

Experimenting with Freud's Theories of Dreams

Lesson Plan

Grade Level: 9-12

Curriculum Focus: Mental Health

Lesson Duration: One class period

Student Objectives

- Understand Freud's argument that our dreams contain clues to our hopes, fears, and fantasies.
- Examine Freud's claims that developments in our childhood affect the way we act and the kinds of dreams we have.

Materials

- Discovery School video on *unitedstreaming: Great Books: Freud's Interpretation of Dreams*
Search for this video by using the video title (or a portion of it) as the keyword.

Selected clips that support this lesson plan:

- "The Interpretation of Dreams": Freud and the Doorway to the Unconscious
- The Psyche: Id, Ego, and Superego in Freud's Study of Dreams and Human Nature
- Inside a Sleep Laboratory: The Science of Dreams
- The Influence of "The Interpretation of Dreams" and Freud's Other Ideas

Procedures

1. As a class, talk about what they learned from the video about Freud's theories on dreams and why he felt dreams were important. For example, Freud believed that parts of our personalities are revealed when we are dreaming, because we are technically "unconscious." Freud argued that our dreams contain clues to our hopes, fears, and fantasies. In addition, Freud claimed that developments in our childhood affect the way we act and the kinds of dreams we have.
2. Tell students they will be conducting their own experiment on dreams. Each student will conduct an experiment on a family member who is asleep. Students should ask a parent or sibling to participate as a volunteer.
3. Explain that the experiment requires the students to be present for part of the time their volunteers are asleep. Students should create a stimulus that does not wake up the volunteer but that may nevertheless be heard or felt by each sleeper. The point of the experiment is to

determine if indeed the sleeper's dreams will include the stimulus. If they do, the experimenter can suggest that the sleeper heard or felt the stimulus while asleep—that is, while not conscious.

4. Discuss with the class the stimuli they may present to their sleeping relatives. If they need help, suggest a soft noise, a light being turned on and off, a touch. Stress that it is important that experimenters not tell their subjects what the stimulus will be.
5. To begin, the student should instruct the volunteer to make a clear record of his or her dreams immediately after waking up. It's important that volunteers record their dreams immediately upon waking so that their recollections are not dimmed. While the volunteer is asleep, each student experimenter should present his or her stimulus to the volunteer, noting carefully the time of the presentation.
6. Ask students to repeat the experiments on two other nights. Students may vary the times at which they present the stimulus, recording the times. Or they may use a different stimulus each night.
7. When students have collected their volunteers' dream records, they should examine them carefully for evidence of the stimulus. Does a dream directly or indirectly refer to the stimulus? Is the stimulus somehow hidden in the dream?
8. If any of the volunteers have incorporated one or more stimuli into their dreams, ask students to comment about the nature of dreams. If none of the volunteers has incorporated one of the stimuli into a dream, ask students to comment on the success or failure of the experiment.
9. Lead a class discussion about the results of their experiments and their implications for Freud's dream theories.

Discussion Questions

1. Freud called dreams "the royal road to the unconscious." Discuss whether dreams can actually help us understand our hidden desires. Can you think of any other theories explaining why we dream? What other functions might dreams have?
2. Describe Freud's theories about the most appropriate ways to interpret dreams.
3. Freud is perhaps the most influential figure in the history of psychology. His work transformed the ways in which people viewed everything from insanity to neuroses to traumatic childhood experiences. He was also the first person to explore the idea of the "unconscious"—the idea that part of who we are is revealed in things like slips of the tongue, dreams, and "accidents"—which today we take for granted. How do you think our modern world has changed in response to Freud's ideas? What ideas or institutions are different today from what they were before Freud? Have any of his ideas been challenged? Do they still make sense today?
4. Freud believed that we all have "primitive selves" that we never really conquer. In fact, he believed that these primitive selves were essential to our personalities. Do you agree? Why or why not? Can you think of any other explanations for the more "savage" sides of human behavior?
5. Freud's work on dreams was not universally well received when he published it, and people's opinions continue to be divided. Speculate about why so many of his ideas are controversial.

6. According to Freud, one cornerstone of psychoanalysis is remembering and understanding the events of our childhood. Discuss ways in which our earliest experiences can affect who we are today.

Assessment

Use the following three-point rubric to evaluate students' work during this lesson.

- 3 points: Student provides evidence of having carried out the experiment on three nights (a relative's signature or detailed records can serve as evidence); student participates fully in the discussion by both reporting his or her findings and questioning other students' findings; student thoughtfully contributes to the discussion about the meaning of the results and the evaluation of the experiment.
- 2 points: Student provides evidence of having carried out the experiment on three nights (a relative's signature or detailed records can serve as evidence); student participates moderately in the discussion by either reporting his or her findings or by questioning other students' findings; student contributes in a minor way to the discussion about the meaning of the results and the evaluation of the experiment.
- 1 point: Student provides no evidence of having carried out the experiment on three nights; student participates in a minor way in the discussion by questioning other students' findings; student contributes in a minor way to the discussion about the meaning of the results and the evaluation of the experiment.

Vocabulary

consciousness

Definition: The upper level of mental life of which the person is aware, as contrasted with unconscious processes.

Context: By the end of the 19th century, consciousness began to be seen as a rational process.

ego

Definition: The one of the three divisions of the psyche in psychoanalytic theory that serves as the organized conscious mediator between the person and reality, especially by functioning in both the perception of and adaptation to reality.

Context: The ego is the rational self.

id

Definition: The one of the three divisions of the psyche in psychoanalytic theory that is completely unconscious and is the source of psychic energy derived from instinctual needs and drives.

Context: This animal self contains the core of the psyche that Freud called the id.

latent

Definition: Present and capable of becoming visible, obvious, or active.

Context: The real, hidden meaning of the dream is called the latent dream.

psychoanalysis

Definition: A method of analyzing psychic phenomena and treating emotional disorders that involves treatment sessions during which the patient is encouraged to talk freely about personal experiences and especially about early childhood and dreams.

Context: In Freud's hands, psychoanalysis allowed his patients to attempt to make sense of their pasts.

REM

Definition: A state of sleep that recurs cyclically several times during a normal period of sleep and that is characterized by increased neuronal activity of the forebrain and midbrain, by depressed muscle tone, and especially in humans by dreaming and rapid eye movements.

Context: Our most vivid dreams come during REM, rapid-eye-movement sleep.

superego

Definition: The one of the three divisions of the psyche in psychoanalytic theory that is only partly conscious, represents internalization of parental conscience and the rules of society, and functions to reward and punish through a system of moral attitudes, conscience, and a sense of guilt.

Context: The superego represents societal pressures and tells us what is right and wrong.

Academic Standards

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)

McREL's Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education addresses 14 content areas. To view the standards and benchmarks, visit

<http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp>.

This lesson plan addresses the following national standards:

- World History – A Half-Century of Crisis and Achievement: Understands the search for peace and stability throughout the world in the 1920s and 1930s.
 - Science – Life Science: Understands the principles of heredity and related concepts.
 - Science – Life Science: Understands biological evolution and the diversity of life.
 - Technology: Understands the relationships among science, technology, society, and the individual.
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Support Materials

Develop custom worksheets, educational puzzles, online quizzes, and more with the free teaching tools offered on the [Discoveryschool.com](http://www.discoveryschool.com) Web site. Create and print support materials, or save them to a Custom Classroom account for future use. To learn more, visit

- <http://school.discovery.com/teachingtools/teachingtools.html>

