

## Lesson 6: Freedom for Excellence

### PURPOSE

To motivate students to live freedom for excellence in their lives.

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

1. Identify and distinguish between freedom for excellence and freedom of indifference.
2. Recognize Viktor Frankl as an example of using freedom for excellence even in the most difficult circumstances.

### MATERIALS & RESOURCES

- [Video](#) *Man's Search for Meaning* by Viktor Frankl
- Excerpt from *Man's Search for Meaning* by Viktor Frankl
- Freedom for Excellence Worksheet

### VOCABULARY

- Freedom for excellence: using one's freedom to make excellent choices.
- Freedom of indifference: using one's freedom to choose carelessly; failing to consider whether one's actions are excellent or non-excellent.

### PROCEDURE

**Step 1:** Review the previous lesson. Recall the importance of using the power to think in an excellent way when making decisions. Highlight the seven steps of excellent decision making and motivate the students to apply those steps when thinking through important decisions in their lives.

**Step 2:** In previous lessons, the class learned that the power to choose is one of the most important human powers and that it distinguishes humans from all other living beings. However, it can be hard at times to know what to choose. We want to be free but do we know what true freedom means? Ask the students if they can recall the two meanings of freedom they learned about in Grade 7: freedom of indifference and freedom of excellence.

Freedom of indifference, hinges upon the idea that to be free simply means that people can do whatever they want. People who argue for freedom of indifference state that to be free means to have the option to choose anything on their own. In this view of freedom, the choice one makes does not matter so much as the idea that each person has the ability to make the choice that they want to. According to freedom of indifference, the defining characteristic of freedom is the capacity to choose, regardless of whether or not a choice is in fact good or bad, an excellent or non-excellent decision for yourself or for others, in the end.

The second idea of freedom, freedom for excellence, hinges upon the idea that freedom is not simply the exercise of choice itself, but that true freedom lies in choosing the good and the excellent over the bad or not-excellent. Freedom for excellence is using your power to think and to choose what is most excellent for you and for others.

Write the definitions on the board:

Freedom for excellence: using one's freedom to make excellent choices.

Freedom of indifference: using one's freedom to choose carelessly; failing to consider whether one's actions are excellent or non-excellent.

**Step 3:** In this lesson, we will learn about a person named Viktor Frankl and see which idea of freedom he chose in his life. Viktor Frankl was a Doctor of Medicine and a Doctor of Philosophy in Vienna, Austria. During the war, his wife and family members were sent to Nazi concentration camps and killed. He survived Dachau and Auschwitz concentration camps and after the war, he published a book called *Man's Search for Meaning*, based on his observations and experiences in the concentration camps. In it, Frankl shows how freedom for excellence can be exercised even in the most difficult circumstances.

To introduce students to Frankl's book and his experiences, play the [video](#) Man's Search for Meaning by Viktor Frankl. After watching the video, ask the students to share the ideas they consider the most important. Write down the key ideas on the board or in the visible place in the classroom. Some of the ideas can be:

- He who has a "why" can bear any "how".
- Meaning enables us to go through suffering.
- A person always has a choice of how he or she will respond to a situation.
- Everything can be taken from a person, except the freedom to choose our attitude.
- Don't aim at success, it is always a by-product of striving for meaning and purpose, etc.

**Step 4:** Divide the students into groups and ask them to read the Excerpt from Man's Search for Meaning, by Viktor Frankl. Clarify that the use of the word 'man' throughout Frankl's writing refers to mankind, which includes all human persons, both man and woman. Give the groups the Freedom for Excellence Worksheet and ask them to answer the questions in the worksheet after reading the text.

After the groups finish working, help the class to answer the questions correctly by using the Teacher's Answer Key as a guide.

Finally, lead the class discussion by asking the following questions:

Did anything surprise you about Viktor Frankl's story?

Can you think of an example from your own life when you struggled to overcome freedom of indifference and choose freedom for excellence?

Does Frankl justify the behavior of those who have been victim to terrible treatment?

What's stopping you from becoming the best version of yourself? Are there habits of indifference in your life that you will need to break to pursue freedom for excellence?

Highlight that Frankl does not justify the behavior of those who have been victim to terrible treatment but mentions the "commonplace truth that no one has the right to do wrong, not even if wrong has been done to them."

After finishing the discussion, ask the students to name two things they can do to practice freedom for excellence in their life. They can write it down in the following form:

Using my power to think and choose freedom for excellence, I will practice this habit at

School:

Using my power to think and choose freedom for excellence, I will practice this habit at

Home:

After students have had a minute to write down their responses, ask if any students would like to volunteer to share their responses with the class.

**Step 5:** Summarize. Recall the distinction between freedom for excellence and freedom of indifference. Recall some of the lessons by Viktor Frankl and how he lived the freedom for excellence. Motivate the students to pursue freedom for excellence in their daily lives by developing excellent habits.

Note that time permitting, [Interim Quiz 1](#) can be assigned at the start of the next lesson. It is a useful evaluation of student understanding and retention of key concepts in the course up to this point and can offer important feedback about any questions that should be addressed or clarified before moving forward in the course. The interim quiz also provides content that is contained in the final quiz, helping to reinforce concepts to students and to prepare them to successfully complete the course.

**Excerpt from Man's Search for Meaning, by Viktor Frankl**

Is that theory true which would have us believe that man is no more than a product of many conditional and environmental factors—be they of a biological, psychological or sociological nature? Is man but an accidental product of these? Most importantly, do the prisoners' reactions to the singular world of the concentration camp prove that man cannot escape the influences of his surroundings? Does man have no choice of action in the face of such circumstances?

We can answer these questions from experience as well as on principle. The experiences of camp life show that man does have a choice of action. There were enough examples, often of a heroic nature, which proved that apathy could be overcome, irritability suppressed. Man can preserve a vestige of spiritual freedom, of independence of mind, even in such terrible conditions of psychic and physical stress.

We who lived in concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number, but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms – to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way.

And there were always choices to make. Every day, every hour, offered the opportunity to make a decision... Even though conditions such as lack of sleep, insufficient food and various mental stresses may suggest that the inmates were bound to react in certain ways, in the final analysis it becomes clear that the sort of person the prisoner became was the result of an inner decision, and not the result of camp influences alone...

It is apparent that the mere knowledge that a man was either a camp guard or a prisoner tells us almost nothing... we must not try to simplify matters by saying that these men were angels and those were devils. Certainly, it was a considerable achievement for a guard or foreman to be kind to the prisoners in spite of all the camp's influences, and, on the other hand, the baseness of a prisoner who treated his own companions badly was exceptionally contemptible. Obviously, the prisoners found the lack of character in such men especially upsetting, while they were profoundly moved by the smallest kindness received from any of the guards. I remember how one day a foreman secretly gave me a piece of bread which I knew he must have saved from his breakfast ration. It was far more than the small piece of bread which moved me to tears at that time. It was the human "something" which this man also gave to me—the word and look which accompanied the gift.

During this psychological phase one observed that people with natures of a more primitive kind could not escape the influences of the brutality which had surrounded them in camp life. Now, being free, they thought they could use their freedom licentiously and ruthlessly. The only thing that had changed for them was that they were now the oppressors instead of the oppressed. They became instigators, not objects, of willful force and injustice. They justified their behavior by their own terrible experiences. This was often revealed in apparently insignificant events. A friend was walking across a field with me toward the camp when suddenly we came to a field of green crops. Automatically, I avoided it, but he drew his arm through mine and dragged me through it. I stammered something about not treading down the young crops. He became annoyed, gave me an angry look and shouted, "You don't say! And hasn't enough been taken from us? My wife and child have been gassed—not to mention everything else—and you would forbid me to tread on a few stalks of oats!"

Only slowly could these men be guided back to the commonplace truth that no one has the right to do wrong, not even if wrong has been done to them.

**FREEDOM FOR EXCELLENCE WORKSHEET**

True or False? Respond to the following statements, using a quote from the reading to show whether the statement is true or false.

1. Frankl says that freedom is just a product of environment, biology, psychology, and sociology and that we aren't in control of our moods.

2. Frankl says that we always have the freedom, if nothing else, to choose our attitude in a situation.

3. According to the reading, people can generally be divided into two groups: angels and devils.

4. This reading makes the case that Freedom for Excellence is not really possible if we are tired, angry, stressed, or hurt.

5. Frankl illustrates that practicing Freedom for Excellence can be as simple as a word or a look, as in the example he gives of the foreman.

6. In this reading, the example of the friend trampling on someone else's crops in anger illustrates how easy it is to justify our actions using Freedom of Indifference.



**Freedom for Excellence Worksheet – Teacher’s Answer Key**

1. Frankl says that freedom is just a product of environment, biology, psychology and sociology and that we aren’t in control of our moods.

**FALSE.** Frankl says: “The experiences of camp life show that man does have a choice of action. There were enough examples, often of a heroic nature, which proved that apathy could be overcome, irritability suppressed. Man can preserve a vestige of spiritual freedom, of independence of mind, even in such terrible conditions of psychic and physical stress.”

2. Frankl says that we always have the freedom, if nothing else, to choose our attitude in a situation.

**TRUE.** Frankl says: “We who lived in concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number, but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms – to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way.”

3. According to the reading, people can generally be divided into two groups: angels and devils.

**FALSE.** Frankl says: “It is apparent that the mere knowledge that a man was either a camp guard or a prisoner tells us almost nothing... we must not try to simplify matters by saying that these men were angels and those were devils. Certainly, it was a considerable achievement for a guard or foreman to be kind to the prisoners in spite of all the camp’s influences, and, on the other hand, the baseness of a prisoner who treated his own companions badly was exceptionally contemptible.”

4. This reading makes the case that Freedom for Excellence is not really possible if we are tired, angry, stressed, or hurt.

**FALSE.** Frankl says that “there were always choices to make. Every day, every hour, offered the opportunity to make a decision... Even though conditions such as lack of sleep, insufficient food and various mental stresses may suggest that the inmates were bound to react in certain ways, in the final analysis it becomes clear that the sort of person the prisoner became was the result of an inner decision, and not the result of camp influences alone...”

5. Frankl illustrates that practicing Freedom for Excellence can be as simple as a word or a look, as in the example he gives of the foreman.

**TRUE.** Frankl says: “I remember how one day a foreman secretly gave me a piece of bread which I knew he must have saved from his breakfast ration. It was far more than the small piece of bread which moved me to tears at that time. It was the human “something” which this man also gave to me—the word and look which accompanied the gift.”

6. In this reading, the example of the friend trampling on someone else’s crops in his anger illustrates how easy it is to justify our actions using Freedom of Indifference.

**TRUE.** Frankl says: “During this psychological phase one observed that people with natures of a more primitive kind could not escape the influences of the brutality which had surrounded them in camp life. Now, being free, they thought they could use their freedom licentiously and ruthlessly. The only thing that had changed for them was that they were now the oppressors instead of the oppressed. They became instigators, not objects, of willful force and injustice. They justified their behavior by their own terrible experiences. This was often revealed in apparently insignificant events. A friend was walking across a field with me toward the camp when suddenly we came to a field of green crops. Automatically, I avoided it, but he drew his arm through mine and dragged me through it. I stammered something about not treading down the young crops. He became annoyed, gave me an angry look and shouted, “You don’t say! And hasn’t enough been taken from us? My wife and child have been gassed—not to mention everything else—and you would forbid me to tread on a few stalks of oats!”

**INTERIM QUIZ 1****A. True/false questions**

1. T/F Human dignity implies enjoying material well-being.
2. T/F All people have the need for love and belonging.
3. T/F Freedom is just a product of environment, biology, psychology and sociology.
4. T/F We can develop two-sided relationships with objects
5. T/F To make excellent decisions it is of crucial importance to correctly define in the first step the question or problem one wants to resolve.

**B. Essay questions**

6. What are Viktor Frankl's key insights on freedom?

**C. What is... vocabulary?**

For example, if the answer is "The first letter of the alphabet", the question is "What is the letter A?". Or, if the answer is "A paste used to help clean and maintain health of the teeth", the correct question is "What is toothpaste?"

7. The human ability to knowingly select between options.
8. Choosing carelessly by failing to consider whether one's actions are excellent or non-excellent.
9. Valuing persons for their intrinsic worth.
10. The universal, intrinsic, and inalienable value of human persons.
11. The human ability to know and connect ideas.

**D. Multiple choice questions**

12. Dignity as well-being:
- a) Is connected to happiness and prosperity
  - b) Depends on having enough material goods
  - c) Is intrinsic and inviolable
  - d) Is always acquired by one's personal effort
13. Mark the true sentences about freedom:
- a) Freedom for excellence is not really possible if we are tired, angry, stressed, or hurt
  - b) Freedom for excellence can be as simple as a word or a look
  - c) We always have the freedom, if nothing else, to choose our attitude in a situation
  - d) Freedom is just a product of environment
14. Which of the following is false? Dignity as moral character and integrity:
- a) Is acquired through one's personal effort
  - b) Can be lost if one behaves immorally
  - c) Is equal in everyone
  - d) Is hard to achieve
15. Which of the following is a necessary step of excellent decision making:
- a) Thinking about consequences of one's actions
  - b) Considering alternatives
  - c) Not spending too much energy on thinking
  - d) Deciding whatever makes one feel good
16. Subjects:
- a) We can love
  - b) We should care for
  - c) We can dispose of when no longer useful
  - d) We can own
17. Intrinsic means that:
- a) All persons have dignity
  - b) No one can take dignity away from us
  - c) Dignity is with us our entire life, we have it just by being human
  - d) Dignity is not earned

**Teacher answer key:**

1. F – this applies to dignity as well-being
2. T
3. F – Frankl says that man is always free, regardless of his environment.
4. F – we can develop two-sided relationships only with subjects.
5. T
6. Frankl shows how freedom for excellence can be exercised even in the most difficult circumstances of concentration camps. He says that the person is always free, no matter the circumstances, since he always has a choice how he will respond to a situation. Therefore, he says that everything can be taken from man, except the freedom to choose his attitude in any given circumstance. According to Frankl, to be free, man needs meaning and purpose.
7. What is the power to choose?
8. What is freedom of indifference?
9. What does it mean to treat persons as subjects?
10. What is human dignity?
11. What is the power to think?
12. a, b
13. b, c
14. c
15. a, b
16. a, b
17. c