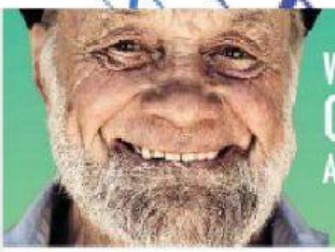
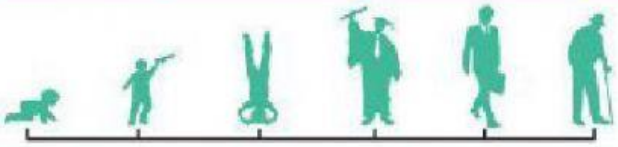
English 5A



WHY WE THINK WE'RE GOING TO HAVE A LONG AND HAPPY LIFE



Researchers have found that people all over the world share an important characteristic: optimism. Sue Reynolds explains what it's all about.

WE'RE ALL ABOVE AVERAGE!

Try asking a 20-year-old these questions:

- What kind of career will you have?
- How long do you think you'll live?

Most people think they'll be able to earn above-average salaries, but only some of the population can be in that top half. Most young men in Europe will say they expect to live well into their 80s, but the average life expectancy for European men is 75. Most people will give an answer that is unrealistic because nearly everyone believes they will be better than the average. Obviously, they can't all be right.

Most people are also optimistic about their own strengths and abilities. Ask people 'How well do you get on with other people?' or 'How intelligent are the people in your family?' and they'll usually say they're above average. Again, they can't all be right. We can't all be better than everyone else, but that's what we think.

LOOKING ON THE BRIGHT SIDE

There is a reason for this. Research has shown that, on the whole, we are optimistic by nature and have a positive view of ourselves. In fact, we are much more optimistic than realistic and frequently imagine things will turn out better than they actually do. Most people don't expect their marriages to end in divorce, they don't expect to lose their jobs or to be diagnosed with a life-threatening disease. Furthermore, when things do go wrong, they are often quick to find something positive in all the gloom. Many people who fail exams, for example, are quite sure they were just unlucky with the questions and they'll do better next time. Or people who have had a serious illness often say that it was really positive, because it made them appreciate life more. We really are very good at 'looking on the bright side'.

THE OPTIMISM BIAS

This certainty that our future is bound to be better than our past and present is known as the 'Optimism Bias' and researchers have found that it is common to people all over the world and of all ages. Of course, the Optimism Bias can lead us to make some very bad decisions. Often, people don't take out travel insurance because they're sure everything will be all right, they don't worry about saving up for old age because the future looks fine, or they smoke cigarettes in spite of the health warnings on the packet because they believe 'it won't happen to me'. Or on a global scale, we carry on polluting the planet, because we're sure that we'll find a way to clean it up some day in the future.

OPTIMISM IS GOOD FOR YOU

But researchers believe that the Optimism Bias is actually good for us. People who expect the best are generally likely to be ambitious and adventurous, whereas people who expect the worst are likely to be more cautious, so optimism actually helps to make us successful. Optimists are also healthier because they feel less stress – they can relax because they think that everything is going to be just fine. Not only that, but the Optimism Bias may also have played an important part in our evolution as human beings. Because we hoped for the best, we were prepared to take risks such as hunting down dangerous animals and travelling across the sea to find new places to live and this is why we became so successful as a species. Even if our optimism is unrealistic and leads us to take risks, without it we might all still be living in caves, too afraid to go outside and explore the world in case we get eaten by wild animals.

LIVEWORKSHEETS

e Read the article again. Tick (✓) the five points made in the article.

1 Pessimists usually have fewer friends than optimists.
2 Humans are naturally positive about their future.
3 Reality is often worse than we imagine it to be.
4 People who live in warmer countries are usually more optimistic.
5 We often act (or don't act) because we're confident everything will work out.
6 If we imagine a better future, we will take more risks.
7 Optimists spend a lot of time daydreaming.
8 Optimism about the future makes us feel better in the present.

f Discuss the questions.

- Look again at your results in the quiz. Do you think you have the 'Optimism Bias'?
- Do you agree that it's better to be optimistic than realistic? Why / Why not?
- How do you see yourself in 20 years' time?

2 VOCABULARY

Adjectives describing attitude

a Find adjectives in *Why we think we're going to have a long and happy life* which mean:

1 expecting the future to be good
2 seeing things as they are
3 not seeing things as they are
4 prepared to take risks
5 not prepared to take risks
6 wanting to be successful

LIVEWORKSHEETS

5A GRAMMAR

4 GRAMMAR Future probability

a 2.24 Complete the sentences with the words in the box. Then listen and check.

likely unlikely could may probably (x2) certainly (x2) chance

1 It's very _____ that your plane will crash.
2 Even if it does you'll _____ be fine, because 95% of people in plane crashes survive.
3 So, if you're worried about getting on that plane, don't be, because you'll almost _____ survive the journey.
4 You're more _____ to have an accident in the car going to the airport.
5 You have quite a good _____ of living to be 100.
6 Modern medicine _____ well make the chances higher still during your lifetime.
7 You _____ won't die in a plane crash and you _____ live to be 100.
8 But the bad news is, you almost _____ won't win the lottery.

LIVEWORKSHEETS