

The Happiness Game: A Board Game for Almost Any Classroom

by DANIEL CLAUSEN

LEVEL: High Beginner and above

TIME REQUIRED: Approximately 15 minutes to introduce and demonstrate the game; thereafter, game time is highly flexible

GOALS: To have fun playing a game; to feel happy and to talk and think about happiness; (optional) to review vocabulary or other targeted language elements

MATERIALS: For each group of students, a Happiness Game board, a die or coin (or something similar), a set of prepared Happiness Question Cards (and/or blank cards for students to create their own game cards), and a set of prepared Free Question—also called Review Question—cards; players should have their own game piece to move around the board.

BACKGROUND: Whenever I teach mixed-level classes, I look for themes of nearly universal interest. Everyone I know wants to be happy. Everyone I know is interested in finding ways of being happier. So, what better topic than happiness?

In this article, I will introduce a game designed for mixed-level classes. The game was created using Canva (www.canva.com), a design website. While the website charges money for the use of some elements, this board game was designed using a free

account and free, non-copyrighted materials. This same game can be created using hard construction paper, markers, and flash cards. See Figure 1 for a Happiness Game board that I have used with my students.

Step One: Introducing the Topic

I usually start the class by asking students about happiness. My initial question is typically something like this:

- What are some ways we can be happy every day?

I might follow up with more questions:

- When you are sad, what makes you become happy?
- What kinds of foods make you happy? What kinds of drinks? What kinds of music?

For advanced learners, I might ask a more difficult question:

- Is happiness due more to perspective or to environment?

During the warm-up stage, I often go to the board and write phrases or new vocabulary items that students might find useful while they are playing the game.

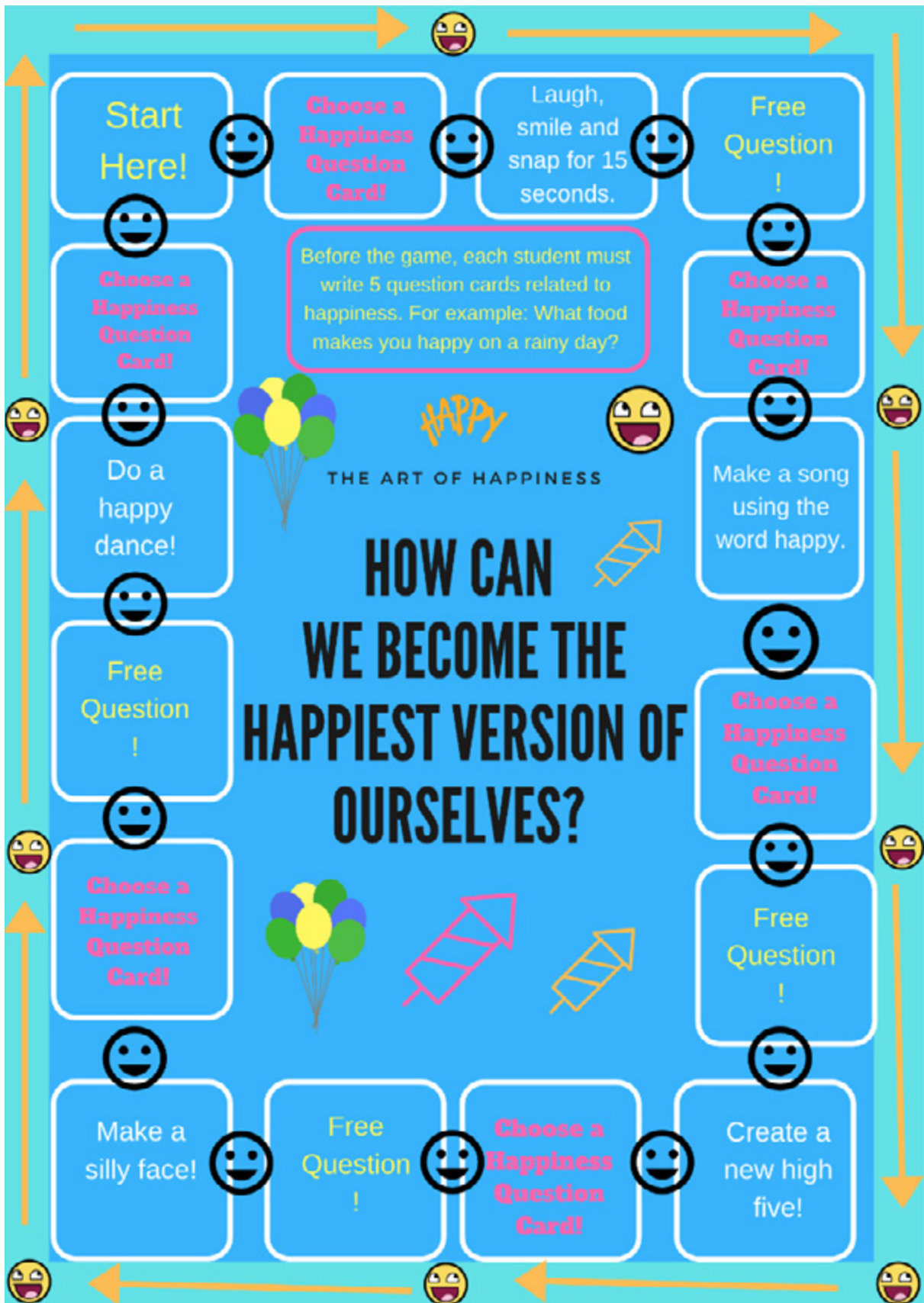


Figure 1. The Happiness Game board. Players start in the upper left-hand corner and move around the board in a clockwise direction.

After the warm-up, I tell the students that we will be playing a game about happiness.

Step Two: Making Materials

During this step, I introduce students to example cards at different levels. The question cards that are included in my example are color-coded and graded by level. I read the cards with the students—and then ask them to write five more cards of their own.

The cards we create during this step are the cards that will be drawn when players land on the *Choose a Happiness Question Card!* spot on the board. Samples are shown in Figure 2. But there are many possibilities, so teachers and students should feel free to create their own cards. Just remember that the theme is happiness!

In addition to these questions, I include questions that review aspects of English conversation that we have already covered in the course. These are the cards that players will draw when they land on *Free Question!* If the course has a more formal atmosphere, a teacher can label the space *Review Question!* These cards can be prepared by the teacher or by the students prior to the game. However, if preparation time is short, teachers can have students write review cards as they play or spontaneously make up their own questions.

When the cards and board are prepared, the teacher and students will need to create game pieces and find a die. If game pieces are hard to create or if there is a time constraint, simple classroom items such as paper clips, erasers, and pen caps can work well as game pieces. In my classes, I sometimes use coins I have collected from different countries as game pieces. (They encourage students to ask about my travels!) If a die is not available, a coin is a great substitute (heads = move one space; tails = move two spaces).

Step Three: Explaining the Rules

The rules for my version of the game are simple. Roll the die. (Or flip a coin.) Move your game piece the designated number

of spaces. If you land on *Choose a Happiness Question Card!*, you must choose a Happiness Question Card and answer the question or solve the challenge. If you land on *Free Question!*, you must choose a Free Question card and answer the question. All other spaces have fun happiness challenges such as “Create a new high five” or “Make a silly face.” I recommend doing one practice trip around the game board in order to model the rules for students.

Players take turns and move around the board as many times as they like or until the challenge cards have all been used up.

My version of the game is noncompetitive. The point is to learn about each other and have fun. However, a teacher who wants to make the game competitive can have the students count the number of challenges they have solved simply by asking students to count their cards at the end of the game.

Step Four: Following Up

The teacher has options for following up after the game is finished:

- **Presentations and speeches.** For large classes, the teacher can have students form small groups to give a short presentation about what they have learned. For small classes, individual students can give a speech about what they have learned.
- **Additional game cards.** The teacher can have students write more game cards for the next time the game is played. (Highly recommended!)
- **Writing.** The teacher can have students write short answers or essays for any challenges or questions that were particularly hard, such as, “What’s your happiest memory from childhood?”
- **Discussion.** In groups, students can discuss questions such as, “What question was the hardest for you to answer?” and “What happiness challenge did you enjoy the most?”

Variations: Ways to Modify the Game

The game described in this article is designed for mixed-level adult students. However, it could easily be modified for children. For children, the teacher will need to make cards that reflect the abilities of young learners.

For example, the teacher can have cards that give spelling quizzes or ask basic questions. One card could read, “Spell the word *happy*.” Another could read, “Which is a happier place, a park or a zoo?”

For more-advanced adult classes, the teacher can design cards with role plays or scenarios. A card could read, “Your friend is feeling down. Try to cheer him or her up.”

Other modifications can make the game even more fun.

- **Music:** The teacher can play music in the background to create a party atmosphere.
- **Happiness tokens or punch card:** The teacher can create some kind of reward system for good responses, such as happiness tokens or stickers. Or the teacher can create a challenge punch card and punch a hole every time the student gets a challenge correct.

Notes on Materials and Game Boards

Teachers can create their own Happiness Game using free resources on the American English website. Free templates for creating board games, along with many other ready-to-go games, are provided here: <https://americanenglish.state.gov/resources/activate-board-games>

- A blank board-game template can be downloaded at https://americanenglish.state.gov/files/ae/resource_files/board_game_template_0.pdf
- A template for dice can be downloaded at https://americanenglish.state.gov/files/ae/resource_files/dice_template.pdf

If game boards, game pieces, or other materials are not available, the teacher may turn the classroom into one giant game board. Any classroom materials may be used to signify board spaces in the physical classroom, including desks or notebooks. The students may play “rock, paper, scissors” with the teacher to advance. When a student wins, they move ahead three spaces; when they lose, they move ahead one space. The teacher can pull a happiness question, free question, or happiness challenge card randomly from a box or have a student do so. If cards are not available, the teacher can make up questions on the spot, based on their knowledge of the student’s level.

Please remember: the main point of the game is for all players (including the teacher) to be happy!

Conclusion: Teaching Should be a Happy Profession!

I designed this game during a holiday from my teaching job. I designed it at a happy moment in my life with the simple insight that teaching should be a happy profession and that learners should come out of the classroom with a smile.

Since that time, I have played the game with all manner of learners: elderly students, adults, younger learners, and children. Though it didn’t always work to perfection, even when it worked imperfectly it never failed to produce a smile on my students’ faces.

Don’t believe me? Well, you just rolled a 2! Move your game piece two spaces. Try smiling, laughing, and snapping your fingers for 15 seconds. See what happens!

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How do you spell happy?	How can you be happy at work?	What is the difference between pleasure and happiness?	What do you think is the connection between happiness and aging?
What's the opposite of a frown? 	What are the happiest animals? Why?	What's your happiest memory from childhood?	What things influence people's level of happiness?
What food makes you happy?	How can you cheer up a friend?	If you could make a happy place, what would it be like?	Have you ever heard of the phrase "pay it forward"? What does it mean?
What drink makes you happy?	Unscramble: look, Always, on, the bright side, life, of	Is happiness due more to situation or perspective ?	If you were a doctor, what would you prescribe for a case of the blues?

Figure 2. Samples of Happiness Question Cards, organized in four levels of difficulty—the easiest to answer are on the left, while the most challenging are on the right. Teachers should use cards that are appropriate for their learners' language level. Teachers and learners are encouraged to create new cards, which can be retained for future use.