**Hook Activity for unit on the Meaning Of Life**

Julia Jorati (Ohio State)

* Give students about 10 minutes to answer the following questions (either project the questions and ask them to write down answers on their own paper, or distribute a questionnaire).[[1]](#footnote-1)
	1. What would make your life more valuable or meaningful, going forward?
	2. Which elements of your life do you already take to be meaningful?
	3. What characteristics in other people lead you to consider them as having meaningful lives? What do you respect and appreciate in others?
	4. Suppose you were on your deathbed, and that you had the presence of mind and the time to look back on your life. What would you be happy or sorry to have done or not to have done?
	5. Suppose you knew that you had only ten more days, or six more months, to live. What would you decide to do in that time?
* After they answer these questions for themselves, ask them to get together in groups of 3-4 and discuss their answers. Tell them to look for similarities and differences in their answers; do they find any interesting patterns? Give them 5-8 minutes to do this; walk around and get a feel for whether the conversations are still productive.
* Whole class: discuss some of the answers; ask groups whether they saw patterns of similarity; ask them what the main differences were; ask them whether they learned anything interesting or important from this exercise.
* Then have a discussion about the usefulness and import of those questions. What can we learn from our answers to these questions, and what are the limitations of these questions? For instance, if there are elements already meaningful in your life, is it always a good idea to increase those elements? Also, if you admire someone else’s life, is it always a good idea to try to be more like them? (Or might what works for them not necessarily work for you? For instance, maybe you admire people who are deeply spiritual, but you just can’t do it; it’s not for you. Or you admire musicians, but you don’t have the abilities required to be a successful musician.) Does imagining the deathbed perspective help us see more clearly what’s important? Or might it also distort what’s important in some ways? (Maybe only the really big or dramatic things will seem important in the end, but maybe that does not mean that the small things we do are not important in life?) How helpful is the last question—what do we learn from it and what are its limitations? You probably all know the saying, “Live every day as if it were your last.” Is that good advice? What might be problems with actually doing that? (Someone will probably mention that then you would not engage in long-term projects such as training for a career or working toward a goal that you won’t reach until much later.)
1. These questions are adapted from Iddo Landau’s *Finding Meaning in an Imperfect World* (Oxford 2017), pp. 206f. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)