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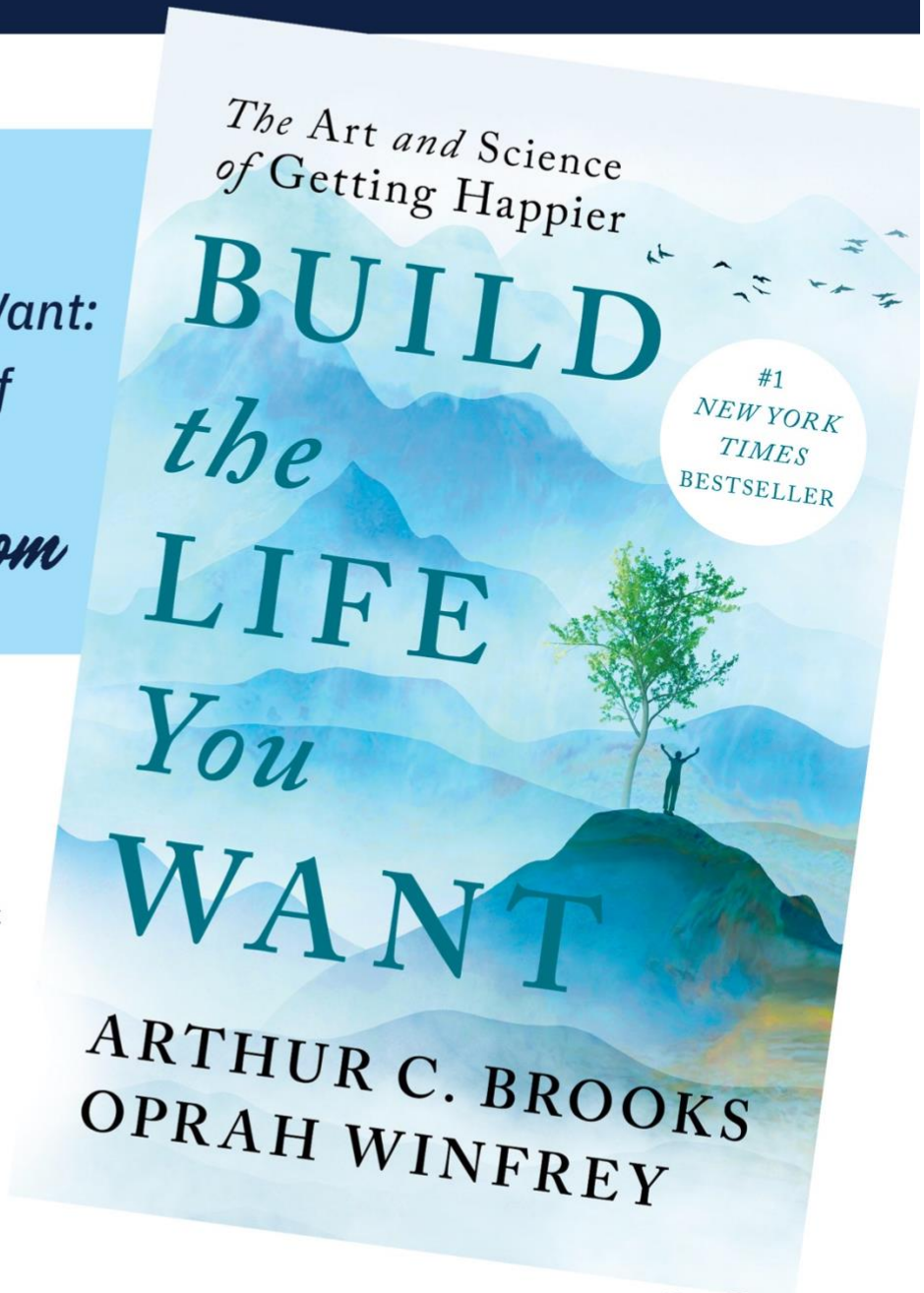
Build the Life You Want: The Art and Science of Getting Happier

Arthur C. Brooks

Oprah Winfrey

THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI
COMMON READING EXPERIENCE
RESOURCE GUIDE

Integrating
Build the Life You Want: The Art & Science of Getting Happier
into the classroom



EDHE
Library
Writing & Rhetoric
Faculty & Staff
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THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI
commonreadingexperience

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Why does UM have a Common Reading Experience program?

The Common Reading Experience is a shared intellectual event for members of the UM community. Through reading and considering a common book, students engage with each other and UM faculty in exploring issues relevant to today's global community. The Common Reading Experience helps students understand the expectations of college-level academic work, the nature of scholarly inquiry, and the values of an academic community. The program also enriches students' campus experiences through co-curricular programs and events related to the book. The Common Reading Text is used in EDHE classes, Writing 100/101 classes, and other classes on campus. For more information about the Common Reading Experience visit http://umreads.olemiss.edu/.

What are the Common Reading Experience student learning outcomes?

By reading, writing, and learning together through the shared venture of the UM Common Reading Experience, students:

- Develop critical thinking, reading, writing, and research skills and abilities.
- Gain an emerging sense of confidence as learners, thinkers, readers, and writers.
- Develop a sense of community among peers, neighbors, and instructors.
- Develop connections among ideas, experiences, disciplines, and academic and personal goals.
- Relate the issues raised by the common book to their lives as new or returning students.

Why was *Build the Life You Want* selected?

Build the Life You Want is an examination of philosophical advice and research-based strategies for navigating life's challenges. Situated within the field of happiness studies, the book considers such areas as happiness, well-being, purpose, faith, and relationships. Authors Arthur C. Brooks and Oprah Winfrey include examples from individuals' lives and careers, including their own, to demonstrate how philosophy and the findings from happiness research can be applied to readers' lives. For students, the book provides the opportunity to reflect on their own goals and happiness and examine the roles that research and philosophy play in helping humans understand themselves and others.

Who are Arthur C. Brooks and Oprah Winfrey?

Arthur C. Brooks is the William Henry Bloomberg Professor of the Practice of Public Leadership at the Harvard Kennedy School as well as Professor of Management Practice at Harvard Business School. Previously, he served as president of the American Enterprise Institute, a think tank based in Washington, D.C. Brooks is the author of 12 books and recipient of several honorary doctorates.

Oprah Winfrey is a renowned American media executive, talk show host, actress, producer, and philanthropist. She is the co-author of five books. Winfrey has received numerous awards and honors, including honorary doctorates from several universities, the Presidential Medal of Freedom, 18 Daytime Emmy Awards, a Tony Award, and a Peabody Award. She was born in Mississippi.

How do I teach non-fiction?

The Common Reading Experience provides students and teachers in all disciplines a chance to interact with a shared text. Critical analysis of texts may feel like foreign territory to some teachers; however, analysis is a skill that is useful in all areas of education and beyond and can be approached in ways with which teachers are comfortable. Writing classes use the Common Reading Text as the basis of a major project but work with the book in other classes does not need to be so in-depth or take up entire class periods. Try to implement short in-class discussions, homework assignments, response papers, or journal writings using the themes and prompts listed in this guide. Or ask students to examine the choices Brooks and Winfrey make as writers and how those choices impact readers. Remember that you can concentrate on a few sections that relate specifically to the themes of your course. This resource guide should provide starting points for discussions, homework, and/or writing assignments that will challenge students.

How do I encourage students to read?

Before assigning reading:

- Preview *Build the Life You Want* with students. Introduce the book during class. Explain how the book will be used in the course and how it will help students meet learning outcomes. Share your own excitement about the book, perhaps describing some favorite passages, events, or people.
- Help students understand the depth of reading required. Display a passage, and model critical reading strategies such as text annotation and marginalia.

As students read:

- Provide focused questions for students to consider while they are reading. Ask them to respond to those questions in writing before the next class.
- Have students identify and submit a discussion topic or question via email or Blackboard after they have read an assignment but before the next class meeting. Use their topics and questions as the basis for class activities.
- Require students to keep a reading response journal in which they comment on or question the reading assignment.
- Ask students to underline/highlight several passages from a reading assignment. In class, ask students to discuss one of their underlined/highlighted passages.

After students have read:

- Use class time and activities to build on, rather than summarize, the reading assignment.
- At the start of class, assign a one-minute paper in which students identify both the most crucial part of the reading assignment and an unanswered question they have about the reading assignment.
- During the first few minutes of class, ask students to write about links between the reading assignment and the topic being discussed in class.
- Distribute one or two questions that build on the reading assignment. Use the think-pair-share protocol. Students first consider the question(s) on their own. Then they discuss the question(s) with a partner. Finally, they share their results with the class.

How do I lead a class discussion?

A good class discussion, like any part of teaching, should be structured yet open to improvisation. Following are some pointers for leading a discussion based on what students have read (or even their attendance at an event).

Preparation before the class meeting:

Though you may have already read the book, be sure to review what the students are reading for your class meeting. Make a list of what you would like your students to learn from this exercise in order of importance.

- For instance, you might prioritize that students understand what they read.
- Then, you might select a couple of scenes or events in the book that seem important or interesting (or even puzzling – just because you are leading class discussion does not mean you need to have all the possible answers).

- Perhaps you have selected several themes in the book as your focus. You might choose sections that relate to personal agency, self-reflection, or resilience.
- You might also ask students to respond to a specific quotation or passage.
- Jot down a few notes so you can access them easily during your class discussion.
- Annotate your own text.

Class time:

- Establish respect. Class discussion is a time for exploration, and the classroom is a safe environment for students to say what they are thinking. Remind students of the first rule of the University creed: "I believe in respect for the dignity of each person." Be sure students are listening carefully to all speakers and taking their ideas seriously.
- Before discussion, ask students to reflect on a directed, yet open, question in a five- to ten-minute writing. Encourage students to keep writing throughout the allotted time even if they run out of things to say. They will surprise themselves with this unstructured writing. This writing is not a quiz with one correct answer. Ask them questions such as, "What do you think is the significance of X?"; "How might concept Y relate to your life?"; "Why was strategy Z persuasive, or not persuasive, to you?" You could also ask them to do a close reading of a particular passage, perhaps even comparing it to another passage.
- Avoid general questions such as "What did you think of the reading for today?" or "What did you find interesting?" These can be dead-end questions that will lead to short discussions.
- To mix things up, you may also have them work together in small groups to find discussion starters or answers to your questions.

Other ideas and approaches:

- Different classes have different personalities. Just make sure the environment in which students speak is a safe one, and continue to encourage discussion in different ways if something is not working.
- Some students will direct their comments just to you. Encourage them to talk with each other.
- If you had them write a response, invite students to share what they wrote.
- If you had them work in groups, invite representatives from each group to share what they found.
- Encourage students to point to specifics in the text. Ask them where they see what they see.
- Invite students to read sections out loud.

- Be open to where the conversation takes you. Sometimes students will pick up on details that you didn't see.
- Try not to let the class discussion go over fifteen to twenty minutes. Students are most productive in that time frame.
- At the end of the discussion, recap the major points made or ask students to do so.
- Course-specific discussion prompts are included in the course-specific sections of this guide.

How do I deal with controversial topics?

A few issues in *Build the Life You Want* may spark controversy in the classroom. Issues that may generate controversy include but are not limited to faith, emotional regulation, privilege, and relationships. The Yale Poorvu Center for Teaching and Learning's Teaching Controversial Topics can help you consider different approaches to discussing these issues.

Remember that the common read discussion should always serve your course outcomes. If a student raises an issue with which you have no expertise or are uncomfortable tackling, you might respond by explaining the topic is more suited for discussion in a different course (such as Psychology, Sociology, or Philosophy). For example, you might say, "[Controversy X] is an important issue, and it's one that you can study in depth in [Course Y]. [Course Y] is taught by an expert in that field. For the purposes of this course, let's keep the focus on [your course outcome Z]." Additional guidelines are below.

If a student raises a controversial issue unexpectedly, you may want to:

1. Acknowledge the student's remark.
2. Acknowledge that other students may hold different views or positions.
3. Assess your willingness to continue the discussion further.
4. Assess other students' willingness to continue the discussion further.

The following guidelines may be helpful for facilitating planned discussions of controversial issues:

1. Articulate a clear purpose for the discussion (for example, how the discussion is related to course objectives).
2. Establish ground rules, such as listening without interrupting the speaker, questioning ideas rather than criticizing individuals, offering at least one piece of evidence to support each point made, and using "I" statements rather than "you" statements.
3. Be an active facilitator by redirecting students who are off topic or participating too actively, ensuring students are not put on the spot as spokespersons for certain groups,

providing opportunities for all students to participate (orally or through writing), and being attuned to students' emotions.

4. Summarize the discussion at the end of class and obtain student feedback.

How do I build instruction around the book's themes?

The book captures many themes: personal empowerment, purpose and meaning, community and connection, and self-reflection. A class focusing on the theme of personal empowerment might look like this:

a. Individually, students identify and write about a self-improvement strategy from the book that they might want to use in their own lives. (five to seven minutes)
b. As a class, students discuss the strategies they have chosen. (ten to fifteen minutes)
c. With partners, students list ways in which they might practically employ their strategies in their own lives. (five to ten minutes)
d. Student pairs report their findings to the entire class. (ten to fifteen minutes)
e. Homework: Students practice the strategy for a week and then write a personal reflection on how well they were able to employ the strategy and whether the strategy was beneficial for them.

What library resources are available?

Visit the UM Libraries Common Reading Research Guide. Explore this library research guide about *Build the Life You Want* to learn more about the author, upcoming events, and related articles, books, and media. Previous UM Common Read texts and guide links are also available.

Where can students find extra copies of the book?

1. Most first-year students received a paperback copy of *Build the Life You Want* during summer orientation. Students who attended the virtual orientation session picked up their orientation materials, including *Build the Life You Want*, when they arrived on campus.

2. UM Libraries has two electronic copies of *Build the Life You Want* that can be read online or downloaded for up to three days on a single device. Go to libraries.olemiss.edu and search for "Build the Life You Want" in the OneSearch box. You will have to log in with your Ole Miss WebID and password to access the e-book.

3. Inside the J.D. Williams Library, students may check out a Reserve copy of *Build the Life You Want* at the main desk on the 1st floor for one day. On Reserve for EDHE 105/305 are two copies of *Build the Life You Want*, two copies of *The A Game*, and one copy of *The Ole Miss Experience* under the instructor name: Melissa Dennis.

4. Finally, a copy of each Common Read title (2011 - present) is available in Archives & Special Collections (but these can only be viewed inside the library).

If anyone needs help with finding books or other library materials for the Common Read, please email Melissa Dennis at mdennis@olemiss.edu.

What events or speakers are being planned for the fall semester?

The Fall Convocation will include Arthur C. Brooks as a guest speaker. Students are highly encouraged to attend Fall Convocation and to bring their book to have signed. In addition, having students attend other thought-provoking events is an excellent way to get students involved with the book outside of the classroom. Please consider encouraging your students to attend events and reflect on the overall message being delivered. For the most up-to-date list, visit the UM Common Reading Experience 2024 Build the Life You Want Library Guide.

What if one of my students has a disability and needs a copy of the book in a different format?

Students with disabilities should visit Student Disability Services in 234 Martindale as soon as possible at the beginning of the semester. SDS provides classroom accommodations to all students on campus who disclose a disability, request accommodations, and meet eligibility requirements. SDS will be able to help your student acquire a copy of the CRE book in an appropriate format. The SDS website, https://sds.olemiss.edu/faculty/, has some helpful resources for instructors.

Chapter 2: FACT Grant Lessons on Critical Thinking, Reading, and Writing

DWR Lecturer Jenny Bucksbarg participated in the 2023 FACT (Faculty Approaches to Critical Thinking) Institute, part of the University of Mississippi's Thinkforward Quality Enhancement Plan. Below she offers insights from her FACT Course Redesign Grant on reading strategies and students' self-identification as readers.

Often we assign readings to students with the assumption that they know the purpose of reading and that they know how to read. Then when they don't read, we often assume that they were just being "lazy." From my experience teaching DS 94: Integrated Reading and Writing, I have found that this is more complicated than we might assume. During Spring 2024, I developed a course redesign of DS 94 for the Critical Thinking QEP. This FACT grant required me to add some of the critical thinking student learning outcomes to the course and assess the success of the redesign. Interestingly, I found that students don't identify as readers unless they read novels for pleasure; they also have a narrow view of what they define as reading and what they consider texts. What students found most helpful throughout the course was an expansion of the concepts of "reading" and "texts" and then also an introduction and practice of a few active reading strategies. Here are a few things that you might also want to consider as you use the Common Read this semester:

- Students don't often understand the power of deliberately choosing the location and mode for reading. It could be beneficial to have them read in a few different places to see if one worked better for them. Also, they will receive a print copy of the book, but for some students an electronic or audio book will be more beneficial. Another key factor is limiting distractions–this was one of the strategies students cited most often as aiding in successful reading. Most students agreed that phones are distracting, but not all found that they required to be alone in a quiet room.
- Another key strategy that most students found beneficial was to read in chunks. By the end of the semester they began to understand their individual attention spans and by taking frequent breaks from reading, they were able to retain focus and not continually re-read because of not actively reading the text. You might aid students in this by deliberately asking them to break up the reading and reflect on their experience or assign them smaller sections or pieces instead of suggesting that they read three chapters by next week.
- Model how you, as a reader, read the text. Walk them through your own process of reading and understanding a text. As Ilona Leki suggests in "Reciprocal Themes in ESL Reading and Writing,"

Rather than only giving individual students individual exercises in chunking, we might show them by reading out loud how we ourselves chunk groups of words together, how we use intonation to get us through the text, how we isolate incongruities or puzzling words for as long as possible before interrupting the flow of our reading, and most importantly how we work to tie the incoming text to patterns of information we already know.

Just as writing is a process, reading is a process. Share your process with students.

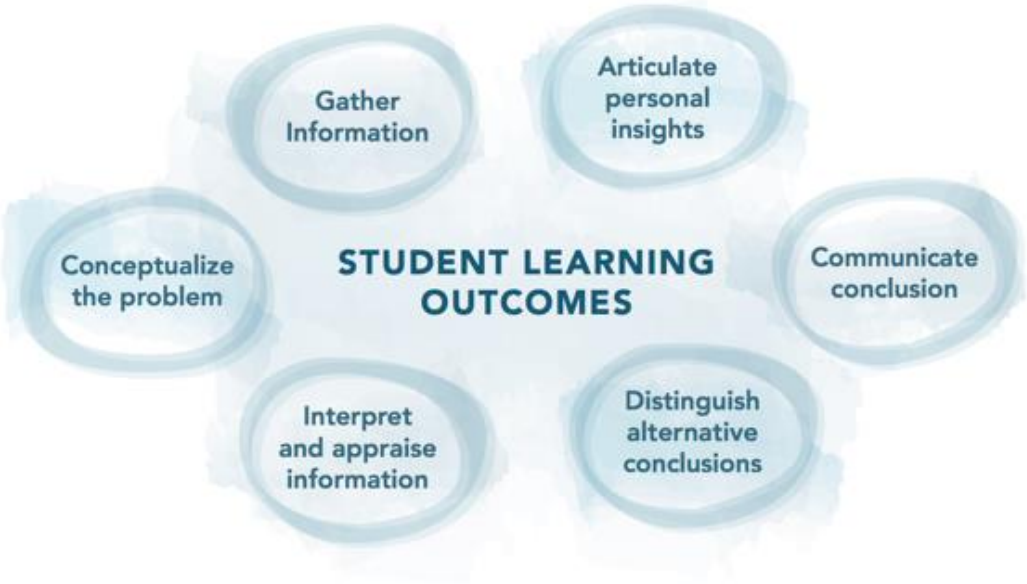
- Reading doesn't have to be done alone. Utilize active reading strategies as in-class activities as well as assigning them as homework. In particular, students identified two favorite reading strategies: annotation and KWL. Students also liked the specific, collaborative method of social annotation. These strategies are equally effective as class activities as well as individual techniques for reading and understanding texts:
    - Social Annotation can be done digitally in a shared Google Doc or by using software like Perusall or Hypothes.is. It can be done also in print by having students share what they annotated and why. For either mode, take advantage of using color, symbols, circling, and underlining. Emphasize that they should engage with the text by adding comments and questions directly above/below the passage or in the margins. It isn't enough to highlight a passage–why are they choosing to highlight it? What are their thoughts? For print annotation, consider asking them to use different color highlighters, pens, or sticky tabs. Many students really enjoyed the "aesthetics" of marking up their text in this way.
    - KWL is a reading strategy that asks students to engage with the text before, during, and after reading. Essentially, you want to create three categories for students to address:

        - K=What do you know?
        - W=What you want to know or What do you wonder about?
        - L=What did you learn?

        Before reading, they address prior knowledge about the rhetorical situation of the text. Then they come up with a few questions that they hope will be answered by reading the text. And finally, after reading, they address what they did learn. As a bonus, I also asked them to reflect on whether their questions were answered and why/why not. Because this is a less intense reading strategy, it works for any genre of text and any medium/format. It is easy enough to write KWL on the board for a large class discussion, but I also made a worksheet that students could fill out digitally, and I printed a few paper copies for small groups and individual practice.

Chapter 3: *Build the Life You Want* Critical Thinking Exercises

The UM QEP, *Thinkforward*, defined critical thinking as the ability to conceptualize problems, gather pertinent information, interpret data, appraise evidence, distinguish diverse points of view, and articulate personal insights in order to present reasonable and effective arguments, responses, or conclusions.



(Diagram from *Thinkforward Quality Enhancement Plan*)

These small group exercises may help students develop critical thinking skills.

1. You can find the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) on pages 14-15. In small groups, complete the schedule and calculate the score. Check which of the four quadrants you each fall into and learn about those roles on pages 16-18. Then, share the results with your group members. Next, do a little research about what your score means you might be best suited for in terms of careers and/or relationships with others. If you fell into the same quadrant as another member of your group, you might start discussing the possibilities with that member; however, talk with the other group members, too, to see where you find overlap and difference. Finally, write a reflective piece in which you relay what you learned about yourself and what impact that might have on decisions about your future.

2. *Build the Life You Want* includes over thirty pages of notes, which are the hundreds of sources the authors used in the book. In small groups, skim pages 209-42 and decide on a source that you would like to examine more (**teachers might set certain criteria here**). This might be based on the title, the publication, the subject matter, or something else. Then, try to find the source through a basic web search or through the University's J.D. Williams Library search tools. If you cannot locate the source you selected, move on to a different one. Once you have found the primary source, read it (or at least part of it if the source is quite long). Go over the part of *Build the Life You Want* where the source was used and discuss how you think it was incorporated. Is the information from the source accurately represented in *Build the Life You Want*? How do you know? Did Brooks and Winfrey miss anything else valuable from the source that could have been used in *Build the Life You Want*? Is the source credible? How do you know? What else did you learn from the source? Lastly, write a reflective piece in which you relay what you learned about the source you chose (this can mean content, why the source was published where it was, and anything else you find relevant) and about research.

3. In the section on friendship, Brooks issues "Challenge 3: Attachment to Opinions." Review this section (135-39). Then form small groups and practice the "opposite signal" strategy. Each member of a group should make a list of five of their strongly held opinions. One member should share one opinion with the rest of the group. Each of the other group members should respond with "you are wrong." Then the opinion holder should respond with "tell me more," and the group should refute the opinion. Each member should share one of their opinions and work through the protocol until every member has shared. Members should then individually reflect on how the exercise challenged or shaped their thinking.

4. Brooks describes and footnotes several research studies to support his argument. He does not, though, include visualized data to convey those studies' findings. *The 2024 World Happiness Report*, however, mixes visualized data and text to document global data on happiness. In small groups, look at Chapters 2, 3, 4, or 5 in that report. Think about the differences in the way Brooks and this report present data. What are the advantages/disadvantages of narrative description vs. visualized data in reporting studies' findings? Then consider what you learn about global happiness from this report? How does this information contextualize, enrich, challenge, or change your understanding of the message from *Build the Life You Want*? Report what your group discovers to the whole class.

Chapter 4: CRE Community of Voices Essay

An Essay Challenge Connecting Diverse Ideas, Experiences, Disciplines, and People

The Creed characterizes the University of Mississippi as "a community of learning dedicated to nurturing excellence in intellectual inquiry and personal character in an open and diverse environment." As part of that mission, the UM Common Reading Experience helps students develop a sense of community among diverse peers, neighbors, and instructors, while making connections across varied ideas, experiences, and disciplines. The CRE Diverse Voices Essay Challenge provides an opportunity for students to further engage with that mission by examining issues related to the common book.

While the Common Read is a text provided to incoming freshmen, we encourage participation from all UM undergraduate students. Each year, the prompt is inspired by the text. However, your essay should not be about the text. Therefore, even students who have not read the text are able to participate.

Essay rules:

- The annual challenge is open to all UM undergraduate students.
- One winner and two finalists will be chosen by a panel of judges.
- The winner will receive a $400 scholarship, awarded through the student's bursar account.
- Entries must be submitted through the online portal.
- The deadline to submit is December 31, 2024, with the winners and finalists announced in March 2025.
- Note that there isn't a length requirement. As the writer, you would decide how long the essay needs to be to effectively answer the prompt.
- For more information and to submit the essay, please visit https://rhetoric.olemiss.edu/awards/cre-community-of-voice-essay/.

Fall 2024 Prompt

In *Build the Life You Want: The Art and Science of Getting Happier*, Arthur C. Brooks and Oprah Winfrey offer detailed advice concerning how individuals may improve personal happiness. This advice ranges from managing emotions and relationships to careers and faith.

They conclude the book by arguing that “teaching happiness is also the best strategy for getting happier as time goes on” (201).

The topic of happiness is an important one in the UM community. The function of the University is built on the well-being of every member of the University, including the students who attend. However, college students aren’t immune to the “happiness slump” (xxiv) experienced in modern society. Loneliness, anxiety, and sadness are prevalent among college students who face fears of usefulness and confidence as they begin to discover the place they want to occupy in the world. Could “teaching” happiness help?

For this year’s Community of Voices essay contest, we are interested in learning how you “teach” happiness and what that means to you. What issues do you and your peers face concerning mental health and happiness, and how do you work to address these issues? What does it mean to “teach” happiness, and how do you do that work in your own life? As a student at UM, what opportunities do you have to “teach” happiness? Here you may consider both the value of self-help, where you learn ways to improve your well-being, and the value of acts of service or moral deeds, where you focus on the happiness of others. Consider these questions and build an experience-driven argument that makes a case for how students of UM may work to “teach” happiness, both to themselves and to others.

Chapter 5: Integrating *Build the Life You Want* into EDHE 105/305

The Common Reading Text is used each year in EDHE 105/305 courses primarily as a framework for class discussions, projects, and writing assignments that explore social themes and/or issues from the book. EDHE 105/305 instructors use the book (with a focus on those themes and issues) to teach students how to explore their personal reactions, to understand and appreciate both the things that make them different from their peers and the things they have in common, and to effectively and respectfully voice their own opinions and viewpoints.

Class Discussion/Writing Prompts

1. Have your students define happiness. Discuss. (6-11)

2. Talk about a time you thought your happiness depended on another person. How were you able to resolve this feeling? (3)

3. The author states that happiness isn't a destination, it's a direction. What does this mean to you? (5)

4. Oprah says, "You feel the feel, then you take the wheel." Do you find the fact that you get to choose how you feel more empowering or more overwhelming? Why? (27-30)

5. You have two selves, me-self (object) and I-self (subject). Happiness goes up and down depending on your perception of yourself. People's perception of you can affect your happiness. Discuss how the prevalent use of social media can impact your sense of self. (76-81)

6. Envy activates the pain center in the brain. Discuss the ideas of malicious envy and benign envy. (86-90) For example, social media is fraught with "influencers." How can they stimulate either (or both) form(s) of envy?

7. Support for building happiness in your life comes from four pillars: family, friendship, work, and faith. Discuss how any or all these systems have supported your journey to college. (93-96)

8. Discuss real friends versus deal friends using the idea that, according to Brooks, "the highest compliment you can pay [a friend] is you are useless to me." (130-35)

9. "Real friendship requires real contact." (150) Text messages and social media lose the dimensionality of talking in person. Have you ever been misunderstood over text/social media in a way that would not have happened if in person? Discuss. (145-49)

10. The extrinsic rewards of a job help you pay your bills, but according to Brooks, you need intrinsic rewards to make you happier. (156-57) Think about the pathway you've begun to your career of choice. At this point, do you plan to be linear, steady-state, transitory, or spiral. Why? (160-62)

GROUP/INDIVIDUAL PROJECT ASSIGNMENTS

1. **Group:** When You Can't Change the World, Change How You Experience It Instead

   Have several groups look at the following scenarios and talk about what the reaction might be in the moment versus what it might be if you took time to think about the ramifications of how you react. Metacognition, "thinking about thinking," may lead students in a different direction of how one might react to these everyday scenarios. (39-42) (You may also write your own scenarios; these are only suggestions.)

   - It's Tuesday night and you are in bed sleeping. You have an exam at 8:00 am. Your roommate comes back to the room after midnight. They turn on the light and slam the door. They are chatting loudly on the phone and generally making a lot of noise, thus waking you up. How do you react in the moment? How might you react if you paused to think about it?

   - You are headed to your favorite restaurant on a first date with your crush. After being seated, the server comes by to take your drink order and then your food order shortly after that. As the night goes on, the server continues to openly flirt with your date and your date flirts back. How do you react in the moment? How might you react if you paused to think about it?

2. **Individual/Discussion:** PANAS (Positive and Negative Affect Schedule) measures the intensity of positive and negative affect. (14-18) Use the questions and chart in the book (14-15) to give your students the scaled measurement to see if they are a Cheerleader, Mad Scientist, Judge, or Poet. Discuss results.

3. **Individual Recall/Reflect Assignment:** Interrupt the doom loop by recalling happier memories. Researchers have shown that thinking of happy memories can improve your mood, and Brooks suggests journaling these memories. Get started on your journal by writing out three of your happiest memories and how they make you feel. (46-49) Have students complete this reflection early in the semester. Later in the semester, around midterms when it is more stressful, have them review and discuss.

4. **Individual Reflect Assignment/Journal:** Begin a gratitude journal to work on for five weeks of the semester. According to Brooks, even though life is likely better for you now than it was for you as a child, we will still find ways to complain. He calls this negativity bias (53). Use the exercise on page 57 to outline the assignment.

5. **Group Activity:** In the "Finding Your Amazing Grace" chapter of the book, we learn that transcendental beliefs help us in our efforts to become happier (176). You may or may not already have a faith of your own, but either way, walking in nature and connecting with the outdoors is a great way to have a transcendental experience (187). Go for a walk in Bailey's Woods and spend time reflecting on nature. Allow yourself to disconnect from other people and your devices, and instead, spend some time being mindful of the world around you.

Chapter 6: Integrating *Build the Life You Want* into WRIT 100/101

The first-semester, first-year writing courses—WRIT 100 and WRIT 101—use the Common Reading Text as the basis for a major writing project. This project emphasizes the critical reading, critical thinking, analysis, research, and synthesis skills that are vital to college writing. In this assignment, students are given a prompt pertaining to the Common Reading Text and asked to compose an essay that integrates the Common Reading Text with the student's own ideas and perhaps outside sources. The prompts are intentionally complex to introduce students to the expectations of college thinking and writing. First-year writing courses use the Common Reading Text as a basis for student reading and writing rather than as a literary study.

Discussion Starters

1. The title of this year's Common Reading Text is *Build the Life You Want*; however, books offering life advice or self-help often begin with *How To*, such as *How to Build the Life You Want*. Though it may seem like a small two-word difference, there were undoubtedly conversations about the title before the book was published. Why do you think the book is titled what it is and the *How To* was not included? How might the wording of a title matter to certain audiences?

2. In the "Author's Notes" sections, Winfrey explains she wanted to write with Brooks because his ideas resonated with her own thinking about "living a life with purpose and meaning" (*xi*). Brooks, on the other hand, describes how he started to study happiness because he was "gloomy and anxious" (*xiv*). What makes you want to learn and/or write about something? Are you more drawn to issues that are unfamiliar or familiar? Ideas that resonate, or those that seem foreign?

3. On page 42, Brooks exhorts readers to write down their experiences and feelings each day and how they responded to those feelings. Brooks goes on to claim that this practice will make readers feel more in control and more productive. This practice is reflection. How might such reflective practices help you in school? Why? How about beyond school? Why?

4.Throughout the book, Brooks and Winfrey share personal stories and anecdotes from their own lives. How effective is this strategy in persuading readers of their message? In what ways might the life experiences of Brooks and Winfrey resonate with the audience? In what ways might those experiences conflict with the audience's experiences?

5. Winfrey contributes fewer than 20 pages to the book. What contribution do these pages make to the book's overall message? What contribution might these pages make to the marketing of the book?

6. Writing in *The New Yorker*, critic Anthony Lane characterizes the book as "First World fretting, one might say, disguised as universal wisdom." What evidence would you give to support Lane's criticism? How might you argue against it?

7. How would you characterize Brooks' tone and voice? How would you characterize Winfrey's tone and voice? In what ways do the voices of these authors complement or differ from each other? In what ways might these voices affect the reader?

8. The authors employ categories (PANAS; the three macronutrients of happiness; the four pillars of happiness; four different career paths, etc.) quite often throughout the book. Why? How effective do you find this writing strategy?

9. Brooks draws a distinction between empathy and compassion (66-70) although these two words are often cited as synonyms. What distinction does Brooks make? How important is that distinction? What's the difference between the "right" word and the "almost right" word in writing?

10. One of Brooks' and Winfrey's subtitles is "Writing about Faith Is Tricky" (178). Do you agree? What makes a topic "tricky" to write about?

11. One common abbreviated definition of rhetoric is the art of persuasion. If we accept this definition, how is the book *Build the Life You Want* problematic rhetorically? How is it constructive rhetorically?

Reflection Prompts

1. In Chapter Eight, Brooks suggests that people read more if they want to start a transcendental journey (186-7). This advice works in many situations, and college should be a time of wide and varied reading. Reflect on your reading habits. Are your reading habits appropriate for the college level? Why, or why not? If your reading habits aren't where you think they should be, what can help you read more? Why?

2. In Chapter Seven, Brooks writes about "earned success" to describe feelings of achievement and success at a job even if the work doesn't lead to higher pay or promotions. In a writing class, earned success might be defined as feeling better about your writing even if your grades don't

necessarily show it. Reflect on ways you might experience feelings of earned success in this class and why, independent of grades.

3. Brooks argues that attachment to views can be destructive (136). What views about writing help you as a college student writer? What views about writing might you be attached to that limit you as a writer and prevent you from changing? Reflect on these questions and write about what views you think you should keep and what views you might change to help you grow as a writer.

4. Brooks makes the claim that compassion is a better and healthier emotion than empathy. Read or reread pages 66-70, and then reflect on whether you think you are more compassionate or empathetic. Why? Does reading this section make you reconsider your emotional tendencies? Why, or why not? What does this tell you about who you are?

5. On pages 136-9, Brooks writes about humility. Read or reread those pages, where Brooks' focus is on becoming a better and happier person. For our purposes, though, reflect on how humility might make you a better student. Has humility played a role in your school life? If so, how? If not, why? Are there parts of this section of the book that you can relate to your work as a college student? If so, what?

6. According to research, millennials, the group just ahead in age of most current college students, see educational attainment as "the most important dating criterion … exceeding earning potential, physical attributes, and political and religious affiliations" (109). Reflect on why you think this is. Do you think the same is true for your generation? Why, or why not? What role does education play in who you would date or befriend? Why?

7. One section of Chapter 4 explores the I-self and me-self. Read or reread that section on pages 76-80, and then think about how you might focus more on your I-self over your me-self. The book is considering self-improvement and happiness more broadly, but try to reflect more specifically on your role as a student. What are some ways you might improve or feel more comfortable as a college student by focusing on your I-self more than your me-self? Why is this meaningful?

8. Review with students "Your Spiritual Brain" (180-89). Then put Brooks' mindfulness advice into practice with this "Walk with Writing" activity from *Dynamic Activities for First-Year Composition*.

- Select a class period when students will be brainstorming ideas for their project. Begin class by explaining that writing and thinking can be improved by taking a walk.

- Ask students to freewrite in response to a prompt, such as, “What does this book make you think about,” or “Where have you left off in planning ideas for the project?”
- Invite students to take a mindful, silent walk outside the classroom to focus on their thoughts.
- Once students have returned, ask them to jot down ideas that occurred to them while they were walking.
- Ask students to pair up, share their answers, and ask each other, “If you were reading the project your partner has described what more would you want to know?”

Essay Prompts

1. Late in the book Oprah Winfrey writes that “success in life isn’t as much about having the right answers as it is about asking the good questions” (196). Some of the most impactful learning in college comes from exploring, asking questions, and even failing. Pick one chapter from the second half of the book: the choices are family, friendship, work, or faith/spirituality. Then ask yourself a question that you have about your chosen focus. For example, you might ask how you could make your friendships more meaningful or why you turn to faith in difficult times. Think about a question that you have struggled with or a question about something you feel you have failed at. Next, read or re-read the chapter looking for help answering your question. Finally, write a thesis-driven argument for how the chapter helped and/or failed to help you consider the question. Keep in mind this does not need to mean you have fully answered the question. Be sure to include citations and show engagement with your chosen chapter.

2. Watch the following short video about Brooks’ relationship with the Dalai Lama Tenzin Gyatso: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZzAUgbfdecY. In the video, the Dalai Lama talks about all people being the same at birth and death and that the differences between those points are secondary. Why do you think people focus so much on difference? Does this lead to happiness? Using the video and *Build the Life You Want* as sources, compose a thesis-driven argument exploring how focusing on difference impacts happiness.

3. In Chapter Two, Brooks avers that “humans make progress and prosper when they learn new things” (37). College should be a time for a lot of learning and progressing. Think about what you learned from reading *Build the Life You Want* and how it can help you prosper and make you happier. Try to focus on one main takeaway that you think can improve your happiness, and then construct a thesis-driven essay in which you argue how this is so. For instance, you might explore whether you are happier or less happy when you text a lot (147) and what this means for you as a learner. Whatever the case, try to connect learning and progress to happiness, and be sure to cite from the text.

4. Read the following article about *Build the Life You Want* from CNBC: https://www.cnbc.com/2024/04/20/arthur-c-brooks-the-3-macronutrients-of-happiness.html. Then, revisit the book, in particular pages 9-11, where Brooks writes about the three macronutrients of happiness. In the article, Brooks makes the claim that purpose is the most important of the three. Consider his claim and the questions Brooks poses under the sub-parts to meaning near the end of the article. Then, write a thesis-driven essay in which you argue whether you agree with Brooks. Be sure to cite from any parts of the book, not just pages 9-11.

5. Replication and review are key components in building confidence in research results. Scientists review and compare methodology and results of separate studies by conducting systematic research reviews. Read Alice Park's *Time* article, "The Data Don't Really Support the Most Popular Happiness Strategies" and "A systematic review of the strength of evidence for the most commonly recommended happiness strategies in mainstream media," published in *Nature Human Behavior* (July 2023). Then reread "Happy Thanksgiving" (53-58) and "Your Spiritual Brain" (180-93). Considering the systematic review's findings, how convincing do you find Brooks' argument in these sections? Why? Construct a thesis-driven essay in which you analyze and evaluate Brooks' argument, taking into consideration the studies he cites as well as other evidence he offers.

6. Experiment on yourself. Choose one or two of the practices prescribed in the book for a predetermined period, perhaps two weeks. Keep a field notebook of each practice session. At the end of the two weeks, write a thesis-driven essay detailing your experiment and crafting an argument about what you learned. Include your field notebook as an appendix or multimodal supplement. Be sure to contextualize your experiment within *Build the Life You Want*, citing examples and evidence from that text and from your experience.

7. Read Jessica Lamb-Shapiro's essay, "A Short History of Self-Help, The World's Best-Selling Genre." Then consider *Build the Life You Want* in light of this passage from the essay:

> Self-help can provide a sense of community for those who are lonely, but it can also isolate them further. Self-help provides a language with which to discuss private and difficult problems, but sometimes that language slips into a meaningless discourse. It's a world full of charlatans and good people, one where it's not always easy to separate the dross from the gold.

Where does *Build the Life You Want* fall? Community for the lonely, or isolator? Discussion facilitator, or meaningless discourse? Dross, or gold? Somewhere in between? Craft a thesis-driven argument supporting your position. Be sure to cite specific evidence from the book to buttress your claims.

8. In the epilogue to her book, *Self-Help Books: Why Americans Keep Reading Them*, folklorist Sandra Dolby argues:

> Accessible wisdom is essential in America's traditional ideal of an educated citizenry, and the self-help books that just keep filling the marketplace are evidence that most Americans are not dour and down in the mouth but instead hopeful and determined to improve themselves and meet life head on (159).

Review Dolby's epilogue in light of your reading of *Build the Life You Want*. Then use Brooks' and Winfrey's book as evidence to craft a thesis-driven argument agreeing or disagreeing with Dolby's claim. In what ways does *Build the Life You Want* serve as accessible wisdom? In what ways is it proof that Americans are hopeful and determined? In what ways does the book fail to achieve these goals? Be sure to cite specific evidence from the book to support your argument.

9. In a book with the subtitle *The Art and Science of Getting Happier*, the first chapter is called "Happiness is Not the Goal, and Unhappiness Is Not the Enemy." What do the authors mean by this? What do you think the goal is? Is there an enemy, and, if so, what is it? Compose a thesis-driven essay in which you analyze the purpose of the book and argue what Brooks and Winfrey mean when they say "Happiness Is Not the Goal." Be sure to cite from any parts of the book you find helpful to support your claim, including but not limited to the first chapter.

Appendix

Sample Rubrics

Sample Group Presentation Rubric

1. Was the content of the presentation well organized and presented with compelling evidence?

1 2 3 4 5

Comments:_____

2. Did the visual component enhance the presentation?

1 2 3 4 5

Comments:_____

3. Was the verbal presentation clear and engaging?

1 2 3 4 5

Comments:_____

4. Did the group engage the class in a discussion?

1 2 3 4 5

Comments:_____

5. Did the group follow the time limits?

1 2 3 4 5

Comments:_____

Sample Group Presentation Peer Evaluation

Your name: _____

1) Team member name: _____

This team member contributed fairly to the creation of the outline. Yes No

If no, please explain:

_____

This team member contributed fairly to the creation of the presentation. Yes No

If no, please explain:

_____

2) Team member name: _____

This team member contributed fairly to the creation of the outline. Yes No

If no, please explain:

_____

This team member contributed fairly to the creation of the presentation. Yes No

If no, please explain:

_____

3) Team member name: _____

This team member contributed fairly to the creation of the outline. Yes No

If no, please explain:

_____

This team member contributed fairly to the creation of the presentation. Yes No

If no, please explain:

_____

4) Team member name: _____

This team member contributed fairly to the creation of the outline. Yes No

If no, please explain:

_____

This team member contributed fairly to the creation of the presentation. Yes No

If no, please explain:

_____

Other comments or concerns about your group and how you worked together? (use back)

ASSESSMENT RUBRIC FOR RESPONSE PAPERS

STUDENT'S NAME: _____

ASSIGNMENT TITLE: _____

SCORE: _____

CONVENTIONS/MECHANICS		
Ineffective	Partially-effective	Effective
Multiple errors in writing hamper communication, and text does not demonstrate standard English grammar, punctuation, and/or usage, and/or does not meet the requirements for length and format.	Minimal errors in standard English, grammar, punctuation, and/or usage are present in some of the writing, and/or the text does not meet requirements for assignment length and/or format.	The writing meets guidelines for standard English grammar, punctuation, and usage, with very few minor errors present. Meets requirements for assignment length and format.
D / F	C	B

INFORMATION PRESENTED			
Ineffective	Partially-effective	Effective	Exceptional
Does not introduce or integrate information relevant to the topic/event or includes inappropriate use of sources. In the case of an event paper, it is unclear that the event was attended.	Demonstrates only minimal or ineffective use of integrating information relevant to the topic/event. Writing only barely addresses details of event or class materials.	Introduces and integrates information relevant to the topic/event. Writing addresses details of event or class materials and places information within a larger context.	Demonstrates exceptionally strong, integrated information that enhances credibility of writing. Writing includes skillfully represented details about event or class materials.
D / F	C	B	A

REFLECTION/RESPONSE			
Ineffective	Partially-effective	Effective	Exceptional
Fails to explore new ideas and/or works without making any connection between event or class materials and a personal context.	Begins exploration of new ideas but could push further. Experience of event or class materials is put in a personal context but lacks development of ideas.	Explores ideas unfamiliar to the reader, and questions different thinking. Puts experience of event or class materials in a personal context, is well-developed, and includes self-evaluation.	Exhibits a significant investigation of new ideas by way of exploring an event or class materials. Shows signs of personal growth and/or considerable self-evaluation.
D / F	C	B	A

Write additional comments on the back of the rubric.