
The Good News of 2020

Segment Length: 4:41 minutes

Lesson Description:

Many people say that 2020 was “the worst year ever.” But was it? Or is that simply hyperbole? In this video Johan Norberg and John Stossel discuss the impact of technology and innovation on our lives and on our responses to crises.

Concepts & Key Terms:

Literacy – The ability to read and write

Genome – is an organism’s complete set of genetic instructions.

Pandemic – the outbreak of an infectious disease that spreads worldwide or across international boundaries

Biodiversity – shortened form of “biological” and “diversity.” It refers to all the variety of life that can be found on Earth or in a particular habitat or ecosystem.

Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- identify facts and opinions
- explain why people tend to focus on problems
- discuss the reasons people tend to think life is getting worse
- discuss ways in which life is getting better
- assess the proposition that life is getting better

Preview Activity and Questions:

Use Think, Pair, Share to have students answer and discuss these preview questions:

- How was 2020 a good year?
- How was it a bad year?
- Is it fair to 2020 if we simply brand it “a bad year”? Why / Why not?

Viewing Guide:

We recommend that teachers show the video twice: once to allow students to view it and focus on the issues presented, and once to allow them time to complete the viewing guide. After they complete the viewing guide, allow students a few minutes to work in pairs sharing and verifying answers.

Answers to Viewing Guide

1. life
2. illiteracy
3. volunteer
4. improvements
5. risk
6. grateful

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Viewing Guide

Name _____

Date _____

Class _____

Teacher _____

Directions: As you watch the video, fill in the blanks with the correct words.

1. Johan Norberg's new book, *The Story of Human Progress*, points out that people just don't realize that _____ keeps getting better.
2. If you look at specifics like global poverty, child mortality, chronic undernourishment, and _____, they all declined faster than ever.
3. People are calling me saying I want to come work, to _____ and donate their time. Which is like...I cannot believe it.
4. Such _____ rarely make news because reporters like to find problems.
5. We have this tendency, for good reasons, to focus on problems, because that's our way of solving problems. But then there's the _____ that we'll just despair and think it's hopeless, and we give up, and that's not the solution to our problems.
6. We should be a little bit _____ for what we have.

Now, take a few moments to reflect on the video and answer the questions below:

What are some examples of good news discussed in the video? _____

How does the media affect our views? _____

What do you think was the main idea of this video? _____

Discussion and Analysis:

1. Why do you think so many people said 2020 was the worst year ever?
2. Why did Johan Norberg say that the best year in human history to face a pandemic was 2020?
3. What has improved over the years? What problems have lessened?
4. Why does Johan Norberg think literacy might be the most important skill to acquire?
5. A woman in the video said that people were calling her to volunteer—to donate their time. Why do people volunteer?
6. In the video, John Stossel said, “A lot of this money went to the top one percent, and ordinary people, they think they’re doing worse.” The top one percent of what? What are some reasons “ordinary” people might think they’re doing worse?
7. The owner of Maryland Crab King redesigned his kitchen and said “My sales actually picked up, our system actually allowed us to be more efficient than we were before Covid?” Why his sales might had picked up? How could redesigning his kitchen affect sales?
8. Norberg states “The six leading pollutants, the ones that used to pollute our lungs and our forests and our rivers, they’ve declined by some 70%. How does that make you feel?
9. John Stossel said, “People think there’s as much or more war as ever.” Why might some people think that? Does the education system play a role? Should it?
10. Have you been affected by the COVID pandemic? How?
11. Johan Norberg said that “We have this tendency, for good reasons, to focus on problems, because that’s our way of solving problems.” What does he mean by that?
12. Do you spend more time thinking about problems or being grateful? Why?
13. What are you grateful for?

Discuss These Lines from the Video

1. 2020 has been awful by so many measures.
2. If I were to pick a year, the best year in human history to face a pandemic, I would say it’s 2020.
3. Had we had this in 1990, we wouldn’t have a World Wide Web and I wouldn’t be able to participate in your show.
4. Literacy might be the most important skill you can acquire because it’s the skill that makes it possible to acquire other skills. And we’ve never seen literacy at these high levels ever before.

5. We have never made this much progress against pollution. The six leading pollutants, the ones that used to pollute our lungs and our forests and our rivers, they've declined by some 70%.
6. Less war is one reason people keep living longer. After COVID, that trend will continue.

Quotes for Discussion:

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair.

– Charles Dickens

People see what they want to see and what people want to see never has anything to do with the truth.

– Robert Bolano

Though we see the same world, we see it through different eyes.

– Virginia Woolf

Folks are usually about as happy as they make their minds up to be.

– Abraham Lincoln

Happiness comes from you. No one else can make you happy. You make you happy.

– Beyoncé

We can complain because rose bushes have thorns, or rejoice because thorns have roses.

– Alphonse Karr

The optimist proclaims that we live in the best of all possible worlds; and the pessimist fears this is true.

– Abraham Lincoln

If you expect the worst, you'll never be disappointed.

– Sarah Dessen

Headlines, in a way, are what mislead you because bad news is a headline, and gradual improvement is not.

– Bill Gates

Pessimists are usually right and optimists are usually wrong but all the great changes have been accomplished by optimists.

– Thomas Friedman

There is no limit to the amount of good you can do if you don't care who gets the credit.

– Ronald Reagan

Protect your enthusiasm from the negativity of others.

– H. Jackson Brown, Jr.

Negativity is the disease, positivity is the cure.

– Anonymous

The news media are, for the most part, the bringers of bad news...and it's not entirely the media's fault; bad news gets higher ratings and sells more papers than good news.

– Peter McWilliams

Your cell phone has already replaced your camera, your calendar, your alarm clock, don't let it replace your family.

– Anonymous

Activities:

1. Have students complete The Good and the Bad critical thinking worksheet after watching the video.
 2. Have students complete the Fact or Opinion activity. Then, go over in class and have the students discuss their answers.
 3. Bring in articles clipped from a newspaper. Have students work in pairs to distinguish facts from opinions expressed in the article.
 4. Show the class Heather Lanier's TED talk "'Good' and 'bad' are incomplete stories we tell ourselves."
https://www.ted.com/talks/heather_lanier_good_and_bad_are_incomplete_stories_we_tell_ourselves#
 5. Using the internet, research news events of the current year. Make a posterboard that is divided into three columns: Good News, Bad News, and a third column, Neutral (or Adiaphorous, something that is neither good nor bad). Then list the news event in the column you believe it belongs in.
 6. Write an essay on the benefits and drawbacks of focusing on problems.
 7. Conduct a classroom debate on the current state of the economy. To get students to look at the topic from a different perspective, have them debate for the side with which they would normally disagree. Students should be given time to research their position to learn key facts prior to debating.
 8. During the course of one day, observe people around you who are talking to others about something going on their life. What are they talking about? Based on what they are saying, do they think it is good or bad. Then
 - a. Write a brief essay about what you observed, and discuss one or more conclusions you can draw from your observations.
- OR
- b. write an essay about how certain people tend to perceive things in one way or another (good or bad). In your conclusion, discuss what you have learned and whether you should modify your how you tend to see life.
9. Seek out and interview someone who regularly volunteers. Your goals should include discovering why he or she volunteers, and why that particular volunteer opportunity was chosen. At the end, ask the volunteer what he or she gets out of the volunteer work. What did you learn about the volunteer? How does he or she view life?
 10. Write a tweet, poem, or song about just how good life is.

Name _____

Date _____

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Fact or Opinion Activity

Directions: Explain what a fact and an opinion is. Then read the statements below and determine which is a fact and which is an opinion and place an **X** in the appropriate box.

What is a fact? _____

What is an opinion? _____

| Statement: | Fact | Opinion |
|--|------|---------|
| The cell phone is the greatest invention ever. | | |
| Many cell phones can take pictures, save them, and upload them to the cloud. | | |
| John Norberg's new book, <i>Open: The Story of Human Progress</i> , points out that people don't realize that life keeps getting better. | | |
| Literacy data shows that more people are able to read and write than ever before. | | |
| Literacy is the most important skill anyone can acquire. | | |
| Technological innovations improved the medical response to COVID-19. | | |
| When the owner of Maryland Crab King redesigned his kitchen, sales improved. | | |
| We're a failed society. | | |
| The six leading pollutants, the ones that used to pollute our lungs and our forests and our rivers, have declined by 70%. | | |
| There used to be more wars and more people used to die in wars. | | |
| More people live longer, but their lives are not fulfilling. | | |
| We should be grateful for what we have. | | |

Name _____

Date _____

Class _____ Per _____

Teacher _____

The Good and the Bad

Directions: Think about each scenario below, then list at least one good and one bad possible effect of each.

Good: What might be some positive effects of this incident.

Bad: What might be some negative effects of this incident.

| + Good + | Scenario | - Bad - |
|----------|--------------------------|---------|
| | Winning the Lottery | |
| | It's raining | |
| | The power is out at home | |
| | School is closed | |

There are two or more ways to look at the same situation. What might be the benefit of doing so? _____

Why do news organizations often put tragedies and bad news on the cover of papers? _____

Which would sell more copies, a newspaper with positive news or one with negative news? _____

Why? _____
