

International Day of Happiness

There's more behind the International Day of Happiness than you might think. Find out more by reading the article and answering the questions.

Before reading

Do the preparation task first. Then read the article and do the exercises.

Preparation task

Match the definitions (a–f) with the vocabulary (1–6).

Vocabulary

1. to measure
2. psychological
3. an orphan
4. to adopt a child
5. human rights
6. healthcare

Definition

- a. a person whose parents have died
- b. medicine, hospitals and doctors
- c. to find out how much, how long, how tall, etc.
- d. to become the legal parent of a child who is not yours
- e. about your mind and feelings
- f. things we all agree everyone should have

International Day of Happiness

You might think the International Day of Happiness is a day to practise positive thinking or to give thanks for the things in your life that make you happy. But it's actually a United Nations (UN) project which has a more serious purpose. The UN thinks happiness will only be for everyone when the people of the world are equal.

Why 20 March?

On this date (and also on 23 September), the centre of the sun is directly above the Earth's equator, which is called an equinox. On the equinox, day and night last for almost equal time all over the Earth. The equinox is felt by everyone on the planet, which matches perfectly with the idea behind the Day of Happiness. Since 2013, the Day of Happiness has been celebrated in all 193 United Nations member states.

How did the idea start?

The idea goes back to 1972, when the King of Bhutan, Jigme Singye Wangchuck, said that we should measure a country's progress by its happiness and not just how much it produces or how much money it makes. He called it Gross National Happiness (GNH). Again, it is more than just a nice idea. Bhutan developed a system to measure happiness based on things like people's psychological health, their general health, how they spend their time, where they live, their education and their environment. People in Bhutan answer about 300 questions, and the results are compared every year to measure progress. The government uses the results and

the ideas behind GNH to make decisions for the country. Other places use shorter, similar versions of this kind of report, for example the cities of Victoria in Canada and Seattle in the USA, as well as the state of Vermont, USA.

The man behind the International Day of Happiness

In 2011, a UN adviser called Jayme Illien suggested the idea of an international day to increase happiness. His plan was accepted by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in 2012. Jayme was born in Calcutta, India, and he became an orphan when he was a child. He was adopted by an American nurse, Anna Belle Illien. She travelled the world to help orphans and she took Jayme with her. He saw children like him, but who were not as lucky as him because they were often escaping wars or they were very poor. He wanted to do something about it, so he worked in the areas of children's and human rights.

The World Happiness Report

The UN measures and compares the happiness of different countries in the World Happiness Report. It bases its report on social, economic and environmental well-being. The UN also sets goals for countries to achieve to increase happiness because it says happiness is a basic human right. Happiness should not be something people have because they are lucky to live in a place where they have basic things like peace, education and access to healthcare. If we agree that these basic things are human rights, then it is not a very big step to agree that happiness is a basic human right too.

Source

- <https://dayofhappiness.net>

Tasks

Task 1

Are the sentences true or false?

	Answer	
	True	False
1. The UN hopes people will think about what makes them happy on 20 March.	True	False
2. There is more than one International Day of Happiness every year.	True	False
3. The equinox happens for everyone on Earth on the same day.	True	False
4. The King of Bhutan was the first person to celebrate a Day of Happiness.	True	False
5. Bhutan asks people a lot of questions to see how happy they are and why.	True	False
6. Jayme Illien's experience as a child influenced his choice of work as an adult.	True	False
7. The United Nations has copied some of the work of Bhutan.	True	False
8. Happiness is something the UN thinks everyone has a right to have.	True	False

Task 2

Put the words in order to make sentences.

1. of different countries The UN in the the happiness measures and compares
World Happiness Report.
2. is directly above the Earth's equator. On the centre 20 March, of the sun
3. well-being. and environmental The UN on bases social, economic its
report
4. suggested happiness. of an to increase Jayme Illien international day the
idea
5. every year to measure People in Bhutan and the results progress.
are compared answer questions
6. idea. than more a nice It just is

Discussion

What is the most important thing people need to be happy?

Answers

Preparation task

1. c
2. e
3. a
4. d
5. f
6. b

Task 1

1. False
2. False
3. True
4. False
5. True
6. True
7. True
8. True

Task 2

1. The UN measures and compares the happiness of different countries in the World Happiness Report.
2. On 20 March, the centre of the sun is directly above the Earth's equator.
3. The UN bases its report on social, economic and environmental well-being.
4. Jayme Illien suggested the idea of an international day to increase happiness.
5. People in Bhutan answer questions and the results are compared every year to measure progress.
6. It is more than just a nice idea.