Cultivating Awe

Enhancing personal meaning and connection through imagination and reflection

RELATING | Appreciation

What you will need:

- 1
- Individual
- 15 mins preparation
- 3.5 hrs execution

Related Tools:

Enhancing Sensorial Connectedness

Menu:

I. Overview
II. Learning Activity
III. Assessment
IV. Key Advice
V. References

"The mysterious emotion of awe is associated with many positive outcomes, linking individual, collective and environmental well-being. This exercise is about understanding awe and learning, both experientially and cognitively, how one can facilitate awe experiences to enhance one's connectedness, appreciation and generosity in different domains of life."

—Jelger Kroese

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I. Overview

The feeling of awe encompasses a range of emotions including reverence, admiration, fear and wonder. It is evoked by things that are grand, sublime or extremely powerful, such as a virtuosic musical performance, great political figures, the galaxy, giant sequoia trees, a big social gathering or the conceptual understanding of a complex system.

Awe can be a deeply personal experience and researchers have identified two key cognitive mechanisms that underlie it: the perception of vastness and a challenge to mental processing.

Experiencing awe is associated with a host of positive outcomes, including increased helping behaviors, pro-environmental behaviour, enhanced life satisfaction and decreased aggressive attitudes. The aim of this exercise is to learn, both experientially and cognitively, how to facilitate awe experiences to cultivate greater connectedness and appreciation in different domains of life (e.g., study, work, family and friends).

Learning outcome

- The student is able to relate to others and the world with appreciation, gratitude and joy by enabling awe experiences

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II. Learning Activity

The student practices awe experiences to enhance appreciation, gratitude and joy in different domains of life.

1. Introduction to Awe

50 mins

Introduce the experience of awe by leading a collective activity that will facilitate a moment of awe in the classroom. This could involve showing an awe-inspiring story or video, taking an Awe walk outside and asking students to observe the world around them, paying attention to the sounds, sights and smells, or any other activity that can evoke a sense of wonder and amazement.

Take the time to reflect collectively on the experience of awe during this activity.

The aim of this activity is to create a shared experience of awe that will help to set the stage for further exploration and learning about this powerful emotion.

Tip: see more information on facilitating an awe experience.

2. Writing about Awe

20 mins

Invite students to take a few minutes to think about experiences, fairly recently, when they felt immense awe. Ask students to select one experience and to describe it in about two full paragraphs.

Encourage them to focus as much as possible on the experience itself rather than what led up to it or what happened afterwards. Encourage them to be as descriptive and specific as possible by paying attention to the sounds, sensations, images and feelings they

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experienced during the moment of awe.

Remind the students that this is a personal reflection, so there are no right or wrong answers.

3. Reflecting

30 mins

Ask students to reflect on the experience of awe they wrote about in Step 2.

Encourage the students to think deeply about the questions and to write down their reflections. By reflecting on their experiences of awe, students will gain a deeper understanding of what makes these moments so powerful and how they can cultivate a greater sense of appreciation and wonder in their daily lives.

Please note, as part of assessment *as* learning, students reflect using the reflective questions.

4. Intentional Awe Experience

50 mins

Ask the students to seek an experience that will evoke a sense of awe. Encourage them to plan this activity in advance and to make sure that it is safe and feasible to carry out. After completing the activity, ask the students to reflect on their experiences.

Encourage the students to write about their experience in detail and to be as specific as possible. This activity can be done alone or with others, depending on the student's preferences.

By intentionally seeking awe experiences and reflecting on their impact, the students will gain a greater appreciation for the power of these moments and develop strategies to cultivate more of them in their lives.

Please note, as part of assessment *as* learning, students reflect using the reflective questions.

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5. Cultivating Awe in Mundane Activities

50 mins

Encourage students to connect their awe experiences to their daily lives, relationships with others and their understanding of the world. Encourage them to use their imagination to facilitate an awe experience, even in mundane activities such as washing dishes, waiting for a train or cleaning up a workspace. Ask them to consider how simple acts or objects in their activity are connected to a bigger whole. For example, think about the life cycle of the water used to wash dishes.

Encourage students to find and practice awe in daily life and use their imagination to facilitate awe experiences. Invite them to infuse a routine task with a sense of awe and reflect on their experience using the provided questions.

Tip: ask students to put their awe strategies in a collective document (e.g., shared doc, whiteboard), to exchange ideas and use it for future reference.

Please note, as part of assessment *as* learning, students reflect using the reflective questions.

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III. Assessment

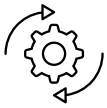
As awe experiences are highly individual, students will evaluate their own experiences through self-guided reflection questions during the activities. The purpose is to guide students in recognising their personal encounters with awe and finding ways to foster awe in a context that resonates with them. It is recommended not to assess students' results quantitatively, as it may hinder their personal connection with the exercise.

Purpose

Assessment *as* learning aims to strengthen the learning process and the development of metacognitive skills. It empowers students to direct their own learning and to become independent, critical self-assessors.

Roles

Self-assessment



Characteristics

Authentic

Materials

Reflective questions

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Assessment

Reflective questions (Step 3)

1. What factors facilitated the experience of awe? Was it the environment, the people around you or something else?

2. What factors may have impeded your experience of awe? Were there any distractions or obstacles that prevented you from fully immersing yourself in the moment?

3. How might you remove potential barriers to experiencing awe in the future? What strategies or techniques could you use to cultivate a greater sense of wonder and amazement in your daily life?

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Assessment

Reflective questions (Step 4)

1. What activity did you do to evoke a sense of awe intentionally?

2. How did you feel during the experience? Did you feel a sense of wonder, amazement or reverence?

3. What barriers did you face during the experience? Were there any internal or external factors that prevented you from fully immersing yourself in the moment?

4. How can you overcome these barriers in the future? What strategies or techniques could you use to cultivate a greater sense of awe?

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Assessment

Reflective questions (Step 4)

1. What activity did you choose?

2. How did intentionally using your imagination to facilitate awe change your experience of the activity?

3. What other strategies can you think of to facilitate awe in other activities? Provide specific examples of how you plan to integrate these concepts into your daily life.

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4. Share your insights with your fellow students in a creative way (e.g. through a drawing, a presentation, or movement).

5. How did your awe experience affect your perspective on relating to others and the world?

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IV. Key Advice

Additional information on awe (Step 1) can be downloaded below.

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Key Advice

Additional information on awe

Awe is a powerful and transformative emotion that can bring joy, inspiration and a sense of connection with something greater than ourselves. An example of an awe-inspiring story is the following:

In the early 1960s, a young American astronaut named Neil Armstrong embarked on a historic journey as part of the Apollo 11 mission. On July 20, 1969, Armstrong became the first human to set foot on the surface of the moon.

As he descended the ladder of the lunar module, millions of people around the world watched in awe and anticipation. With every step, Armstrong left an indelible mark on human history. The entire world held its breath as he uttered the now-famous words, "That's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind."

In that singular moment, Armstrong and his fellow astronauts, Buzz Aldrin and Michael Collins, represented the culmination of centuries of human exploration, ingenuity and collective effort. Their achievement expanded the boundaries of what humanity believed possible, inspiring generations to dream, innovate and reach for the stars.

Armstrong's moonwalk not only symbolised human achievement, it also instilled a profound sense of awe in people worldwide. It demonstrated our ability to overcome challenges, push boundaries and explore the unknown. The story of Armstrong's lunar landing continues to inspire awe, reminding us of the extraordinary feats that can be accomplished when determination, courage and scientific progress align.

This awe-inspiring story captures the magnitude of human accomplishment, the spirit of exploration and the awe that arises from witnessing groundbreaking moments in history.

Next to a narrative or nature experience, art and culture can induce awe: introduce others to breathtaking works of art, such as paintings, sculpture or music that evoke strong emotions.

Remember, awe is a deeply personal experience and what evokes awe for one person may not have the same effect on another. It's important to understand and respect individual preferences and sensitivities when trying to help others experience awe.

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V. References

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