

# Positive Emotions from Presenting "This I Believe" Essays

Nelson Adams  
Winston Salem State University  
January 9, 2020

**Brief Abstract:** Writing and presenting a “This I Believe” essay was a meaningful activity resulting in positive emotion among presenters, peers, and faculty with lasting classroom benefits

## Objectives:

- Identify the possible benefits and practicality of using “This I Believe” essay presentations for their own teaching plans.
- Appreciate how applicable the themes of these essays are for particular psychology courses, and also for more general application across the humanities and social sciences.
- Understand the possible opportunities for further empirical research associated with this teaching and learning application.

# This I Believe Essays: Begun By Edward R. Murrow on CBS Radio in early 1950's

“This I Believe. By that name, we bring you radio broadcasts presenting the personal philosophies of thoughtful men and women in all walks of life.,,a banker or a butcher, a painter or a social worker, with nothing more in common than integrity—a real honesty—will speak about the rules they live by, the things they have found to be the basic values in their lives.”

“We hardly need to be reminded that we are living in an age of confusion. (Many) have traded in our beliefs for bitterness & cynicism, or for a heavy package of despair... Opinions can be picked up cheap in the marketplace, while ...courage and fortitude and faith are in alarmingly short supply.” (1951; Sound relevant today?)

Abstracted from Murrow's initial introduction to his program.

Along with “every day persons” who submitted and read their essays, many well-known persons of the early 1950s were invited to contribute, including Hellen Keller, Albert Einstein, Ralph Bunche, Jackie Robinson, Pearl Buck, Eleanor Roosevelt, Martha Graham, and Mohandas Gandhi

Program reinitiated in 2005 on National Public Radio—see slides, and see last page here for website

## Context for Using TIB Essays: Senior Seminar in Psychology

Course on developing professional skills and a capstone review of major (n= ~20)

Some curricular theme with readings: Use of “Big Ideas” in psychology and more particularly some introduction to positive psychology is my approach to this course.

**Positive Psychology:** Study the qualities and characteristics of flourishing people. Complement our “problem-focused” approach or “deficit model” where applications in psychology are used to help those in need (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) The entire issue of January 2000 *American Psychologist* was devoted to this formal “launching” of this movement in psychology.

Three pillars of Positive Psychology: To scientifically study

- Positive emotions and related mood states (joy, “flow”, happiness, awe, elevation, etc.)
- Virtues & Character Strengths
- Positive Institutions

### The Assignment

Students write their own This I Believe essay & Present it in Class

Preparation:

- Exposure to 3-4 essays listened to from website in class for discussion
- Identify 8 character strengths of interest (from Positive Psychology—see list next)
- Find links to the themes (next slide) of This I Believe essays on the website
- Pick 2 essays that embody each of 8 strengths selected. Minimally, 16 essays will have been reviewed and written about (1 paragraph)
- Discussion in class of these stories.

At end of semester students write a 4-page reflection paper on the essay theme using psychological literature.

## **Virtues and Character Strengths of Positive Psychology <sup>1</sup>**

### **Virtue I: Wisdom/ Knowledge**

Love of learning

Curiosity

Open Mindedness/Critical Thinking

Creativity

Perspective

### **Virtue II: Courage**

Bravery

Perseverance or Persistence

Vitality

Integrity

### **Virtue III: Humanity**

Love/Intimacy

Social Intelligence

Kindness

### **Virtue IV: Justice**

Citizenship

Fairness

Leadership

### **Virtue V: Temperance**

Humility

Prudence

Forgiveness and Mercy

Self-Regulation

### **Virtue VI: Transcendence**

Spirituality

Humor

Hope

Gratitude

Appreciation of beauty and excellence

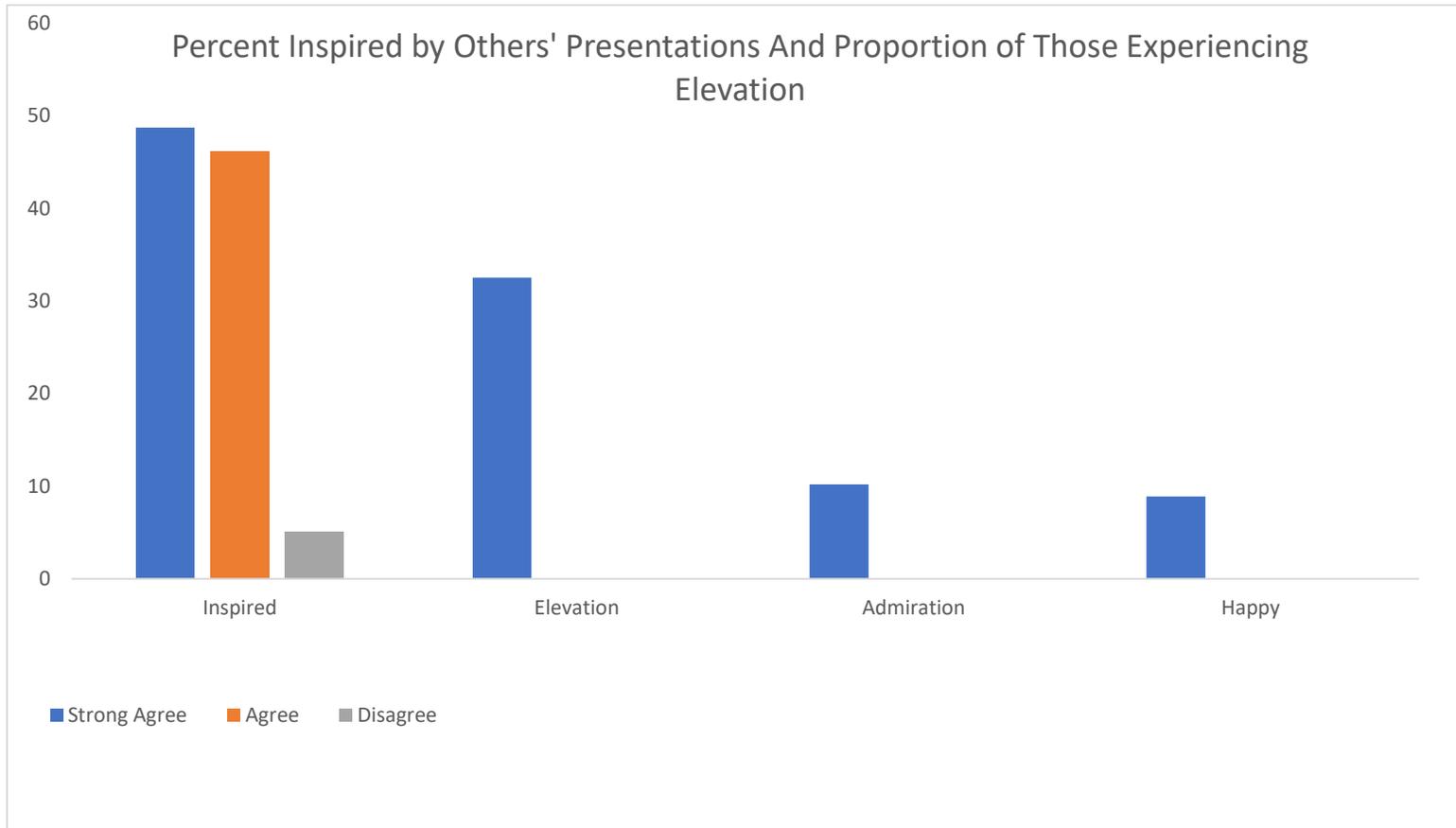
<sup>(1)</sup>Based on Peterson & Seligman, 2004)

## Browse Essays By Theme

[addiction](#) (1108)  
[atheism](#) (272)  
[carpe diem](#) (3558)  
[children](#) (2552)  
[community](#) (2228)  
[death](#) (3588)  
[discrimination](#) (891)  
[environment](#) (1080)  
[family](#) (13240)  
[freedom](#) (1100)  
[goodness & kindness](#) (3496)  
[Holocaust](#) (68)  
[humility](#) (544)  
[immigrant](#) (850)  
[legacy](#) (1709)  
[nature](#) (1771)  
[pets & animals](#) (1459)  
[popular culture](#) (2449)  
[race](#) (728)  
[science](#) (874)  
[setbacks](#) (5325)  
[tolerance](#) (1572)

[afterlife](#) (526)  
[birth](#) (448)  
[change](#) (3857)  
[Christianity](#) (1421)  
[courage](#) (2535)  
[democracy](#) (333)  
[education & knowledge](#) (4558)  
[equality](#) (1706)  
[fear](#) (1075)  
[golden rule](#) (1170)  
[govern & constitution](#) (570)  
[hope](#) (3660)  
[humor & laughter](#) (1553)  
[injustice](#) (506)  
[love](#) (6461)  
[parenthood](#) (1940)  
[place](#) (1015)  
[prejudice](#) (753)  
[respect](#) (2065)  
[self-determination](#) (10797)  
[social justice](#) (890)  
[values & spirituality](#) (6085)

[America & patriotism](#) (1674)  
[brotherhood & friendship](#) (4466)  
[charity & service](#) (1723)  
[citizenship](#) (512)  
[creativity](#) (4660)  
[disability](#) (709)  
[empathy & compassion](#) 2750  
[faith & religion](#) (5204)  
[forgiveness](#) (1436)  
[good & evil](#) (1959)  
[gratitude](#) (2963)  
[humanism](#) (943)  
[illness](#) (2215)  
[integrity](#) (1849)  
[morality](#) (705)      [music](#) (1379)  
[peace](#) (820)  
[pleasure](#) (2454)  
[purpose](#) (2975)      [question](#) (2338)  
[responsibility](#) (2345)  
[self-knowledge](#) (15710)  
[sports](#) (3863)  
[war](#) (840)      [work](#) (4888)



Based on 921 ratings across 64 students in four class sections 2015-2017. Class of 2015 (n = 14) was not assessed for Elevation, Admiration, or Happiness. Two scores of 1 occurred for “strongly disagreeing” with the statement “I was inspired by this presentation” and were included with the Disagree score above. One individual accounted for one of those “1” scores and five “2’s” which was 12.8% of the entire disagree number.

Instructor scores (Adams) were comparable to this pattern, (and the scoring on the other Figure in the PPT) but with fewer admiration and happy ratings as depicted here.

## Websites and Contacts

<https://thisibelieve.org/>

<https://www.npr.org/series/4538138/this-i-believe>

<https://www.mightycause.com/organization/This-I-Believe-1>

**EMAIL:** [admin@thisibelieve.org](mailto:admin@thisibelieve.org)

Phone: (502) 259-9889

**This I Believe, Inc.**

P.O. Box 5625

Louisville, KY 40255

Contact Presenter:

Nelson Adams, Professor of Psychology

Winston Salem State University

[adamsn@wssu.edu](mailto:adamsn@wssu.edu)