

Grade 8 Informational/Expository Writing Prompt – “Moods”

Using evidence from the passages, write a 2-3 paragraph explanation for your school newspaper explaining how a person’s mood can be affected by the emotions of others. Your explanation must be based on ideas, concepts, and information from the “Moods” text set.

Manage your time carefully so you can

- Plan your explanation
- Write your explanation
- Revise and edit your explanation

Be sure to

- Use evidence from both sources
- Do not over rely on one source
- Type your answer in a new Word document

Is a Bad Mood Contagious?

By Gary W. Lewandowski, Jr.

When you see someone coughing, you reflexively know to steer clear of his or her germs. When you observe someone who is cranky, it is less obvious what to do. Studies suggest, however, that others' moods may be as easy to catch as their germs.

Psychologists call this phenomenon emotional contagion. This is a three-step process through which one person's feelings transfer to another person. The first stage involves nonconscious mimicry. Individuals subtly copy one another's nonverbal cues, including posture, facial expressions and movements. In effect, seeing my frown makes you more likely to frown. People may then experience a feedback stage. Because you frowned, you now feel sad. During the final contagion stage, individuals share their experiences until their emotions and behaviors become synchronized. Thus, when you encounter a co-worker on a bad day, you may unknowingly pick up your colleague's nonverbal behaviors and begin to morph into an unhappy state. Mimicry is not all bad, however; a person can also adopt a friend or colleague's good mood, which can help enhance their bond.

Although mimicry often occurs outside of our awareness, sometimes we can observe it. Let us say you see someone across from you on the bus yawn. Often you cannot help but yawn as well. Recent research suggests that this type of mimicry is more common when the person yawning is someone close to you. This might be a family member, good friend or romantic partner. Another study revealed that nonconscious mimicry occurs more often in more empathetic people.

The contagious nature of emotions can become more intense when individuals are in frequent contact with one another. In one study, marriage researchers examined more than 150 couples for three years. They wanted to determine how one spouse's stress influences the other spouse and overall marital quality. They found that wives were not affected significantly. Husbands, however, experienced lower marital satisfaction when their wives reported higher stress. More important, emotional crossover was more noticeable when the couple engaged in negative behaviors. These might include rejecting or criticizing the partner.

These studies emphasize the importance of choosing wisely the company you keep. You want to catch others' good moods, rather than their bad moods.

Facebook Spreads Rainy-Day Blues to Sunny Places

By Monte Morin

Blame your Facebook account if you feel down on a bright, sunny day, according to new research. Too many of your friends may be posting emotionally negative messages.

In a paper published recently, scientists argued that the hugely popular social networking site exerts an emotional “spillover” effect. The research may carry significant consequences for an increasingly interconnected world.

By analyzing more than a billion Facebook status updates, the authors concluded that emotionally positive posts gave rise to more positive posts by friends. On the other hand, negative posts spawned more negative posts.

“It was actually a very large effect. Every message that you post causes your friends to post an additional one to two messages that have the same emotional content,” said lead study author James Fowler. He is a professor of medical genetics and political science at the University of California, San Diego, School of Medicine.

How do Fowler and other researchers know this?

Researchers said they first used weather records to determine which updates were posted in cities experiencing rain. Then they used text analysis software to determine if posts expressed positive or negative emotions. Finally, they compared the rainy-day posts with non-rainy-day posts.

They found that rain increased the number of negative posts by 1.16% and reduced the number of positive posts by 1.19%. But it didn’t end there. The study’s authors claimed that those negative posts influenced Facebook friends in cities even with dry weather. According to researchers, negative posts in general caused 1.29% more negative posts by friends. Positive posts led to an extra 1.75% positive posts.

“What people feel and say in one place may spread to many parts of the globe on the very same day,” the authors wrote.

Although positive posts had a slightly bigger influence than negative posts, these findings raised concerns, researchers said.

The findings suggest that emotions might ripple through social networks to create clusters of happy and unhappy people.

“As a result, we may see greater spikes in global emotion,” they said. These spikes could cause increased instability in everything from political systems to financial markets.

Fowler and study co-author Dr. Nicholas Christakis have written numerous papers on the topic of social contagion. Their work suggests even that obesity, being grossly fat, can be spread through “social ties.” Christakis is a physician and sociologist at Yale University.

Their work has generated numerous newspaper headlines, but it’s also been criticized by outside experts. Charles Mansk, a professor of economics at Northwestern University, said it’s difficult to determine how reliable the study is. Russell Lyons, a professor of mathematics at Indiana University, criticized the authors’ 2007 obesity paper. He called it “deeply flawed.”

Lyons said he hasn’t had the time or information necessary to examine the methods of the current paper, but remained skeptical. “I don’t think I’ve seen any particularly convincing and interesting recent research on social contagion,” he said. “The information presented in this paper is certainly not convincing,” he wrote.

In the Facebook study, the researchers said they examined posts from users in 100 U.S. cities from 2009 to 2012. To ensure anonymity, they did not view any of the names or actually read the posts. A lot of research has been done on the spread of emotions among humans, and its basis in evolution.

This previous research has argued that emotions play a special role in bonding. Humans are naturally inclined toward expressing their emotions rather than concealing them.

“Human laughter, for example, is believed to have evolved from the ‘play face’ expression seen in other primates in relaxed, social situations,” authors wrote. These expressions and positive emotions strengthen social relations by producing pleasurable feelings in others. They also reward the efforts of others and encourage social contact.

Fowler said that scientists and policymakers should consider using social networks to improve mental and physical health.

“We should be doing everything we can to measure the effects of social networks and to learn how to magnify them,” he said. This would create an epidemic of well-being.