

HAPPY HEAD

JOSH SILVER

TEACHING RESOURCES

When Seb is offered a place on a radical retreat designed to solve the national crisis of teenage unhappiness, he is determined to change how people see him. But as he finds himself drawn to the enigmatic Finn, Seb starts to question the true nature of the challenges they must undergo. The deeper into the programme the boys get, the more disturbing the assessments become, until it's clear there may be no escape...

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Suitable for ages 13+

Explores themes of:

Mental health

Sexuality

Happiness

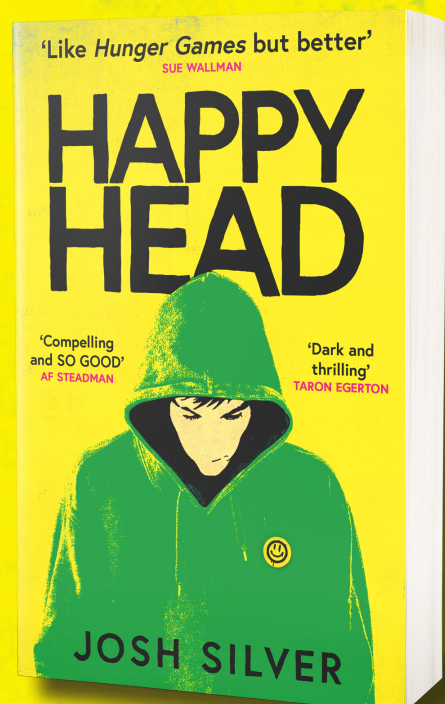
Secrets

Homophobia

Competition

Wellness culture

Social conformity



HAPPY HEAD

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In the novel, we see the dangers of toxic positivity extremified. What do you feel that this says about wellness culture in our society?
2. What were your gut instincts about the 'Overalls' at the start of the book? What early descriptions of them made you feel this way?
3. Those who follow the orders from the 'Overalls' and 'fit in' are rewarded. Do you feel that there are ways that you can relate to this? Make note of a few examples and discuss with your peers.
4. At HappyHead, access to devices and the internet are prohibited. How do you think social media perpetuates false notions of happiness?
5. Those who succeed in the programme are categorised as the 'Elite', while those who 'fail' at being happy, like Finn, are categorised as 'Bottom Percentile'. In what ways do you feel that this is reflected in real life?
6. Performance is a key theme in the novel. Seb performs his sexuality, Eleanor performs happiness, the 'Overalls' perform their duty of care. What comment is this making about society generally?
7. Seb and Finn have to hide their sexuality in order to be accepted into the programme and succeed. How do you feel this reflects LGBTQIA+ relationships within our current society?
8. Make a list of all the songs referenced in the book. What are their similarities and differences? Why do you think the author decided to include these songs?

HAPPY HEAD

9. Look at pages 154-156, where Seb is asked if he likes himself. Do you believe that liking yourself is vital to happiness?
10. *There was a time when I really wanted to be a Good Person. I thought it was our ultimate aim in life as human beings. Our Biggest Goal. And, once we reached it, we would be happy.* Do you think that there is such a thing as being a good person? If so, do you think being a good person equates to happiness?
11. *I feel sick. This is not what I want. I want to... go back to my strange white room and wait for the screen to tell me what to do.* What does this say about Seb's character? How does it reflect what he is hoping to achieve in the experiment?
12. The author describes his book as a cross between *Love Island* and *Squid Game*. Can you find three examples where this is apparent in the novel?
13. What did you think of the ending? What are you expecting from the second book?
14. In the author interview at the back of the book, Josh Silver is asked whether he believes if happiness is an illusion. Taking his answer into consideration, do you agree or disagree? Why?



HAPPY HEAD

ACTIVITY: EXPLORING KEY QUOTES

Look at these quotes from Eleanor, Finn, and Seb. Consider what the characters are saying and how this may be masking their deeper feelings. In conjunction with these sentences, write a monologue from the perspective of each character, which details their thoughts and feelings.

Eleanor: *'I am better than that and I'm under so much...' She catches herself, shaking her head. She inhales, then smiles at me. 'Oh, God. Sorry. This is silly...' She suddenly refocuses, looks at me and smiles. 'You're so sexy,' she says, slightly robotically. And then it's gone.*

Finn: *'Calm down? Easy for you, isn't it? Elite...' He starts pacing, scratching at his arms, his hair.*

Seb: *'The fence is for our safety...' I say, but I suddenly feel unsteady. 'There's a gate – it's probably locked to keep things out. I don't know, bears and stuff. You know?'*



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ACTIVITY: LOOKING AT AN EXTRACT

'We are in an epidemic. An epidemic of unhappiness. The data has shown that, without intervention, you, the youth of our country, are in serious danger of many things, but most importantly in danger of yourselves. And it is glaringly obvious that, now more than ever, you need help. A way out...

'Friends, here is the good news: HappyHead has the answer... Our radical new project is here to put you at the centre of your journey into adulthood and give you all the tools you need to fulfil your potential as happy human beings. We seek not only to transform lives but to save them. And you, you lucky people, were selected at random from across the nation and have become the first – the very first – to experience this. You, each and every one of you, are special.'

Look carefully at this extract. Do you think there is truth behind Professor Manning's statement? If so, how do you think Manning manipulates the truth in order to advance HappyHead's dangerous mission?



HAPPY HEAD

ACTIVITY: REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

Take a few moments to think about what happiness means to you. Discuss with your peers how this relates to wellness culture and what other routes there are to better mental health. Fill in your thoughts on the mind map below.

HAPPINESS

