a magnetic whiteboard, instead of using a paper plate. Put the magnetic paper negative thoughts in the brain and put the positive sticky notes on top of it. The sticky notes will easily fall off the board if brushed lightly, while the magnets will stay.

Begin the lesson by showing students the paper plate.

This is a model of your brain. It may not look anything like your brain, but it’s going to show you how our brain keeps thoughts and memories. Did you know that our brain treats negative thoughts and positive thoughts differently?

Pause to ask students for examples of negative and positive thoughts.
Our brain is like Teflon (you may need to explain Teflon or just say ‘non-stick pan’) for positive thoughts. This means that we don’t easily remember positive thoughts. For negative thoughts, however, our brain is like Velcro - this means that negative thoughts tend to stick to our brain and are hard to get off.

Show students how the negative thoughts stick to the plate.

Teaching Note: If your students are already familiar with lizard/wizard brain you can integrate these concepts into the lesson as well. Ask students which part of their brain focuses on negative thoughts (lizard) and which one prefers positive thoughts (wizard). If doing a read-aloud now will make the lesson too long for the students, just make sure to have read the story before you start this lesson.

Ask students what they tend to think about at the end of the day - negative thoughts or positive thoughts?

When you get home at the end of the day, what are you more likely to remember: the 50 positive things that happened that day or the 1 negative thing that happened? That’s right! Our brain is hardwired to remember negative experiences much more than positive ones.”

Because negative thoughts are so “sticky” to our brain, we need some strategies to get positive thoughts to stick too. Mindfulness is one strategy that we can use to take in the positive. Often we just need to pause to enjoy and remember positive things that happen. Does anyone know how many positive thoughts it takes to replace one negative thought?

Allow some guesses.

Explain that it, “takes about 5 positive thoughts or experiences to replace one negative thought. For example, if you say one mean thing to someone you will actually need to say 5 positive things to them to make up for it.”
GUIDED PRACTICE (WE DO)

We’re going to practice replacing negative thoughts with positive thoughts. I’m going to give each group one negative thought. Your job is to write down 5 positive thoughts on the blank notecards to replace each negative thought.

a. Hand-out a negative thought to each table and provide them with enough blank notecards to write 5 positive thoughts for each negative thought.

b. Provide enough time for each group to write down at least 5 positive thoughts to replace their 1 negative thought.

c. As groups begin to finish, have each group send a representative to the front of the room and allow them to stick the negative thoughts to the Velcro and place the positive thoughts on top of them.

Teaching Note: Younger students may be challenged by group work or group writing. You can also do this activity as a whole group.

When all groups have placed their thoughts on the platter, you can demonstrate how you can use 5 thoughts to peel off one negative thought. Then, show students how “slippery” positive thoughts can be and how “sticky” negative thoughts can be by turning the platter upside-down and letting the positive thoughts fall. For some laughs, turn it upside-down over your head! Have students return to their seats.

REINFORCING LESSON CONCEPTS (YOU DO)

Finally, have students pick up the positive thoughts and place them all in a box. Keep this box in the room or the cool-down area and let students know that when they are struggling with negative thoughts they can read themselves 5 positive thoughts from the box to help them get “unstuck.”
**EVIDENCE OF CONCEPT ATTAINMENT**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reflect on it</th>
<th>Journal it</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• How many positive thoughts does it take to “unstick” a negative thought?</td>
<td>Have students complete the Positive and Negative Self-Talk: SEL Journal Page for today’s lesson.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Why do we remember negative experiences more than positive experiences?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How can you use the 5:1 strategy to help you in your life?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How does this relate to our lizard/wizard brain?</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**EXTENSIONS**

**Classroom**

- Practice “savoring” positive experiences each day this week with your students; this means taking time each day to be mindful of positive experiences.
- Keep the “positive thoughts” box in cool down area and remind students to use it when they can’t think of positive thoughts.
- Prompt students to say 5 positive things when you hear them being negative to themselves or each other.
- Play this video/song for students about focusing on the good: Taking in the Good Claymation.

**School-wide**

This strategy can be used as a logical consequence when a student says or does something mean to another student. Rather than asking them to apologize, ask them to write or say 5 kind things to the person to make up for their negative behavior.
REFERENCES


## NEGATIVE THOUGHTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negative Thought</th>
<th>It's not worth trying, I'll just mess it up.</th>
<th>I can't do that. It's too hard.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I guess I'll just never be cool.</td>
<td>I can't do that. It's too hard.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I quit!</td>
<td>Everyone is always better than me!</td>
<td>There must be something wrong with me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why do bad things only happen to me?</td>
<td>I never do anything right.</td>
<td>I'm not good at anything.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I'm terrible at math.</td>
<td>No one likes me. I'll never have friends.</td>
<td>I'm just not smart enough.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyone is against me!</td>
<td>I'm a horrible person.</td>
<td>I don't even like myself.</td>
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</tbody>
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