

# I Choose Happiness

Background information is important to share and discuss with students for this lesson. For this reason, you will notice there are three additional steps\* in the lesson sequence. All steps are as follows:

- Leader Introduction to the video
- Students view only the first 30-40 seconds of the story\*
- Preliminary Leader Transition Statement\*
- Preliminary Discussion Question\*
- Students watch the entire video (from beginning)
- Leader Transition Statement, followed by discussion questions, journal prompts, and extended activities

### Primary Virtues

**Courage:** the capacity to meet danger and difficult situations without giving way to fear; to have the courage of one's convictions; to be willing to put one's opinions into practice.

**Fortitude:** mental and emotional strength in making the right decisions, in the face of difficulty, adversity, danger, or temptation.

**Perseverance:** trying hard and continuously in spite of obstacles and difficulties.

### Secondary Virtues

**Empathy:** trying to understand another person's situation, entering into the feeling or spirit of others and imagining yourself in another person's situation.

**Hero:** a person who is regarded as a model due to their acts of courage, or nobility of purpose and noble qualities.

**Respect for Others:** showing full appreciation of the worth and dignity of others and for ourselves; living by "the golden rule": do unto others as you would want done unto you.

**Solidarity:** unity from a shared common purpose and/or interest; active loyalty within a group; mutual support within a group.

### Lesson Goals

Help students to gain a clear understanding of the virtues of courage, fortitude, perseverance, empathy, solidarity, respect for others and to see how these apply to their lives

Help students to see that true respect – our dignity and value – comes not from outward appearances but from our interior qualities such as our talents, how we care for others, our goals and efforts to achieve our goals

Help students recognize that a group of individuals can unite in their efforts to fight against negative actions by caring and showing respect for someone being mistreated.

Inspire students to have the courage to stand up to others in affirming respect for someone else or for yourself.

### Featured Video

<http://tedxtalks.ted.com/video/I-Choose-To-Be-Happy-Lizzie-Val>

### Leader Introduction to the Video

We're going to watch a video about a young woman named Lizzie Velasquez, who was born with a very rare syndrome called Neonatal Progeroid (prō-jēr'oyd) Syndrome, which causes babies to age more rapidly than normal, so Lizzie looks much older than her age of 24. It also stops babies and children from growing normally and gaining weight. You'll see that Lizzie is small and extremely thin.

You may have seen pictures of children who have this syndrome – their bodies are thin and their faces look like little old men or women, even though they actually are very young. Babies born with this disease often have other impairments such as visual problems, and Lizzie has these too. We're going to take a look at the beginning of the video, and then stop briefly to discuss our initial reactions.

**1st viewing of video:** Leader shows only the first 30 – 35 seconds of video allowing students to see Lizzie and hear the very beginning of her speech, then freezes video for a preliminary discussion.

## Preliminary Discussion Question

1. What were your first feelings and reactions in seeing Lizzie?

We have all likely encountered similar situations where in seeing someone with a very noticeable injury, illness or disability we are uncertain as to how to respond. What do you think we should do or say when we encounter people in these situations?

(Engage them as we would anyone else in terms of our conversation, our attitudes toward them and especially to view them as an entire person, make them feel welcome and include them as best we can.)

## Leader Transition Statement

Let's watch the whole video now and as we just discussed focusing on what she is saying, rather than her appearance. (Leader restarts the video from the beginning.)

<http://tedxtalks.ted.com/video/I-Choose-To-Be-Happy-Lizzie-Val>

## Leader Final Transition Statement

Lizzie's story is really powerful, she has accomplished so much by the age of 24 and she teaches us a lot about respect for ourselves and others, courage and perseverance. We're going to talk more about it, but first let's pass around these sheets (see the "Highlighted Virtues" download on the story's page on the website) that have the definitions of the virtues that relate to Lizzie's story. We will take a couple of minutes to read these over and then discuss how some of these virtues apply to Lizzie and to our own lives.

## Discussion Question Options - Critical Analysis and Personal Reflection

1. Lizzie asked her audience to imagine how they would feel if what happened to her, happened to them – having a YouTube video posted about you with hundreds of terrible comments written about you. Describe how you would feel.

How did Lizzie choose to respond, what was her key phrase and how did she choose to live it out? (She "choose happiness" by setting goals and working hard to achieve them.)

What did she use in part as motivation to achieve her goals? (She wanted to prove wrong all those who cut her down, and the best way she could prove them wrong was by achieving her own goals.)

2. Lizzie states that happiness in part comes from choosing goals and then working hard to achieve them. Do you agree with this, and how else would you define happiness?

3. Lizzie's story is inspiring in so many ways. How does her story speak to you, and what are the virtues that she lives out that relate to these aspects of her life?  
(Encourage discussion of each of the four virtues below.)

- fortitude in being emotionally strong in the face of the hurtful comments
- respect for herself in seeing her value not in her outward qualities but instead her talents, goals and work to achieve them
- perseverance in working hard despite her obstacles
- courage in not giving in to the fear of rejection and criticism

4. Courage is in part accepting and dealing with dangerous and / or difficult situations without giving in to fear. How were Lizzie's parents courageous? (If needed, remind students about their conversation with the doctor who told them Lizzie wouldn't be able to do nearly anything on her own. Lizzie's parents didn't give in to this fear and instead chose to keep her, to love her and to support her as best they can.)

In what ways do you think Lizzie has been formed by the support of her parents?

5. After kindergarten how did many of the students establish solidarity with Lizzie in grade school and high school?
6. Lizzie had to deal with bullying through social media. Is bullying an issue in our school and community, either physical or online?

If bullying is an issue, how can we do better in confronting it and ending it? What lessons have we learned from Lizzie's story that we can specifically apply to our school and community?

(Solidarity and courage of students standing up to those who are bullying others, supporting those who are being bullied, posting a positive statement about someone in social media when others are cutting them down.)

## Journal Writing Options

1. Read the definition of a hero and write about how Lizzie is a hero to you.
2. Pretend you were someone who saw the 8-second video on YouTube and read the mean comments about Lizzie. It made you so upset you decided to write a positive and supportive comment to Lizzie. Write your 4 - 6 sentence comment.
3. Pretend that you were someone who saw the 8-second video on YouTube and posted a mean

comment about Lizzie. You then saw the TEDX video that we saw, which changed your perspective on Lizzie and inspired you to send her an apology. Write out a letter of apology including why your actions were wrong and how your perspective has changed because of Lizzie's life.

4. Lizzie said she "had a good cry" and then decided to choose happiness instead of staying angry, sad and hurt. Choosing to be happy and focus on her goals helped her get over her pain. Have you or someone you know had a difficult experience that you/they were able to get past? Explain.

### Extended Activity #1 - Small Group Discussions

**Supplies: Large poster size paper or butcher paper and markers needed for each group.**

1. Divide the students into groups of 3 to 5 students and have them move to a location out of close proximity to others.
2. Read each group one of the following questions to discuss. Students select a recorder from their group to write down their question.
3. Allow students time to discuss the question, being sure that everyone has an opportunity to contribute. The group recorder writes notes of the main points. The students raise their hands when their group has concluded their discussion.
4. Students in each group select a reporter to share the group's question and their ideas. They can refer to their notes.
5. Leader asks other students to provide feedback on each group's ideas and other related idea.

### Questions for Small Group Discussions

- A. Many hurtful statements were posted online about Lizzie. Why do you think it is easier for people to show negative behavior online rather than in person, and what can we do to counter online bullying?
- B. Lizzie often discusses how important her parents have been in her life. What were the key points of how Lizzie's parents choose to raise her and the impact they had on her?

- C. When we witness others physically or verbally bullying someone, why is it hard to do the right thing and stand up to bullying? What virtues does it take to stand up to bullying?
- D. Lizzie's story has many good lessons for us. What are the ways Lizzie most inspires you or speaks to you, and what are the virtues that relate to these aspects of her life?

### Extended Activity #2 - Small Group Skits

Divide the students into groups of 3 or 4 students and have them move to a location out of close proximity to others. Explain the small group skit situation. Groups plan & practice their skits, then share with the larger group. Skits may be similar, but all groups should have an opportunity to perform.

### Small Group Skit

Lizzie said her friends became her "body guards" and stuck up for her when others were mean. Create a short skit to demonstrate what this situation might look like. Include negative behavior from someone toward Lizzie, her friends' actions to support her, and then how one of her friends later speaks with those who were bullying her to explain in greater length more about Lizzie and why bullying is wrong.

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