BHUTAN'S PLAN TO ADVANCE GROSS NATIONAL HAPPINESS

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- Bhutan is a small Asian nation located in the Himalayan Mountains between Tibet and northeastern India. (Kingdom of Bhutan)

- The main religion in Bhutan is Buddhism, and the second largest religion is Hinduism. (Kingdom of Bhutan)

- Bhutan became an absolute monarchy in 1907 after centuries of internal conflict between local lords and governors, and wars with neighboring countries. (Kingdom of Bhutan)

- In the 1950s, Bhutanese King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck started political reforms, creating a National Assembly and giving up some of his power as King. (Klaus Hoffman, Democratization from Above: The Case of Bhutan)

- In the 1970s, the next King—Jigme Singye Wangchuk—proposed the idea of measuring the prosperity of a country, not just by its economic growth, but by the happiness of its people. He coined a term for this: Gross National Happiness. Since then, Bhutan uses surveys with questions about issues like employment, health, education, hours of sleep every night, and leisure time, to measure the happiness of its people. The government uses the finding from this survey to make policies to improve national happiness. (Gross National Happiness)

- In 2005, King Jigme Singye Wangchuk began the process of creating a new constitution for Bhutan, including the creation of an elected parliament. Bhutan’s first democratic elections were held in 2008, and that same year the King passed the throne to his son, Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck. Bhutan is now considered a constitutional monarchy, instead of an absolute monarchy. (Klaus Hoffman, Democratization from Above: The Case of Bhutan)

- In 2013, the new king decided that, as part of legal reforms, Bhutan needed a school of law to train its own lawyers and judges. Without this, Bhutanese had to get legal training in other countries. In February 2015, the King signed an official proclamation giving the law school its charter to train lawyers. Construction of the new school will begin in the spring, and will be finished by 2017. (Michael Peil)

NOTE TO EDUCATORS

The following activities are designed to stimulate a current events discussion. Generative in nature, these questions can be a launching point for additional assignments or research projects.

Teachers are encouraged to adapt these activities to meet the contextual needs of their classroom.

In some cases, reading the article with students may be appropriate, coupled with reviewing the information sheet to further explore the concepts and contexts being discussed. From here, teachers can select from the questions provided below. The activity is structured to introduce students to the issues, then allow them to explore and apply their learnings. Students are encouraged to further reflect on the issues.

KEY TERMS

- **Absolute monarchy**—A system of government where all power is in the hands of a king or other monarch.

- **Arbiter**—A person who acts as an intermediary to settle a dispute between two people or groups.

- **Adversarial system**—A system of law where two sides each present their case to an impartial judge or jury who makes a decision about who is right and who is wrong, and who wins the case.

- **Restorative justice**—A justice system that focuses less on punishment and more on rehabilitating offenders and seeking reconciliation with those who have been harmed.
THEMES AND COURSE CONNECTIONS

- Themes: Politics, Socially Conscious Living, Values and Ethics
- Course Connections: English, The Arts, Social Sciences and the Humanities, Interdisciplinary Studies

MATERIALS

- Front board
- Student journals or note paper
- Writing utensils

SPECIFIC EXPECTATIONS AND LEARNING GOALS

Students will:

- Develop and express responses to issues and problems.
- Reassess their responses to issues on the basis of new information.
- Participate in active group work and class discussions.
- Communicate effectively in writing, orally or visually.
- Demonstrate the ability to think critically.
- Develop, express and defend a position on an issue.

DIVE DEEPER

Begin by asking students the following questions:

- What does happiness mean to you? How would you measure your happiness?
- Does the amount of money you have measure how happy you are?

Present the concept of Gross National Happiness (GNH). Tell students that GNH was developed by the fourth King of Bhutan, Jigme Singye Wangchuck. The main idea of GNH is that every human being aspires to happiness and that a country’s development should also be measured by its citizens’ happiness. Explain that nine domains were created to measure the happiness of Bhutan citizens.

Write Gross National Happiness on the board and choose nine students to take turns writing down the nine domains and their examples:

- **Psychological wellbeing**—life satisfaction, positive and negative emotions, spirituality
- **Health**—mental health, health days, disability
- **Time use**—work, sleep
- **Education**—literacy, schooling, knowledge
- **Cultural diversity and resilience**—speak native language, cultural participation, artistic skills
- **Good Governance**—government performance, fundamental rights, services, political participation
- **Community vitality**—donations (time & money), community relationship, family, safety
- **Ecological diversity and resilience**—responsibility towards environment, wildlife conservation, urbanization issues
- **Living Standard**—housing, assets

Ask students:

- What do these domains tell us about Bhutan?
- Which of these domains discuss money? Do you think money is a major indicator of happiness?
- Do you think each category is important for happiness? Why or why not?
- If you had to put them in order of importance, how would you do it?

Show students the two videos linked below. The first one will provide students with a visual explanation of GNH and Bhutan’s history. The second one will give students an insight of life in Bhutan.

- What is “Gross National Happiness”?: [https://youtu.be/7Zodqa4YNV1](https://youtu.be/7Zodqa4YNV1)
- Bhutan: A Kingdom of Happiness- [https://youtu.be/2uphDHRfO5w](https://youtu.be/2uphDHRfO5w)

Now that students have an understanding of GNH, tell them that they will apply the Bhutan philosophy in their school community. Students will promote the concept of **Whole School Happiness (WSH).**

They will work together to create nine domains that could be used to measure WSH and provide goals for the school to work toward.

Organize the class into nine separate groups and allow each group a ten to fifteen minute window to walk around the school and assess their environment. Tell students to determine what makes the school happy and what goals can be achievable.

Once each group has developed a domain write them on the board. Finally, instruct each group to develop a unique poster titled “Whole School Happiness” that includes their domain and goals for the school to work towards. These posters can be posted around the school.

MAP IT

Have students locate the different locations mentioned in the article to gain an understanding of the expanse and involvement of this issue.

- Bhutan

DISCUSS

1. Before reading the Global Voices article, what did you know about Bhutan? Based on what you know now, in what ways is Bhutan different from countries like Canada or the United States?
2. How are concepts such as sustainability or environmental conservation connected to happiness?
3. Think about all the decisions that you make in a day. Do you think that considering whether each decision is sustainable, has long-term effects or has an effect on the environment would change your choices? If yes, would the changes be subtle or drastic?
4. Why does it matter that lawyers, the people who uphold the law and justice system, make sure that they do their job lines up with the principles and core values of the nation?
5. Do you think that the general legal system and the ways lawyers practice law in Canada and the United States reflect the countries’ principles and core values? Why or why not? Does the legal system reflect your values and principles?