FEELING GOOD, LOOKING GREAT

by Mary Walters Riskin

Non-Fiction (Health Issues 8, p. 17)

OVERVIEW

About the Author

Her first novel, *The Woman Upstairs*, which won the Writers Guild of Alberta Award for Excellence in Writing, was published in 1987. Her most recent novel, *Bitters*, was published in 2000. Born in 1949, Mary Walters Riskin has lived in Edmonton for more than 20 years.

Background
This selection examines irony. Many teens claim not to be concerned about the appearance of others, yet place demands upon themselves to look better or different than their peers do. Here the focus is on the mistaken belief that changing one’s looks can change how one feels about oneself. Instead, Riskin points out that the truth lies in self-confidence and positive thinking. Included in her article are strategies for positive thinking patterns regarding appearance that remind teens to focus on the positive and accept themselves as they are.

Links
It might be useful to use this selection in combination with *I Want to Be Beautiful So Bad It Makes Me Sick* also by Mary Walters Riskin (p. 13), particularly since *Feeling Good, Looking Great* provides a very positive outlook and message. As well, you may want to refer students back to the *Health Issues 7* selection *Your Hidden Skills* from *TG* magazine (p. 98) to review the concept of thinking patterns and to provide additional positive examples of how positive thinking can affect the way one feels, or the way one is perceived.

Key Terms relating to Health and Life Skills content:
- Self-image
- Self-esteem
- Self-confidence
- Thinking patterns
- Positive thinking
- Peer pressure
ACTIVITIES

Pre-Reading
1. Begin by asking your students the first question in the survey by Zoot Capri magazine: Do you choose your friends on the basis of their appearance? Why or why not? Students should respond personally in their journals.
2. Carry out an informal class survey to determine how many said yes, no, or sometimes.
3. Discuss students’ reasons for answering as they did and chart some of the common answers. The answers to this question and to the question above can be used for comparison after students read the article.
4. Then ask students to respond to the question: If you could change something about yourself to make you feel better, what would it be and why? This can be a journal response as well, followed by sharing in small groups.

Reading
1. Have students read the selection to themselves once, or read it aloud together.
2. Discuss the content by comparing your class results and comments (Pre-Reading questions #2 and #3) with those in the survey. If there is a marked difference, ask students what the reasons might be.
3. Have students focus on the question on page 17, column 2: How come so many teens think other people are keeping an eye on their appearance when they don't worry about how other people look? Using the blackline master for a T-chart, students should fill in their own opinions under the heading: What I Think. After skimming the selection again, they should fill in the author’s opinions under the heading What the Author Thinks.
4. Working in small groups, have students compare what they would like to change about themselves referring back to the examples given in the text. They should look for similarities or differences, and think of reasons why their examples might be the same or different.
5. Draw attention to the key statement on page 18, column two: Teens who focus on the way they look and want to change their bodies are focusing on the wrong part of the equation. What needs changing is not their shapes or heights, but the way they see themselves. Ask students to respond to this statement by agreeing or disagreeing, and providing reasons.
6. Review the six exercises on page 19 designed to help turn negatives into positives and build confidence and self-esteem. Ask students to summarize each point in a phrase or sentence under the heading: Strategies for Feeling Good about Yourself.

7. Have students respond in their journals to the statement on page 20, column one: The bottom line is that the self-confident look is what’s good looking. Ask them to explain its meaning, providing examples of self-confident looks or people who demonstrate confidence to support this statement.

Post-Reading
1. Review the concept of thinking patterns from grade 7 (R-7.1: Students will analyze how thinking patterns influence feelings; for example, positive thinking, all or nothing thinking, overgeneralization, perfectionism). Have students discuss how the idea of thinking positively is developed in this selection.

2. Role play a variety of scenarios in which pairs of students take the parts of a person concerned with appearance, or the trusted friend who listens and responds to the problem, acknowledging feelings and focusing on the positive. Talk about the strategy of talking over concerns with a friend and how it can be useful, as well as the importance of being a good listener.

ASSESSMENT

Dear _____ letter:
Have students write a letter to a fictitious character (the class may name the character) similar to Ann Landers or another advice columnist. In this letter, they will ask for advice about how to change their appearance so they will look and feel better about themselves. Letters will then be exchanged among students at random, so each person receiving a letter becomes the advice columnist, and writes a response that provides positive advice.

Suggestions for facilitation:
1. Letters to Dear ____ : These letters can be completely fictionalized, but should be based on reasonable comments a typical Grade 8 student might make. OR, students can choose to write a modified version of what they might actually write themselves. They should not sign or personalize their letters so typing is suggested if at all possible.

2. Responding as the columnist: Make sure no one ends up with his or her own letter. Depending on the class, you may wish to have boys respond to boys and girls to girls, or mix them up. The response letter should preserve the positive spirit of Feeling Good, Looking Great, focusing on self-esteem and confidence, and on positive thinking patterns rather than on actual appearance changes. If a letter brings up something that can be changed, advice should be reasonable and based on sound, healthy principles.
Revising and self-evaluation:
When students have completed their draft letters, divide them into small groups and have them exchange letters for evaluation based on the checklist related to this assessment activity. Students should make revisions, edit, and proofread according to usual writing process steps. If necessary, take time to review or elaborate on related elements of the writing process. Final, typed copies of the letters can be assessed by you using the assessment rubric provided.

Sharing: You may wish to post final letters on a bulletin board or produce a booklet to share with the students.

Additional Resources