

# **EMPOWER Students**

**Help Them Make School Meaningful**

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Association for Contextual Behavioral Science  
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# Need CE credit for this session?

Please don't forget to scan in to have your attendance tracked.



# Disclosures

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Lauren Porosoff is the author of a book, published by Rowman & Littlefield, on a topic tangentially related to this presentation. She receives royalties.

Lauren Porosoff and Jonathan Weinstein are co-authors of an upcoming book on the topic of this presentation. We hope we'll find a publisher and receive royalties.

Lauren is a middle school teacher and does not have a terminal degree in a relevant behavioral field.

# **Prologue: A Million Points**

# I had a teacher who...

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- was organized.
- worked hard.
- held students to high expectations.

# I want to be a teacher who...

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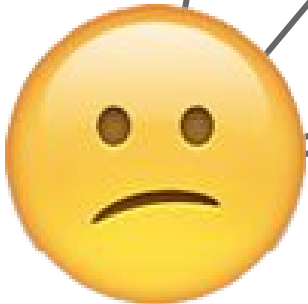
- is organized.
- works hard.
- holds students to high expectations.
- creates opportunities for students to do work that matters to them.
- ensures authentic participation and cooperation.

IF MY STUDENTS WERE GOING TO DO MEANINGFUL WORK, THEN I HAD TO TO **DESIGN CURRICULUM** THAT WOULD GIVE THEM OPPORTUNITIES TO DO THAT.

BUT WASN'T THE CURRICULUM PRETTY GOOD ALREADY?

THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS A "GOOD" OR "BAD" CURRICULUM. A CURRICULUM IS "GOOD" IF IT **WORKS** – IF IT SERVES THE FUNCTIONS YOU VALUE.

OH YOU FUNCTIONAL CONTEXTUALIST, YOU.



**In Which I Went  
on a Quest  
to Make the  
Curriculum  
Meaningful**



# Multiple Functions of Tasks

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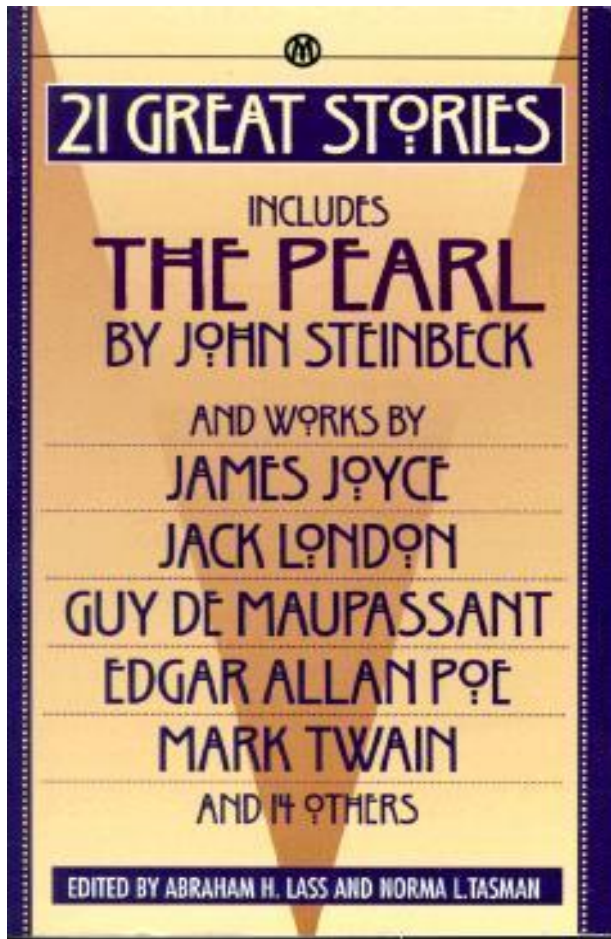


Image: <https://d.gr-assets.com/books/1348754574/723198.jpg>

- Identify and analyze key themes.
- Use the text as a model for writing.
- Read “classic” texts.
- Get the message that only white men’s stories matter.

# Identifying Important Functions

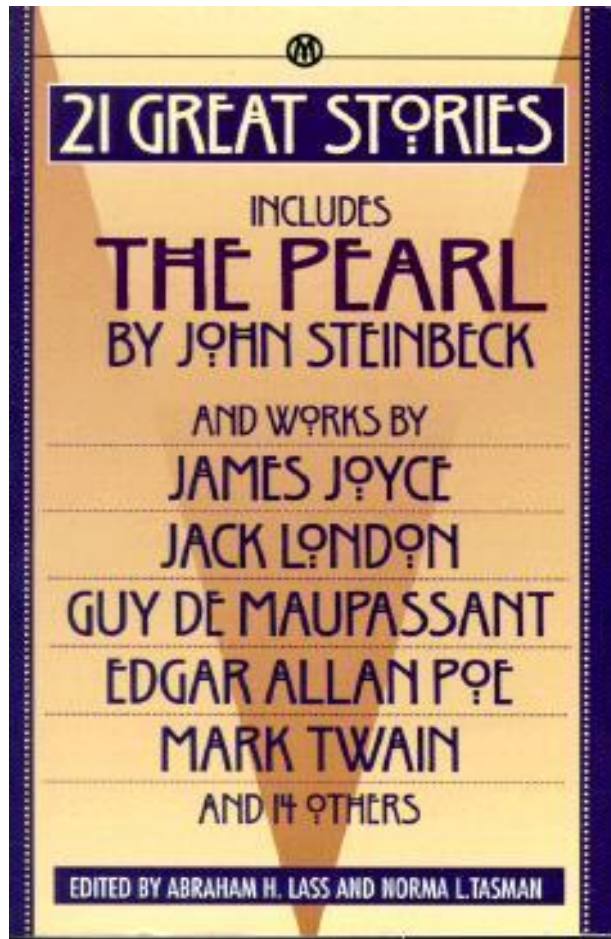
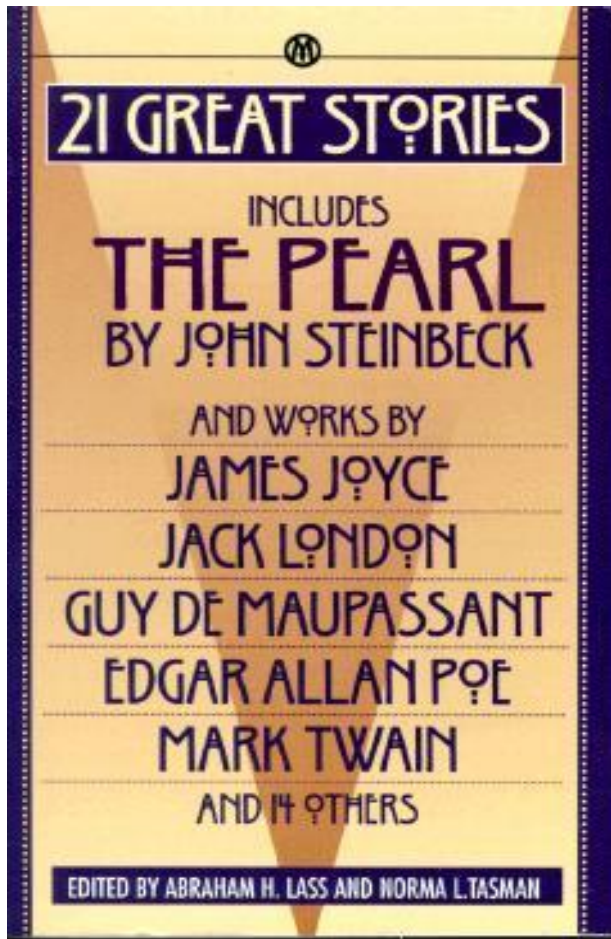


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# Fulfilling Functions in Multiple Ways



- Identify and analyze key themes.
- Use the text as a model for writing.

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# Adding Functions

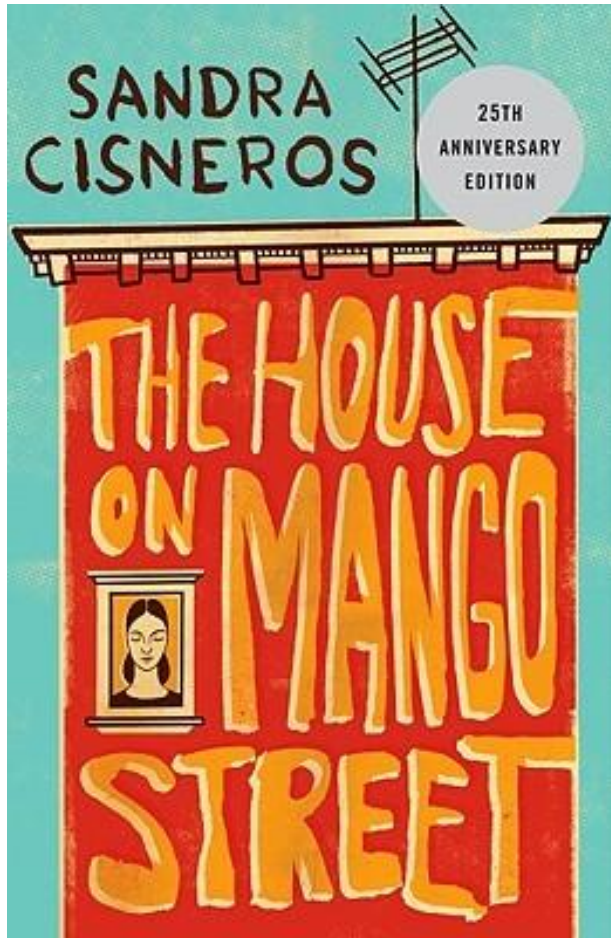


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- Identify and analyze key themes.
- Use the text as a model for writing.
- Relate to a coming-of-age story.
- Write vignettes that share a common theme.
- Write about people, events, and objects that matter to the students.
- Learn to use imagery to help the reader see and understand what matters.

**What student  
work starts to  
look like...**

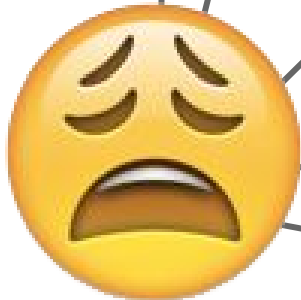
AREN'T YOU IMPRESSED BY HOW **AWESOME** I AM?

WHATEVER. REMEMBER BEN'S VIGNETTE COLLECTION?

MUST YOU BRING THAT UP RIGHT NOW?

HIS THEME WAS **FEAR**, AND HE WROTE ABOUT GOING ON ROLLERCOASTERS AND BEING AFRAID OF THE DARK.

A **LOT** OF OR THEIR WRITING WAS LIKE THAT. SUMMER CAMP, MORE SUMMER CAMP, DOGS, PIZZA, SOCCER, FAMILY TRIPS, AND "BEING A SUPPORTIVE FRIEND."



YOU ALWAYS THINK EVERYTHING IS ABOUT THE CURRICULUM. BUT YOUR PRECIOUS CURRICULUM WAS GETTING MIXED RESULTS.





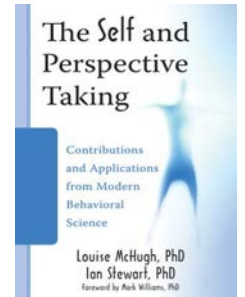
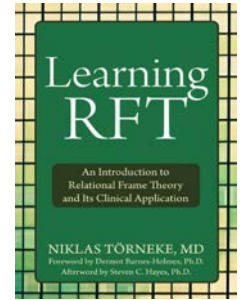
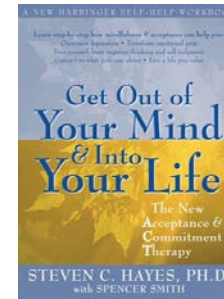
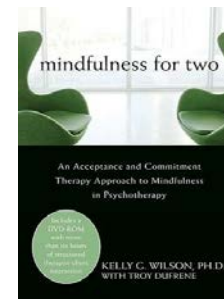
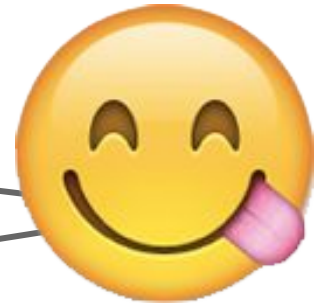
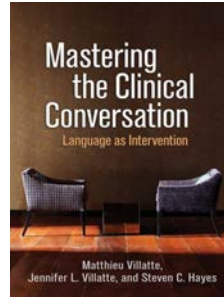
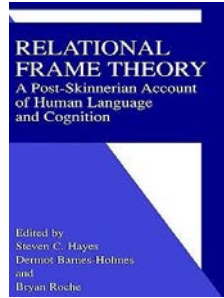
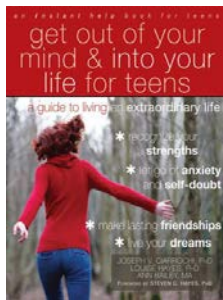
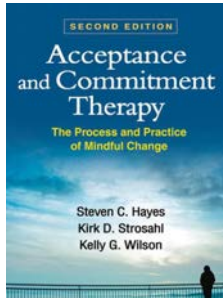
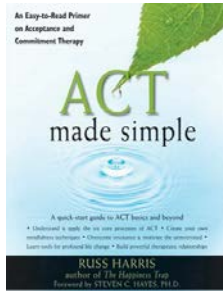
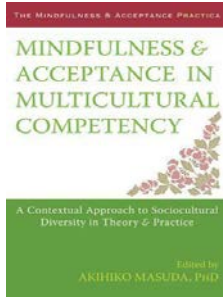
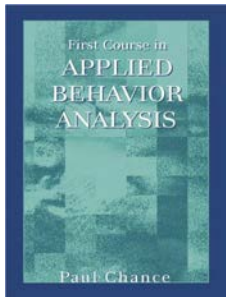
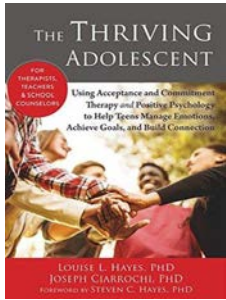
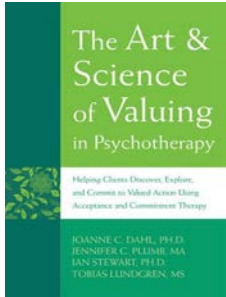
“Are you  
teaching them  
HOW to write  
about what  
matters?”

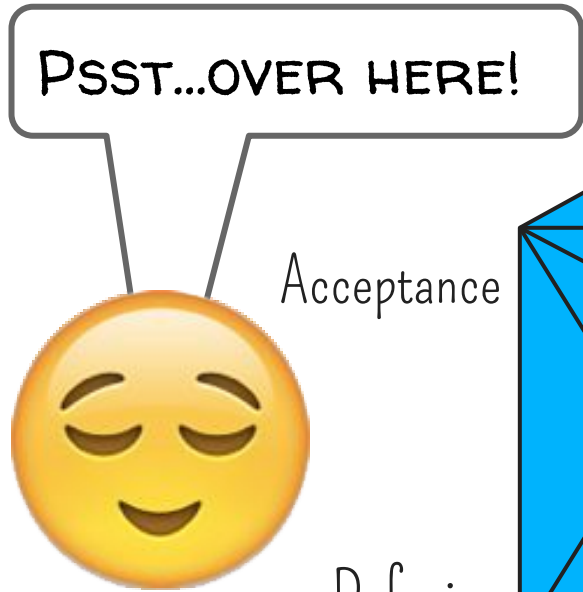
**In Which I  
Learned to  
Create Contexts  
for Students to  
Explore What  
Matters to Them**



WHAT DO I DO?



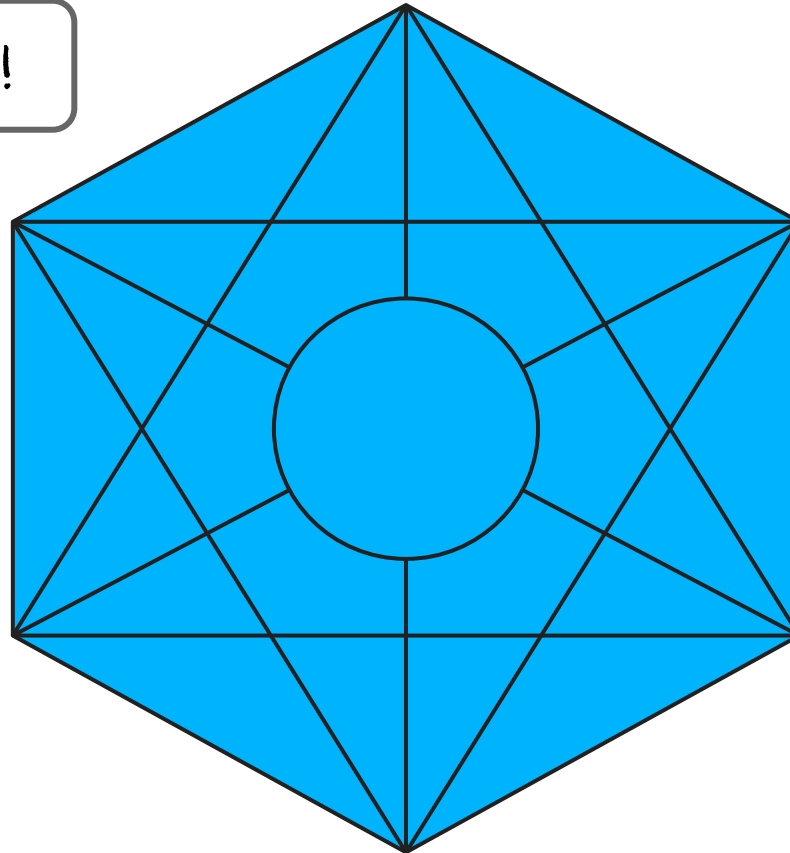




Acceptance

Defusion

Present Moment  
Awareness



Values

Committed  
Action

Self as Context

# Exploring What Matters to Them

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**Show diverse models of work whose creators clearly care about their topics and are willing to be vulnerable.**

*What does the author (composer, artist, scientist) know? Feel? Want?*

*What does s/he want us to think or do?*



# Exploring What Matters to Them

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**Get students to articulate why a chosen topic is important, not just interesting.**

*If I study this, what important things will I be able to do next?*

*How does this topic connect to other things that matter to me, to my family, in my community, or in the world?*



# Exploring What Matters to Them

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**Make assignments open-ended enough that students can connect the work to their values but defined enough that they can meet expectations.**

*Too specific: “Paint a night sky.”*

*Too broad: “Paint anything!”*

*In between: “Create a fantasy version of what you see from your window.”*



# Exploring What Matters to Them

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## **Do your own assignments.**

*Experience how the assignment gets you to tap into what matters. Do you want to add lessons? Modify the assignment? Leave it as it is?*

*Share your work product so students see it's OK to go deep and open up.*

*Let your students see you fail and then recommit to your values.*

# Exploring What Matters to Them

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**Give post-assignment reflections that include process questions about values-consistent behavior.**

*What did you do this time?*

*How satisfied are you with the outcome?*

*What will you continue to do next time?*

*What's something different that you'll try next time?*



# Exploring What Matters to Them

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**Let your students mess up.**

*Notice the urge to punish or rescue.*

*Help students notice the short-term and long-term workability of their choices and accept struggle as part of the process.*

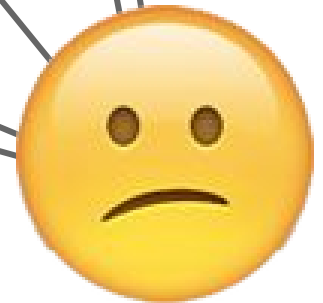
BUT WHAT CAN **KIDS** DO WHEN I'M NOT THERE TO PROMPT THEM TO EXPLORE WHAT MATTERS TO THEM?

OR...WHEN I'M STRESSED, SICK, DISTRACTED, OVERWHELMED, UNDERPREPARED, STUCK...

OR OTHERWISE DISPLAYING SYMPTOMS OF HUMANITY?

MAYBE WE COULD FIGURE OUT HOW TO **EMPOWER** THEM TO MAKE SCHOOL MEANINGFUL FOR THEMSELVES.

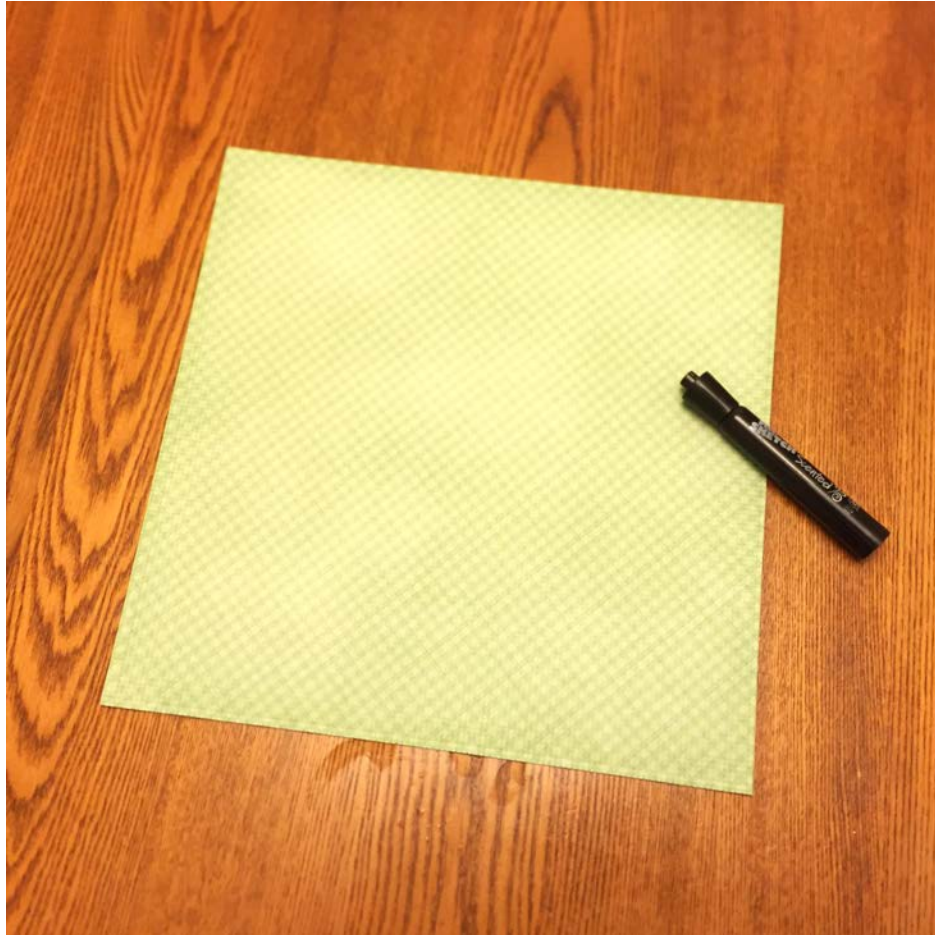
WHAT WOULD **THAT** LOOK LIKE?



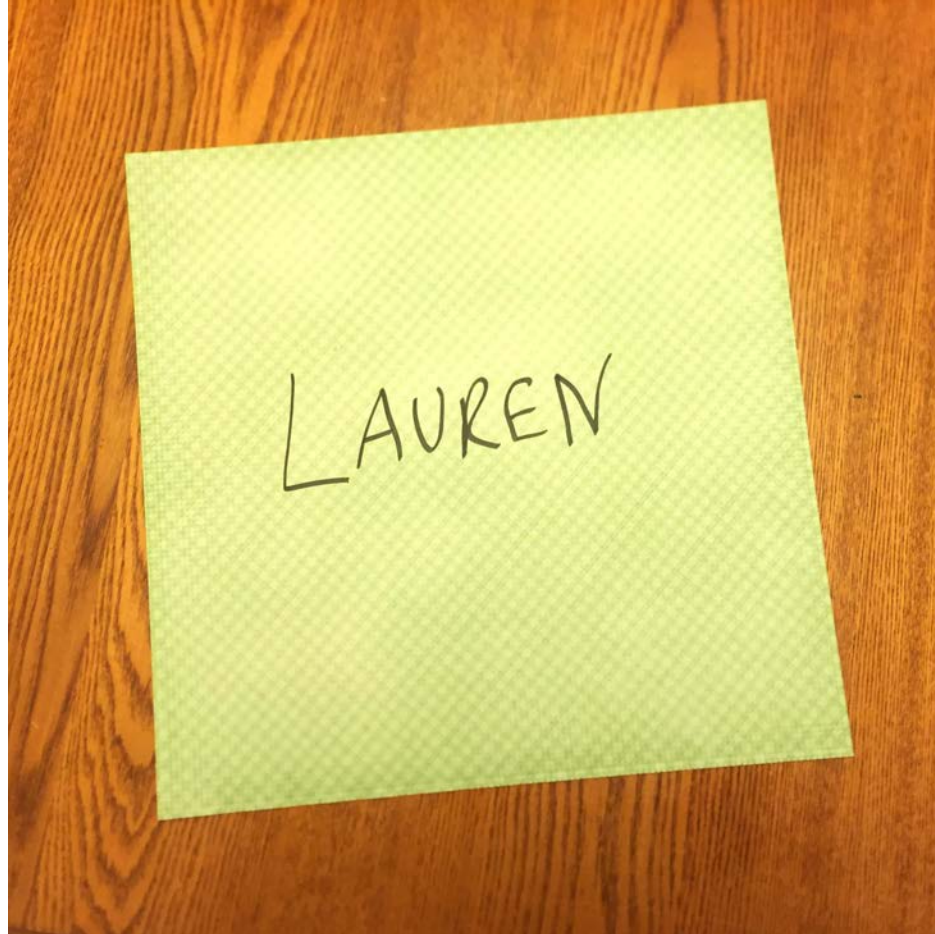
**In Which We  
Learned to  
EMPOWER  
Students to  
Make School  
Meaningful**

# Values Origami

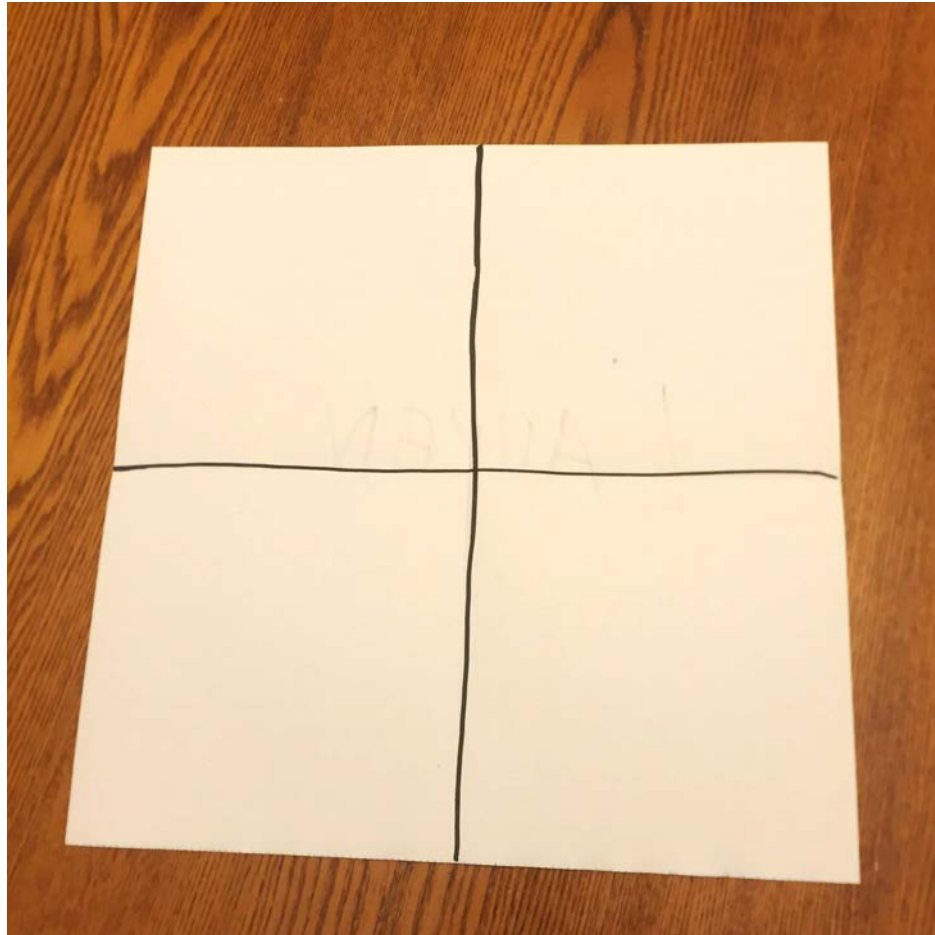
# This represents your life.



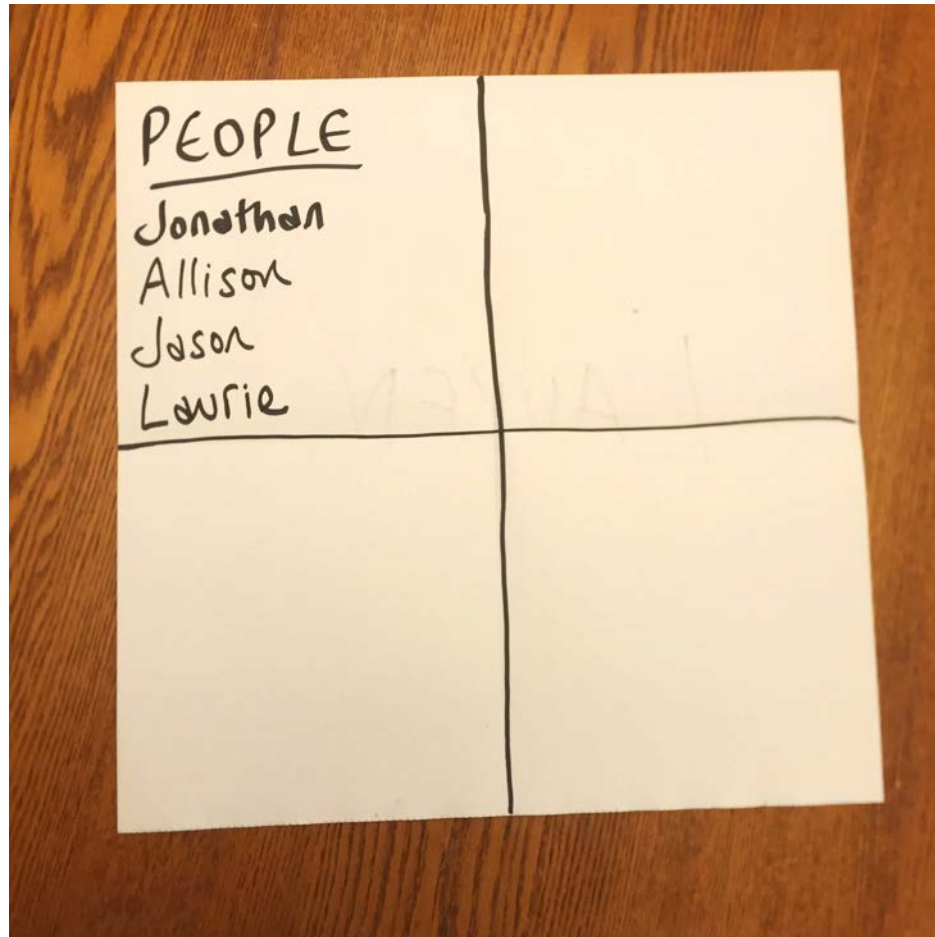
**The first thing to know about your life is that  
it's *your* life.**



**Let's think about some of the parts of life that some people might call "meaningful."**

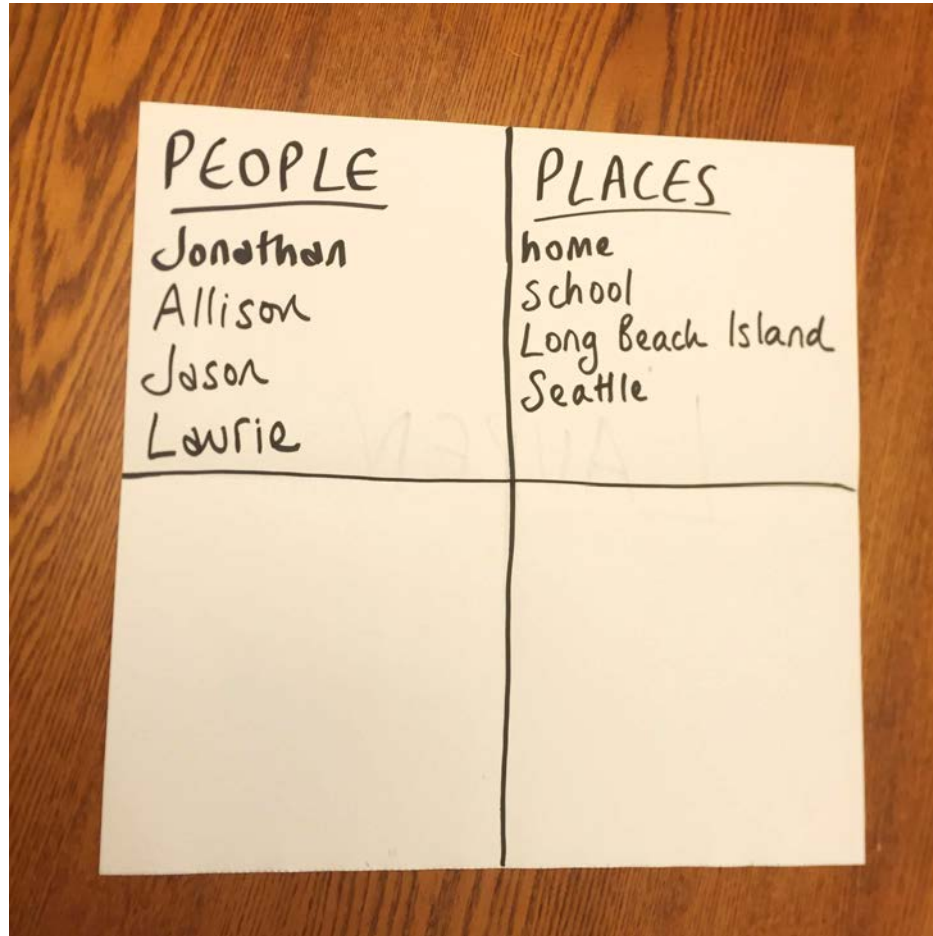


**Now let's think about some of the parts of life that some people might call "meaningful."**





**Now let's think about some of the parts of life that some people might call "meaningful."**



Now let's think about some of the parts of life that some people might call "meaningful."

A hand-drawn table on a piece of paper, divided into four quadrants by a vertical and a horizontal line. The quadrants are labeled as follows:

<u>PEOPLE</u>	<u>PLACES</u>
Jonathan Allison Jason Laurie	home school Long Beach Island Seattle
<u>THINGS</u>	
childhood photos kids' artwork wedding ring book	

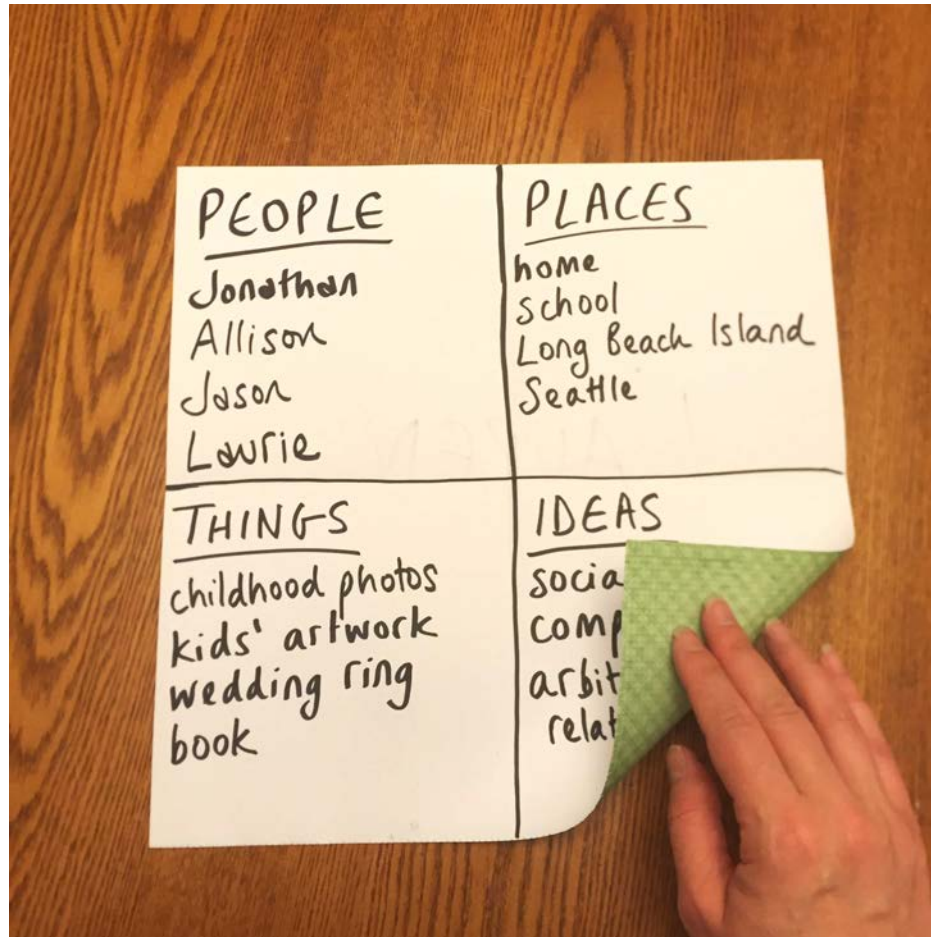
Now let's think about some of the parts of life that some people might call "meaningful."

<u>PEOPLE</u>	<u>PLACES</u>
Jonathan Allison Jason Laurie	home school Long Beach Island Seattle
<u>THINGS</u>	<u>IDEAS</u>
childhood photos kids' artwork wedding ring book	social justice compassion arbitrarily-applicable relational responding

# But the trouble with relying on nouns is...

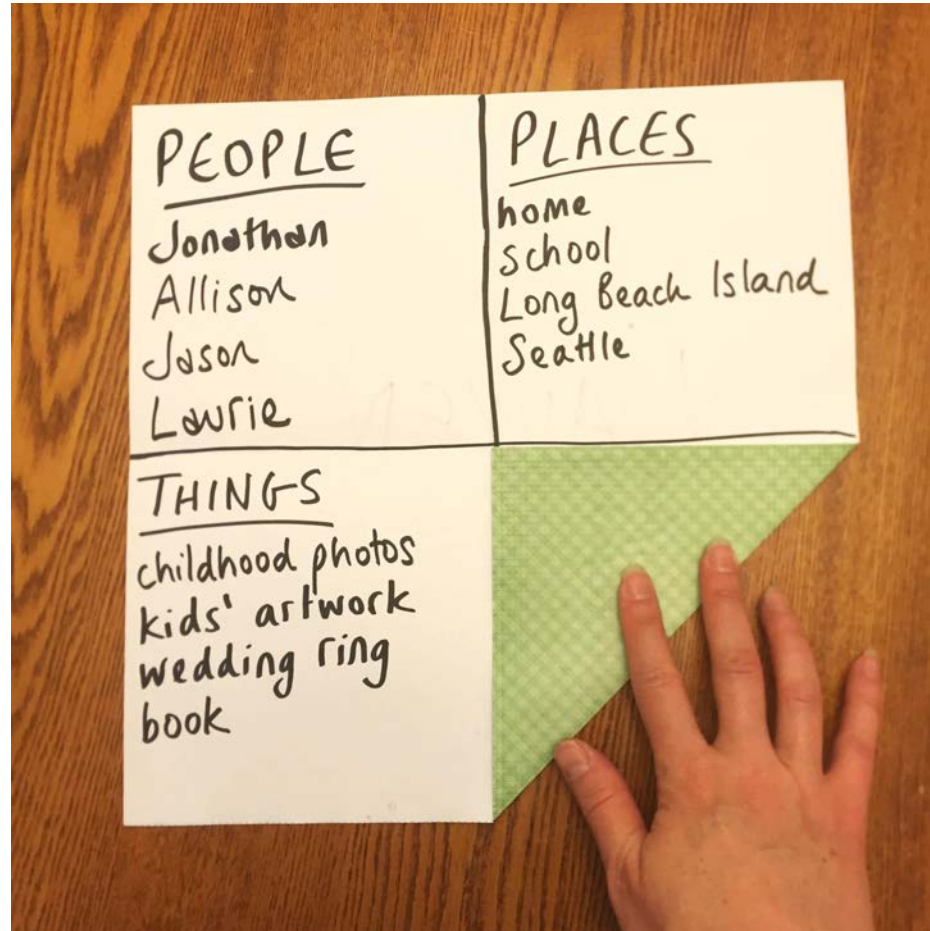
<u>PEOPLE</u>	<u>PLACES</u>
Jonathan Allison Jason Laurie	home school Long Beach Island Seattle
<u>THINGS</u>	<u>IDEAS</u>
childhood photos kids' artwork wedding ring book	social justice compassion arbitrarily-applicable relational responding

# An idea can become less interesting or important over time.

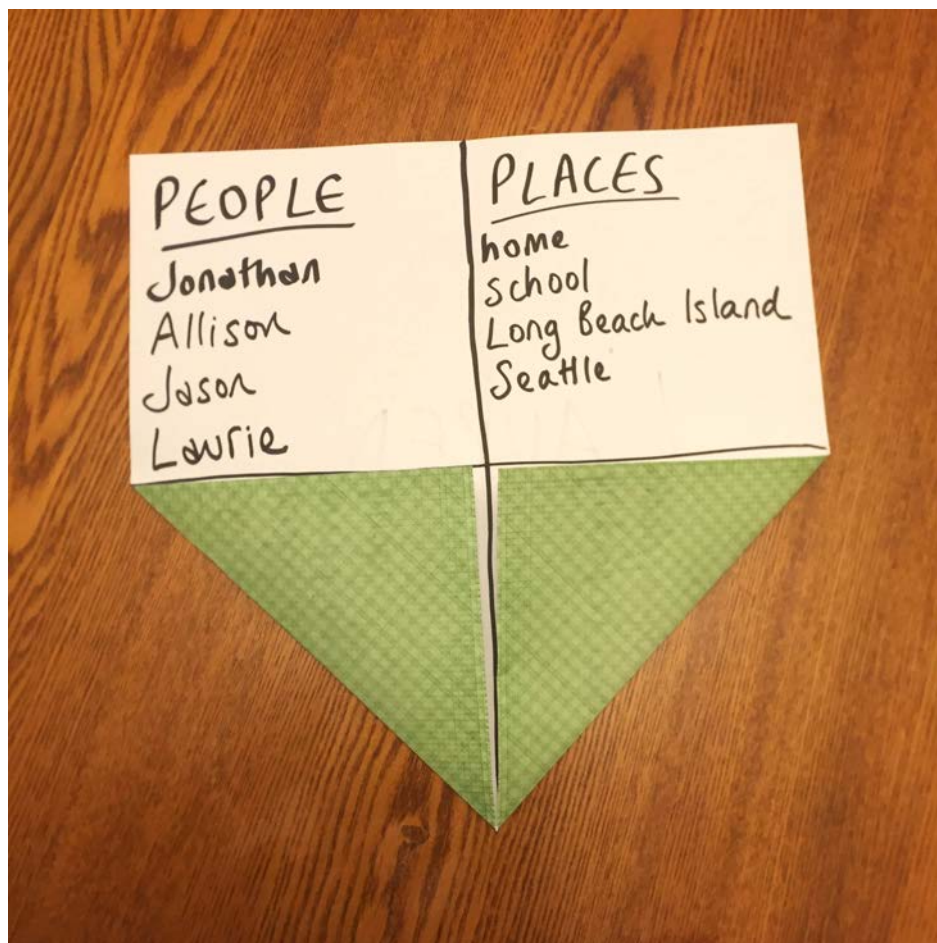




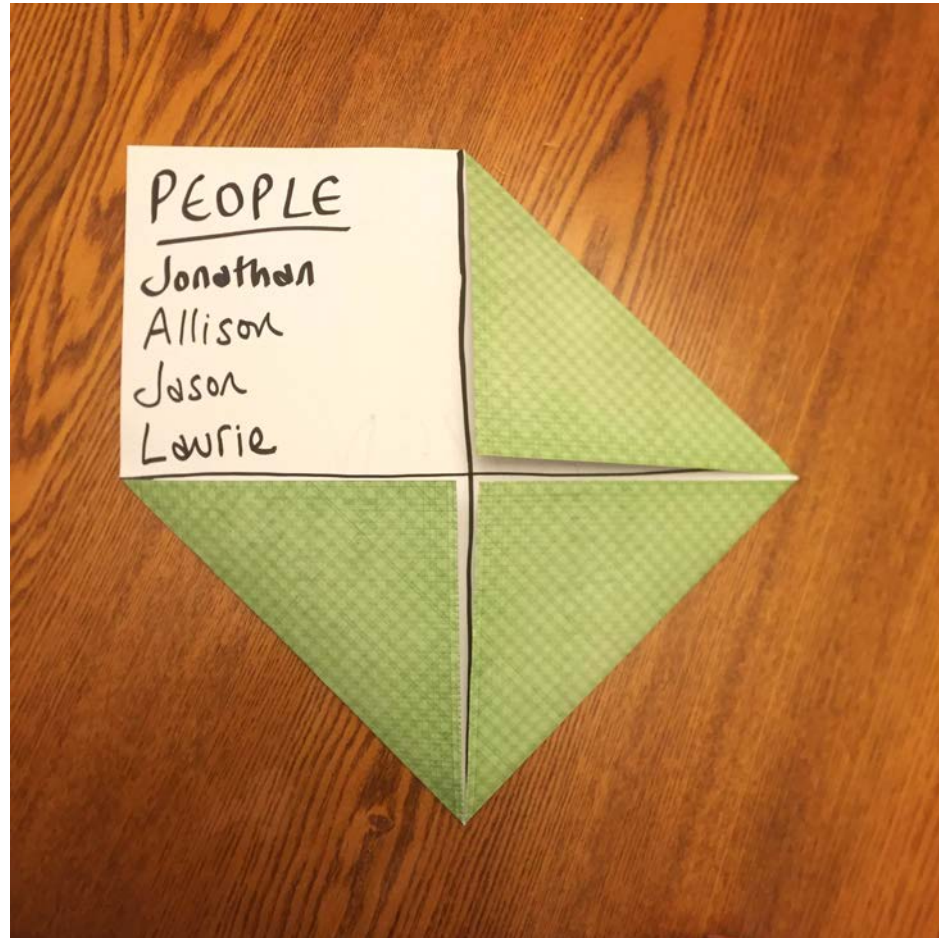
# An idea can become less interesting or important over time.



**Things can be lost, stolen, or ruined, or they can lose importance once achieved.**

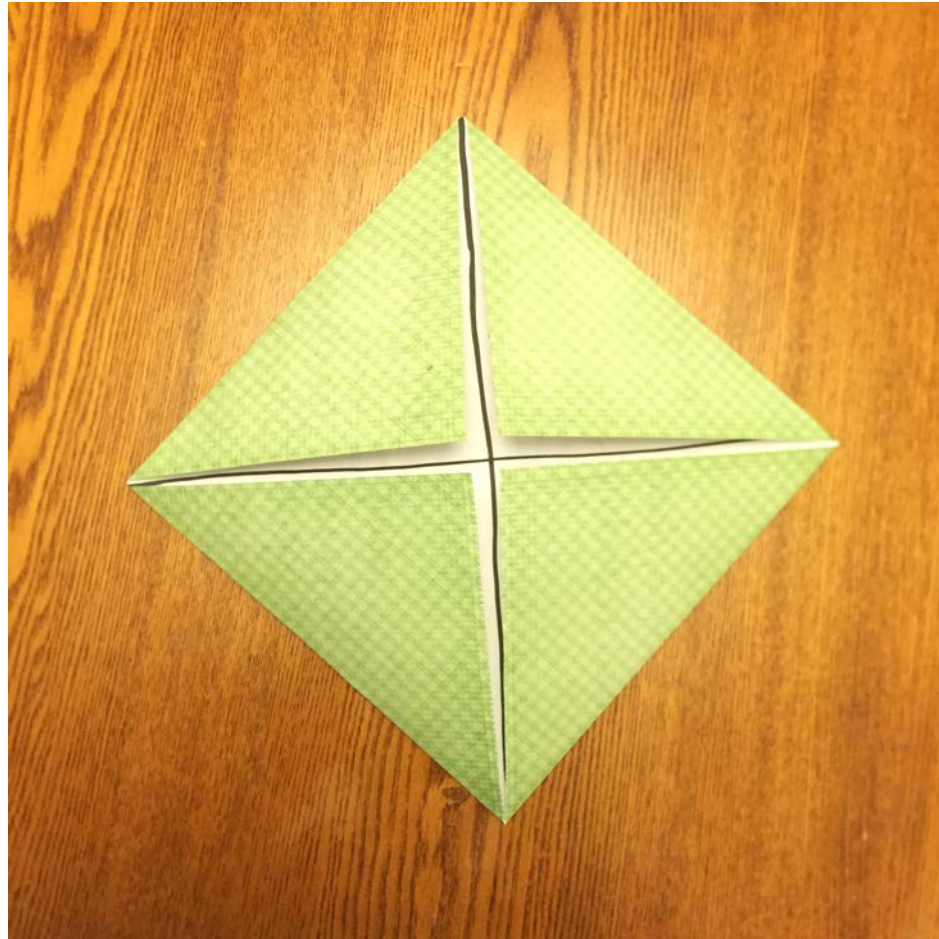


**Places can change, we can lose access to them, or the place can lose importance.**





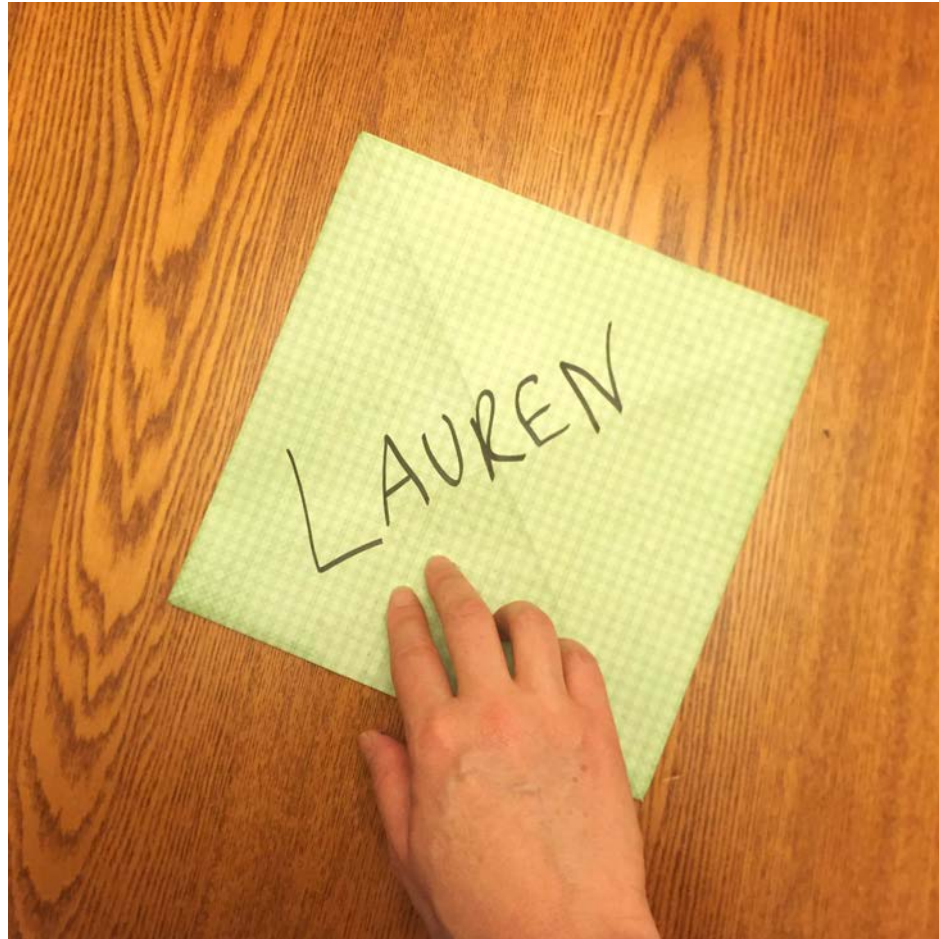
**People can change, we can lose access to them, or the relationship can shift.**



# Without your meaningful nouns, what's left?



# You're what's left.



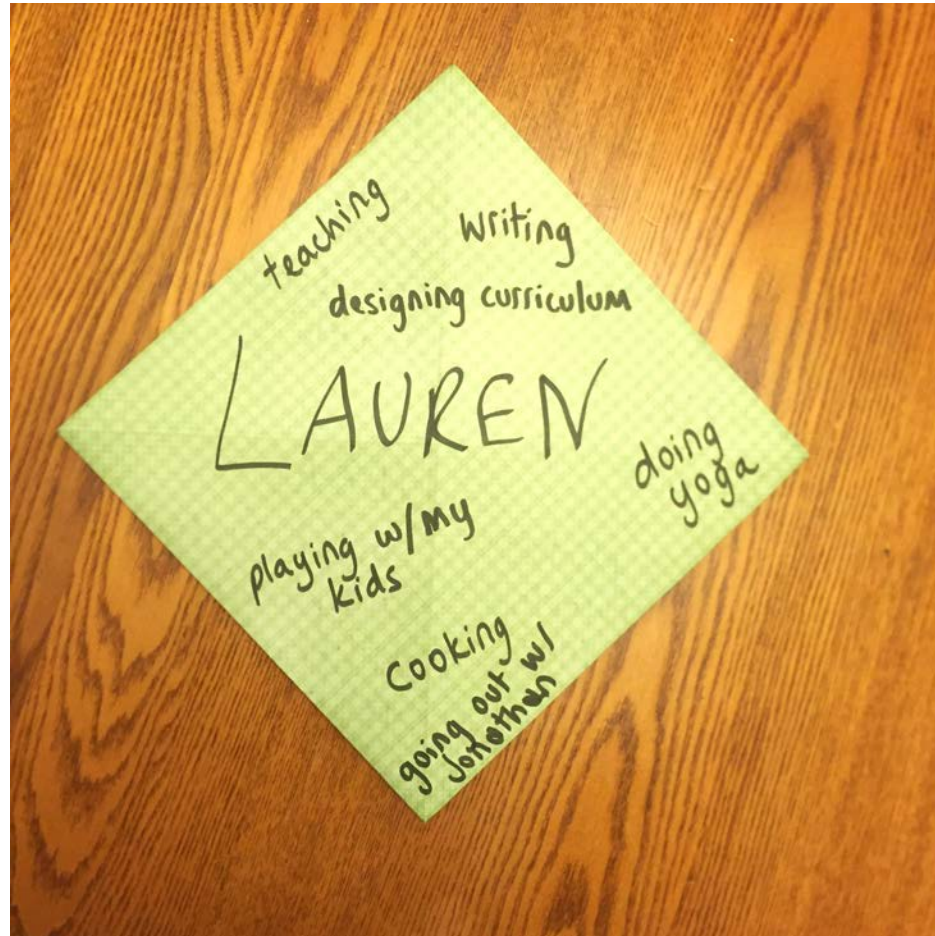
**Maybe relying on people, places, things, and ideas to give our lives meaning is a problem.**

*But what if meaning doesn't come from what we get out of the world?*

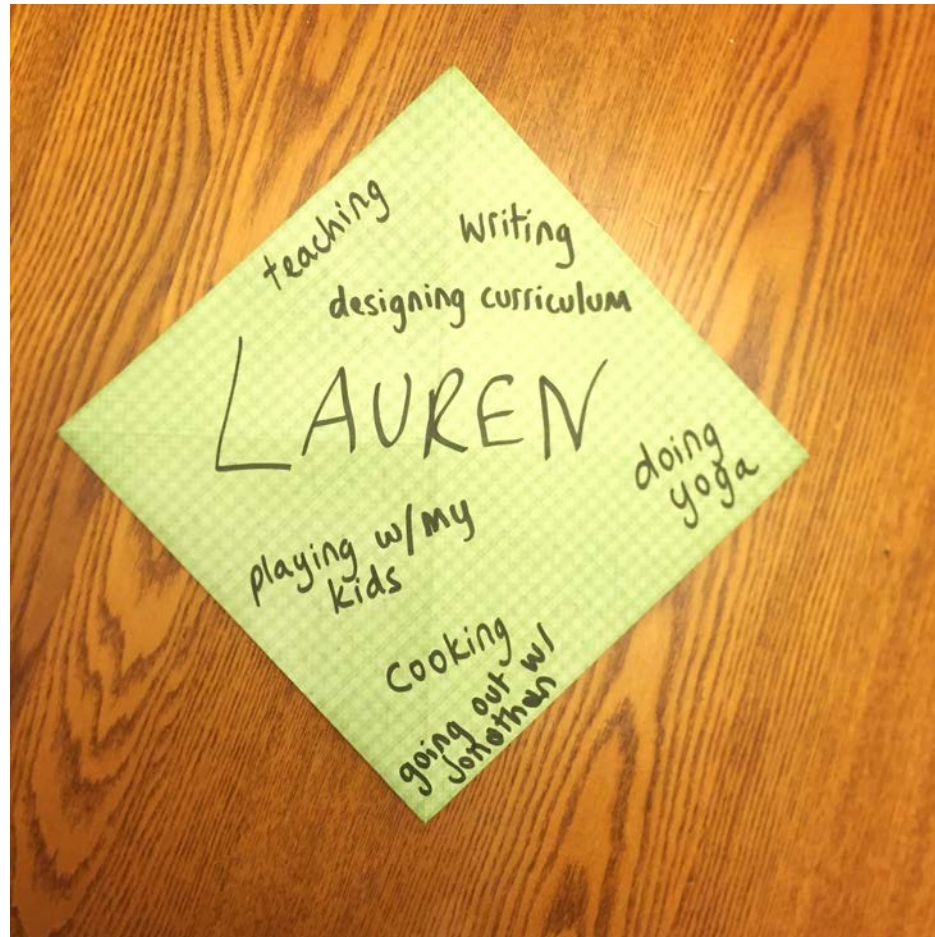
*What if, instead, meaning comes from the actions we put into the world?*



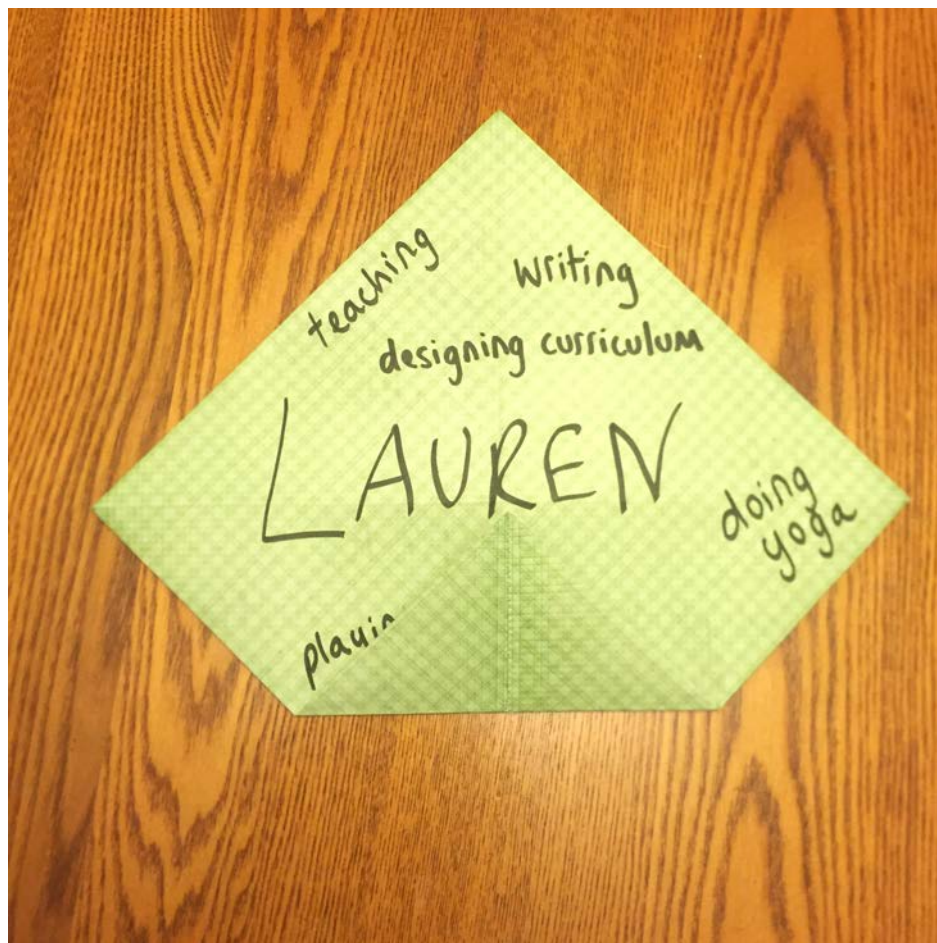
# What do you DO that makes your life meaningful?



# Your actions are more in your control, but...

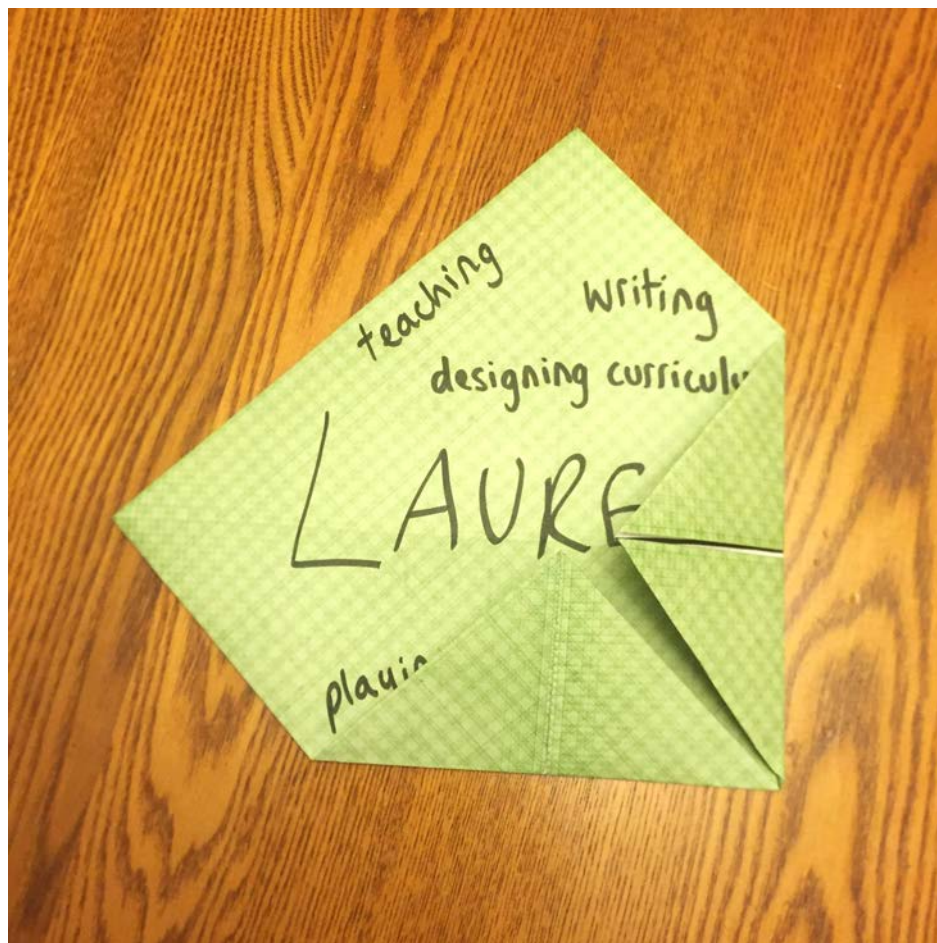


# You can lose the ability to do something meaningful...



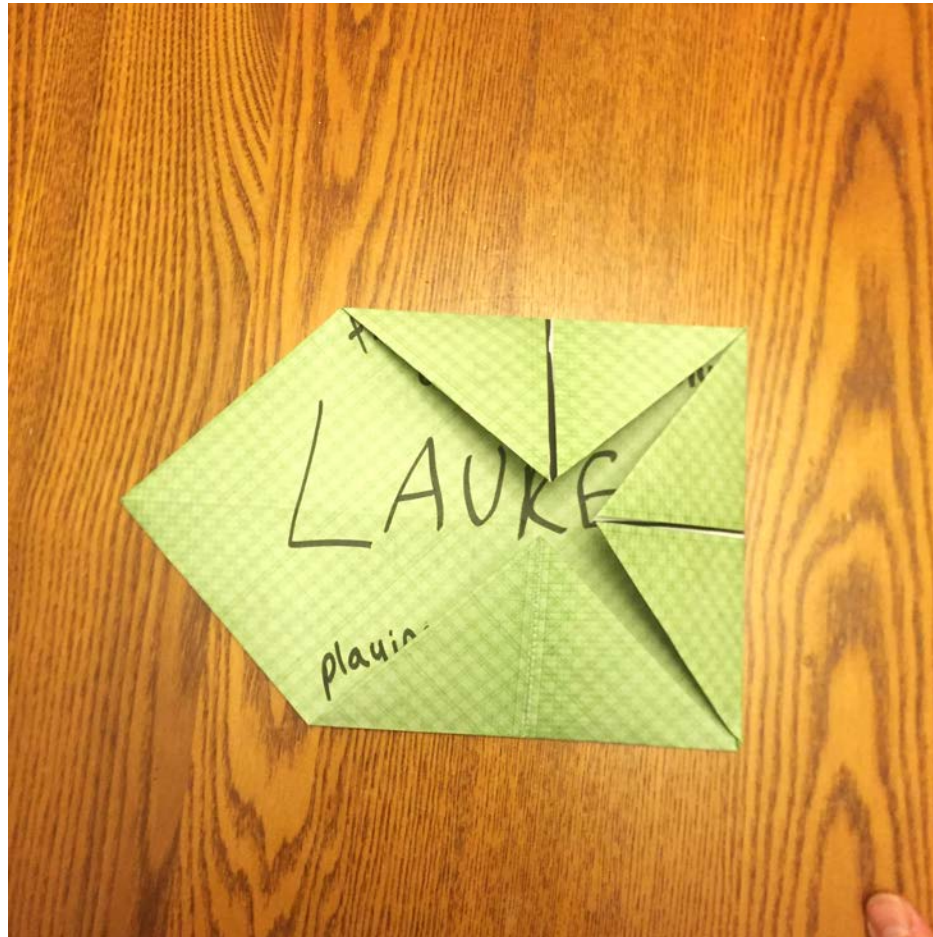


**...you might not have access to meaningful activities (or as much access as you'd like)...**

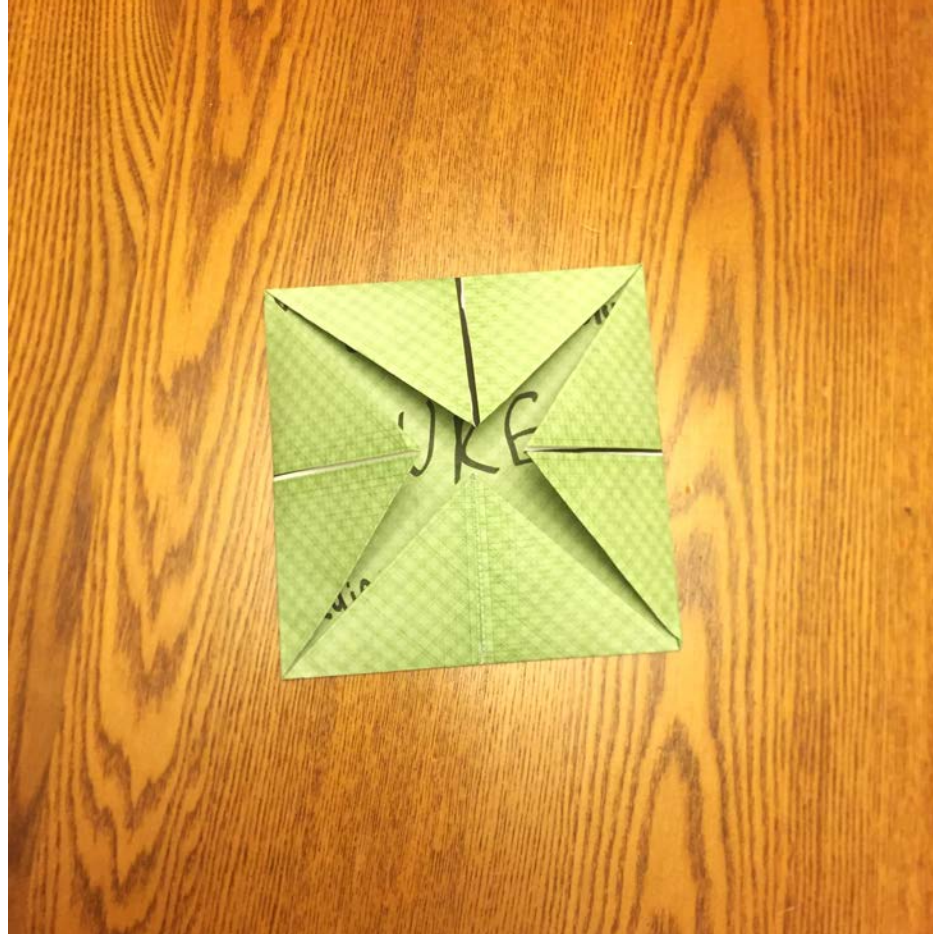




**...you might not have time to do the things  
that matter most to you...**



**...or you might have made commitments that get in the way.**



# So, what is always available and makes life meaningful?!?

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What if instead of asking,

*What do I want out of life?*

or even,

*What do I want to do in life?*

you were to ask,

*How do I want to live?*

# When we can't choose what we get or what we do, we can still choose how we live.

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## VALUES are qualities of action that make life meaningful.





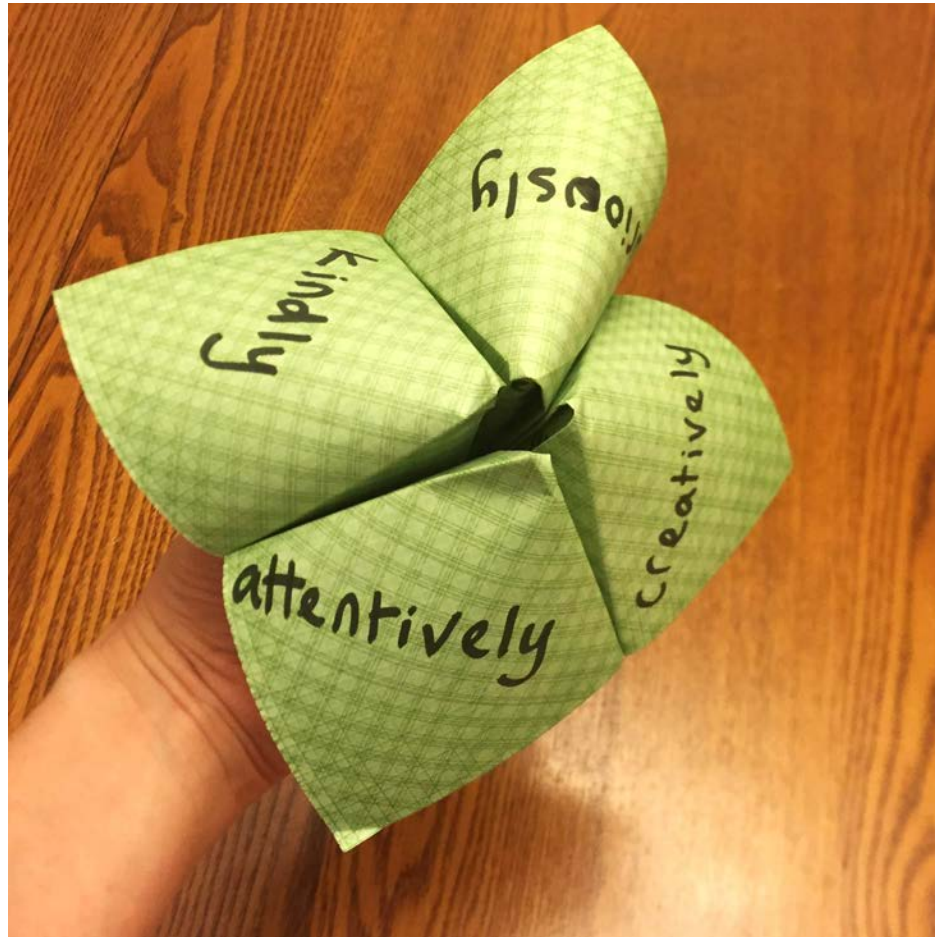
# What qualities of action make your life meaningful? How do you want to live?



actively      creatively      generously      knowledgably      resiliently  
appreciatively      curiously      gracefully      lovingly      reverently  
authentically      deliberately      helpfully      loyally      resourcefully  
assertively      determinedly      honestly      modestly      responsibly  
attentively      efficiently      hopefully      patiently      skillfully  
beautifully      excellently      humbly      passionately      sustainably  
boldly      fairly      imaginatively      peacefully      supportively  
cautiously      faithfully      inclusively      playfully      thankfully  
consciously      flexibly      industriously      productively      thoroughly  
cooperatively      forgivingly      inventively      prudently      trustworthily  
courageously      freely      kindly      respectfully      wisely

A wooden background with a green sticky note in the center. The sticky note has handwritten words: 'creatively', 'curiously', 'humbly', and 'inclusively'.

**What qualities of action make your life meaningful? How do you want to live?**



# What qualities of action make your life meaningful? How do you want to live?



# Making School Meaningful

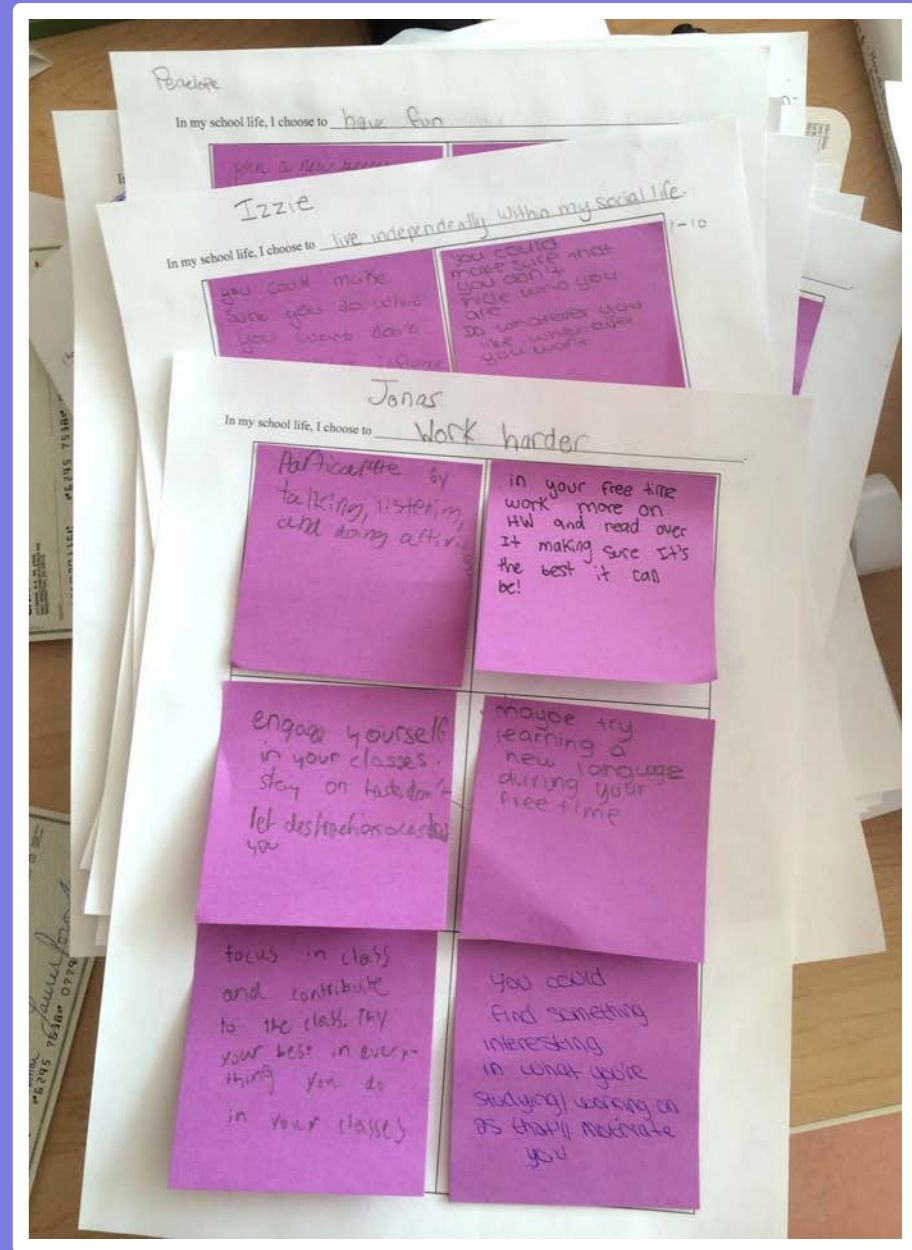
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*How do you enact your values (“do your adverbs”) in school?*

*How would you like to enact your values more fully or effectively in school?*



# Behavior Brainstorm



# Focus Stickers

**Think of a time when a learning experience went really well.**

It could be a class, an activity, or an assignment, or a learning experience outside of school.

**Describe in detail what you were doing during the learning experience.**

Focus on what *you* were doing – not what someone else was doing, or what you weren't doing, or what the experience was like.

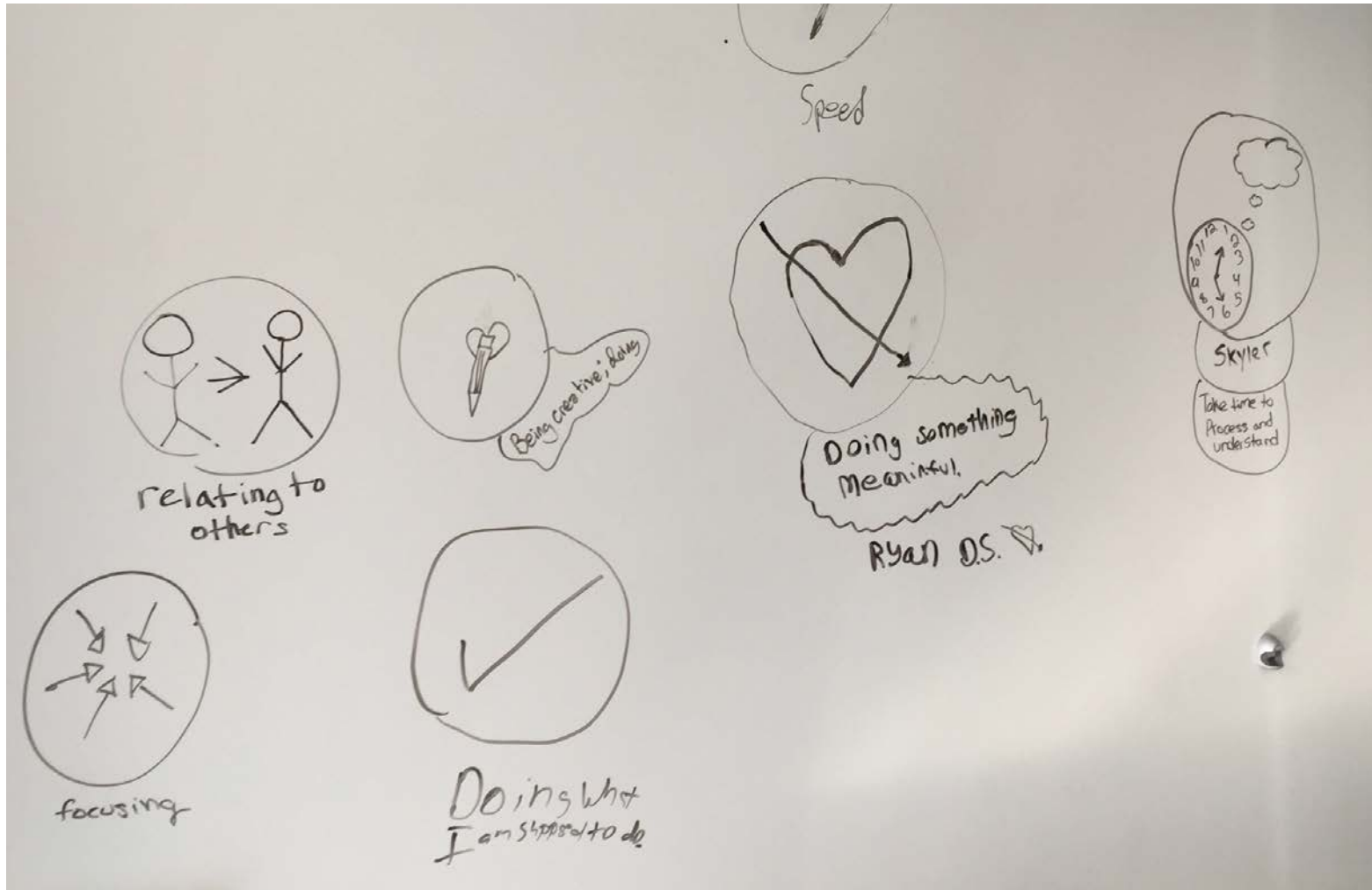
Mental actions, like thinking and wondering, count as doing.

**Find a behavior you could do in most of your classes.**

Underline behaviors you could do in most classes or while working on different kinds of assignments.

Pick one behavior that you think is particularly important.

# Create a simple icon to represent the behavior.



**With your black marker, draw the icon on the dot stickers.**



**Stick them in places where you want reminders to do that behavior.**

Binder

Pencil case

Folder

Instrument case

Book

Planner

Notebook

Locker

Calculator

Calendar

Laptop

Desk at home



# Grading Classes

# Yummy ≠ Healthy

	Yummy	Yucky
Healthy		
Junk		

# Fun ≠ Meaningful

	Fun	Painful
Meaningful		
Pointless		

# Fun ≠ Meaningful

What makes a class fun?

What makes a class meaningful?

*Please choose 3 factors that are most important for a class to be meaningful to you.*

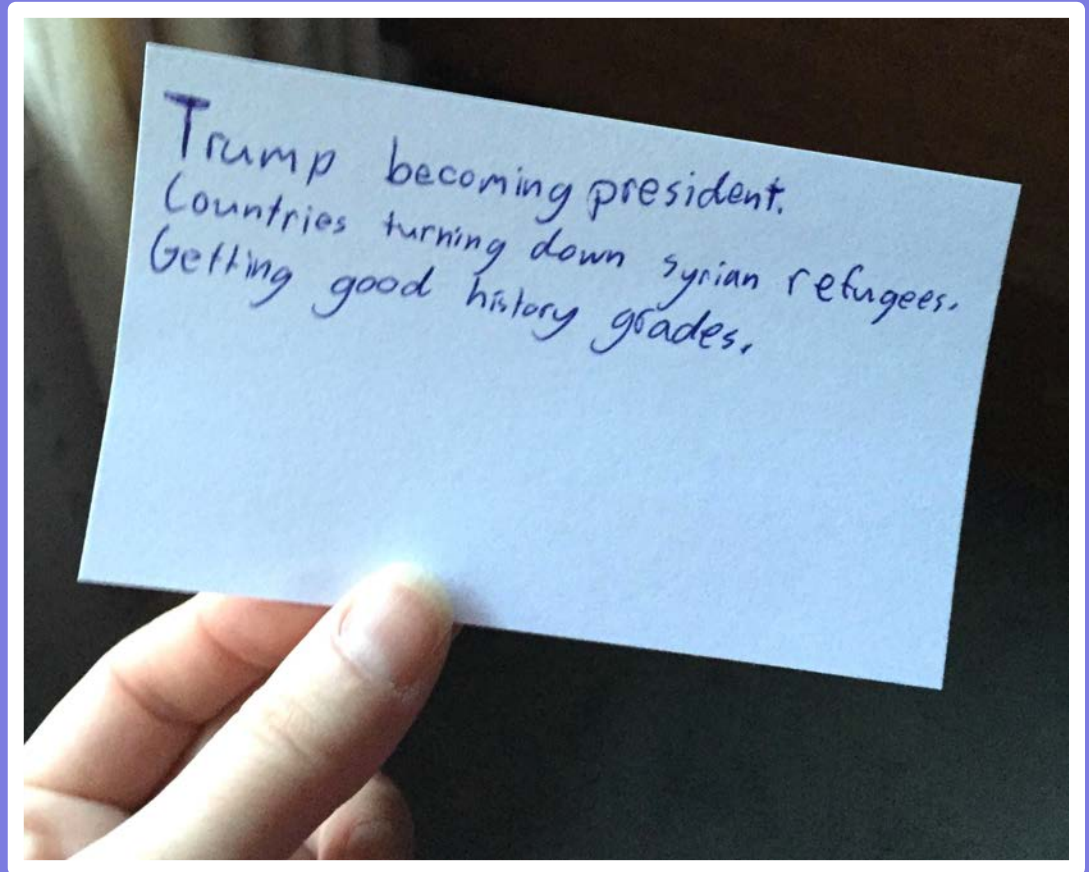
Based on your 3 factors for what “meaningful” is to you, what grade would you give each class you’re currently taking?

What can you do to make your  
classes more meaningful?

In your home report, highlight suggestions you could follow to make your classes more meaningful (according to your own definition).



# Concern Cards



# On Your Plate

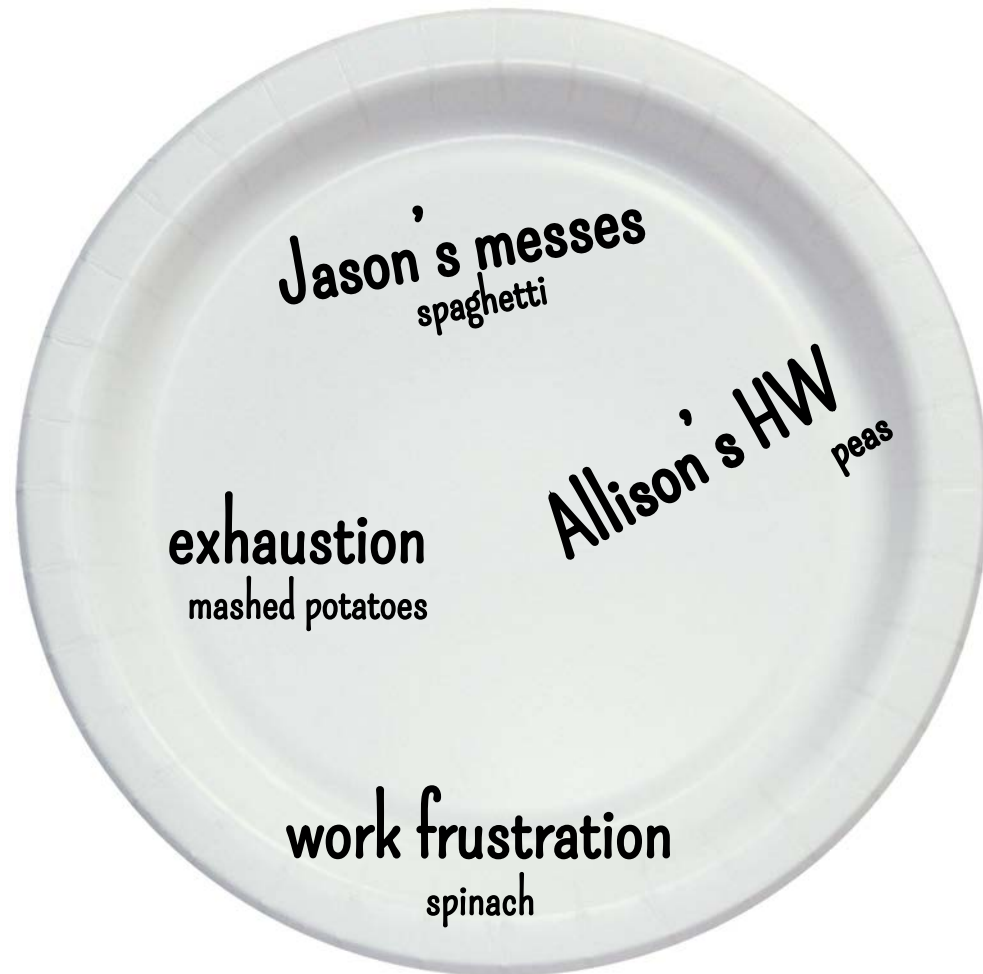
# What's on your plate?



# What's on your plate?



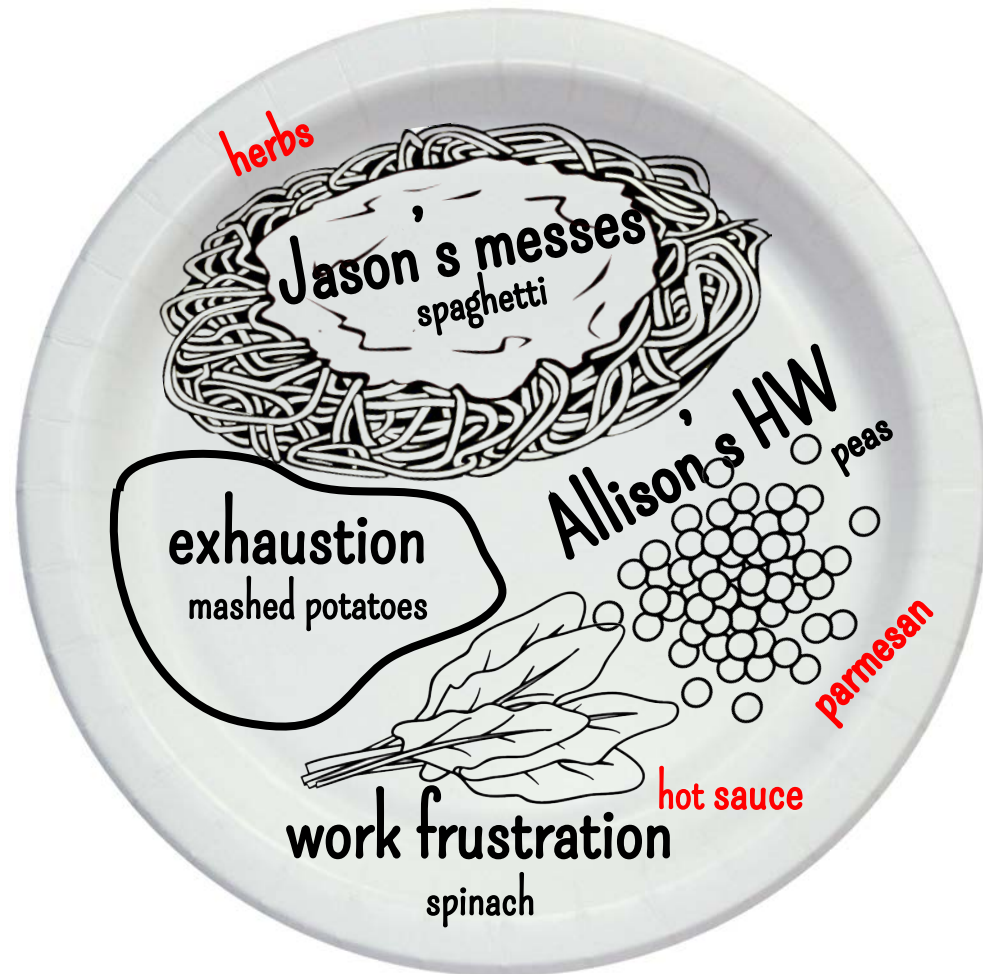
# What's on your plate?



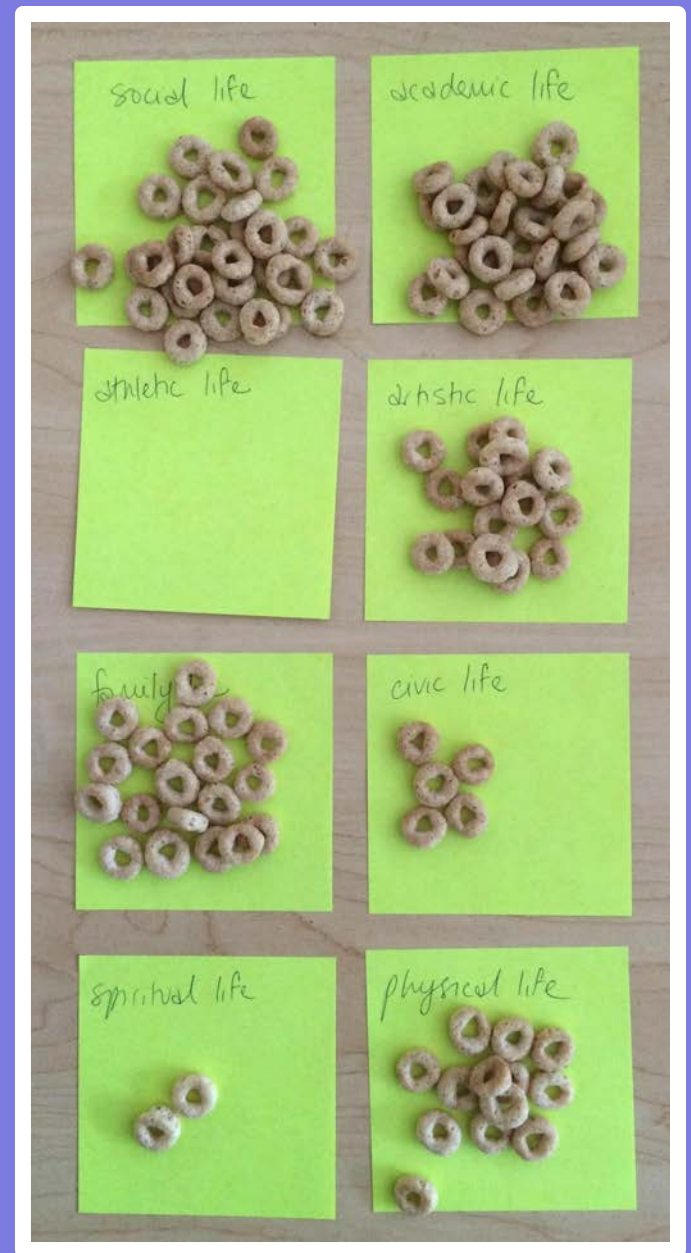
# What's on your plate?



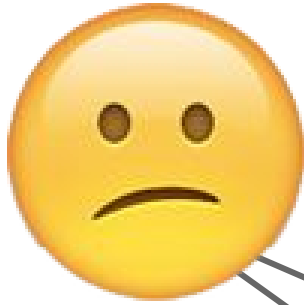
# What's on your plate?



# Hills of Beans







Present Moment  
Awareness

Energy

Willingness  
Acceptance

Meaning  
Values

Defusion  
Openness

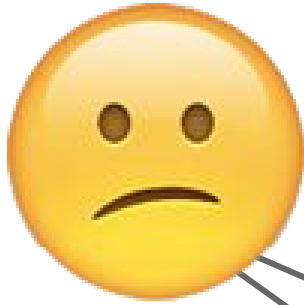
Committed  
Action  
Participation

OUR TERMS DON'T  
QUITE MAP ON TO  
ACT, BUT THEY WORK  
FOR MIDDLE AND HIGH  
SCHOOL STUDENTS AND  
THEIR TEACHERS.

Resilience

Self as Context

Empathy



OUR TERMS DON'T  
QUITE MAP ON TO  
ACT, BUT THEY WORK  
FOR MIDDLE AND HIGH  
SCHOOL STUDENTS AND  
THEIR TEACHERS.



PLUS THEY SPELL  
**EMPOWER!**

**E**nergy

**M**eaning

**P**articipation

**O**penness

**W**illingness

**E**mpathy

**R**esilience

# **Epilogue: A Million Thanks**

*To all the students I've embarrassed, shut down, one-upped, or forced to do something boring and pointless – and there are many – I'm so sorry. I wish I knew then what I know now.*

*To all the students I have right now, I wish I knew now what I will know when I've been teaching for 33 years.*

*Right now, the best I can do is keep becoming the teacher I want to be, so I can EMPOWER you to become the person you want to be.*



# THANK YOU!

*Please don't forget to scan out for CE credit & go to <https://contextualscience.org/quickeval> to do the 3-question evaluation for session 118.*



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Association for Contextual Behavioral Science  
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