



Lesson Plan: Self-Calming Methods

Downshift to a lower gear, with help from your body

Grade level: High School

Approximate time frame: One to two class periods

Introduction/rationale

In the following lesson students will consider the influence of emotions on thinking and behavior and come to understand how managing one's emotions typically leads to better outcomes. After exploring strategies that fictional characters might use to modify their emotional response to an event, students are encouraged to think about how they might apply these strategies in their own lives.

Instructional objectives

Students will...

- Describe self-calming strategies to regulate emotional intensity
- Apply knowledge of strategies to a work of literature
- Demonstrate – through creative writing or performance – use of strategies within a work of literature

Curriculum standards

Health:

- Analyze healthy ways to express emotions and to cope with feelings, including the common causes of stress, its effects on the body, and managing stress

Materials needed

- Work of literature (novel, chapter, or short story)
- Whiteboard
- Paper
- Pencils



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Student activity/handout

Time for a Rewrite!

Student reading assignment

Brain Driver's Education: Operator's Guide section: "Downshift to a lower gear, with help from your body"

Procedures

Note: this lesson is a good follow-up to the lesson entitled "How hot or cold does your emotional 'engine' run?" If done in conjunction with that lesson, use the previous discussion as a starting point.

Anticipatory set:

We've read many works of literature where characters' emotions are revved up high or else shut down so low they seem muted or numb. This often leads to serious trouble. What can these characters do to balance their emotions better?

Step-by-step instructions/activities

1. Identify a character who is experiencing high or low emotional intensity. (If done in conjunction with the lesson "How hot or cold does your emotional engine run?" use the previous discussion as a starting point; if not, take a few minutes to review the character and the work of literature.)
2. Is the intensity appropriate for the situation? Or does it negatively affect the character and the people around him or her? Allow class to discuss these questions. Encourage students to support their assertions with evidence from the text.
3. If the level of intensity is not appropriate to the situation (choose a work of literature where this is the case), ask students what this character might do to move into a more balanced emotional state. Write the students' suggestions on the board. (It may help to ask them what they themselves do to manage their emotions.)



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4. Provide students with the Student Reading Assignment entitled “Downshift to a lower gear, with help from your body,” in the *Brain Driver’s Education: Operator’s Guide*.
5. Review the self-calming strategies presented in the reading assignment. Check off the options the students suggested if there are any “matches.”
6. Concluding assignment: Give students the Student Activity handout entitled “Time for a Rewrite!” This assignment can be done as an individual or group assignment, a written assignment or a presentation. Feel free to modify the handout to meet your classroom needs.

Assessment

Use class discussion and Student Activity handout assignment to assess student understanding.



Student Activity: Time for a Rewrite!
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Assignment

What if our character was able to use some self-calming strategies to balance his/her emotional intensity?

In this activity, you will revisit the scene we've been discussing and imagine an alternative outcome, one in which your character takes a moment to walk away from the action and comes back armed with some powerful new ways to rein in his/her emotions.

You (or your group) will present an alternative outcome to the scene in either written or dramatic form.

Step 1: Re-read the scene in question and give the character some strategies for self-calming. Refer to the Student Reading Assignment to get some ideas. What self-calming strategies best fit the character's personality and needs? Which ones are practical for the situation he/she is in? Decide which self-calming strategies your character will use.

Step 2: Imagine what would happen when the character actually uses your strategies. Develop a scene – written or dramatic – that shares the new outcome you've imagined.

Step 3: Write and practice the scene. If you are writing the scene, try to use the same tone, diction, and style as the author. If you will be presenting a skit or other dramatic work, develop a script and practice with your group.

Step 4: Present the scene (written or dramatic) for the class.



Downshift to a lower gear, with help from your body *Self-calming methods*

When the emotional intensity is high enough to cloud your judgment, or when your emotions are so shut down that you need to re-connect with the inner you, take a break from the situation and give yourself a chance to calm your mind and body. By doing so you can clear your mind and get yourself back into the driver's seat with your feelings. There are many ways to downshift – different methods work well for different people, so it is helpful to try out several and see which work best for you. First, take some space by walking away from the situation.

- **Soothe the senses**

Calm your five senses (vision, hearing, smell, taste, and touch). For example, look at photos of people, pets, or places you care about, listen to comforting or enjoyable music, light a candle that has a soothing aroma, savor the taste of a favorite food, or focus on the sensation of something with a pleasing feel against your skin, such as a soft blanket or a furry pet, or put a warm towel on your forehead.

- **Do relaxation activities**

For example, take deep breaths while you slowly count to 10. Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. Or clench your fists or tense the muscles throughout your body as you slowly count to 10, then slowly release. Repeat.

- **Use meditation techniques to focus on being “centered”**

Meditating is simple. Start by finding a quiet, comfortable place to sit. You'll be sitting in this spot for the next 15 - 20 minutes. While you're sitting, close your eyes and silently, slowly repeat a single word or syllable in your mind. Some people repeat a syllable, such as “om.” Other people prefer to repeat a word, such as “peace” or “love.” While you silently repeat your word, it's likely that your mind will wander. That's normal. When you notice your mind wandering, bring your thoughts back to the word you've chosen to repeat. Do this every time your mind starts to wander. After 20 minutes, open your eyes. You will likely feel more relaxed than when you started. Scientists have discovered that meditating regularly is good for the brain and the body because it helps reduce stress.

- **Move your body!**

Head for the gym to shoot baskets, go for a run, or even squeeze a stress ball to release some tensions. Getting exercise is a great way to relax the mind.

- **Act in the opposite way of the emotion**
Sometimes it can be helpful to purposely act in a way that opposes, or is inconsistent with, the upsetting emotion. You can change actions, thoughts, facial expressions, or even body posture. For example, if you feel anxious about socializing at a party, go up and talk with someone at the party with the goal of just chatting for a few minutes and getting one smile from that person. If you feel angry and want to punch someone or something, walk away and do a peaceful activity with your hands (such as drawing or playing your guitar). If you feel depressed and unmotivated to get out of bed, push yourself to go outside or engage in an activity you usually enjoy.
- **Distract yourself with something fun**
Do something fun that competes for your brain's attention. For example, call or text a friend, go for a bike ride, listen to music, or watch a movie you like. Engage with other people to take your mind off what's troubling you.

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