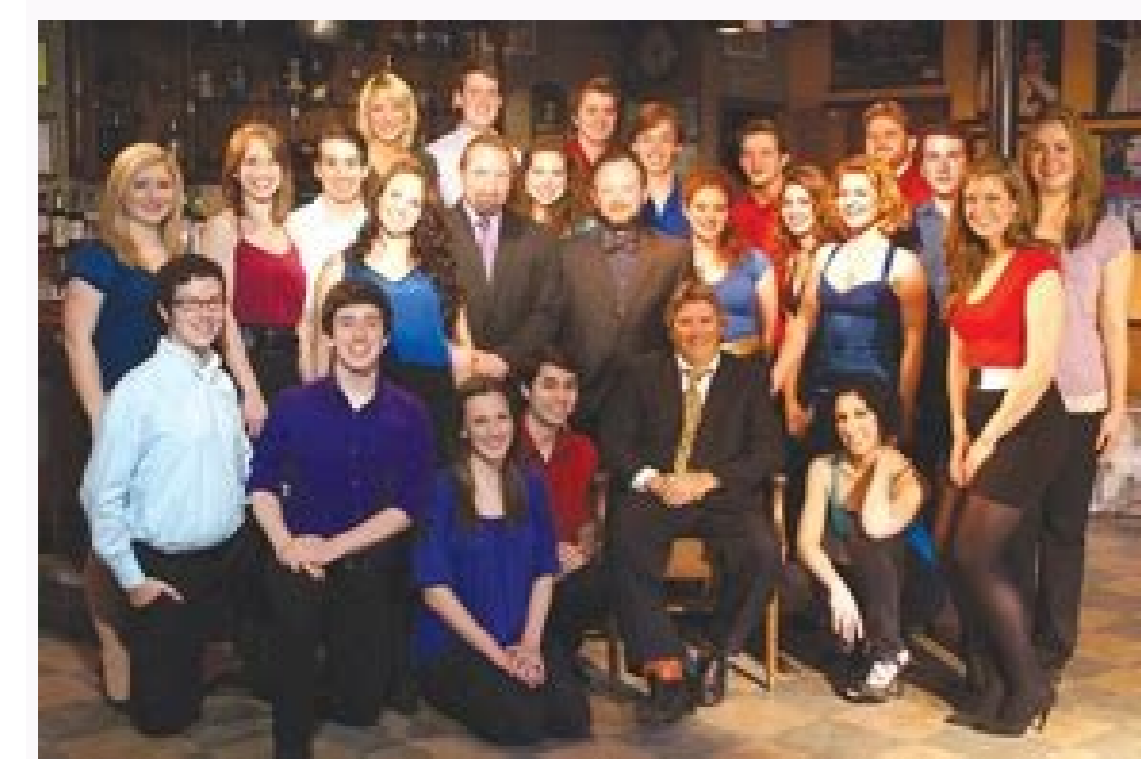
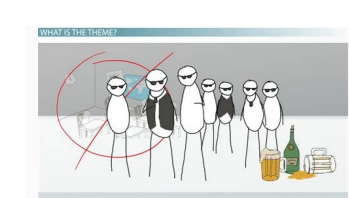


Central idea of the poem character of a happy life

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Renewing Our Imaginations



What is a central theme of a poem. What is a central idea of a poem.

Wendy Syfret is a Melbourne-based writer and editor. She is the former managing editor of VICE Asia, as well as head of Editorial for VICE Australia. She has contributed to publications such as The Guardian, Crikey, and ABC Life, to name a few. Currently, she is editor-in-chief of RIISE, a climate-forward fashion and lifestyle publication. Below, Wendy shares five key insights from her new book, *The Sunny Nihilist: How a Meaningless Life Can Make You Truly Happy*. 1. Nihilism doesn't deserve its bad reputation. Nihilism has a PR problem—the term itself has become shorthand for “grim” and “depressing.” But I'd argue that this reputation is undeserved, owing more to the people who have embraced, promoted, and manipulated it than the concept itself. In its simplest form, nihilism preaches that “life is meaningless.” In turn, so are you and I. When we accept that “meaning” isn't an inherent thing, we can examine it as a concept we create, and hence have the ability to control. Additionally, we can question where it comes from, and who is pushing it. Even if you don't go full nihilist, it can be a prompt to wonder: Why do I believe what I believe? Where do these ideas come from? Who is benefitting from them? What do they really deliver to me? And how do they benefit others? 2. Meaning is supposed to make us happy, but our obsession with it is making us miserable. The search for a meaningful life isn't a bad thing. It is a quest that has pushed humanity forward for millennia. It's also a lot of work—people have dedicated their entire existence to understanding meaning through religion, philosophy, art, and even a commitment to civic life. Few of us have that kind of time, but our desire for meaningful connection remains. Unfortunately, that lust can easily be hijacked by power-holders who recognize that if they can produce a dupe of that meaningful feeling—for only a fraction of the work needed to create a true sense of meaning—then that's a powerful tool. Meaning was never supposed to be binged on. Even believers of meaning located it in, perhaps, one or two parts of their lives. But now, every job is suddenly “culture-defining,” and each consumer product “life-changing.” Nothing can exist without some huge, bloated narrative attached to it. It's great marketing, but it's also exhausting. 3. Meaning makes you selfish. Rejecting it might make you kinder. One of the deceptively nice things about buying into all this meaning is it can make self-obsession feel like a truly noble act. When we embrace personal myth-making, placing ourselves at the center of the universe, we give ourselves permission to spend a lot of time thinking about our own lives, actions, and experiences. Who doesn't love that? In contrast, nihilism's major selling point of “you don't matter” is a spikier declaration. Honestly, staring into the abyss takes guts, but there are a lot of benefits to attempting it. Acknowledging nihilist principles doesn't need to be a destructive experience. Accepting our own smallness in the face of the universe prompts interesting considerations around how we spend our time, money, and energy—when we're not totally devoted to ourselves. We start wondering about what we want to last beyond our short lives, and what needs to be protected and treasured. For each person that will be different, but I'd bet it's not your follower count or LinkedIn presence. 4. Value vs. meaning. I dunk on meaning a lot, but I'm careful to point out that it's not the same as value. Value is real, like the practical use of the products we're bombarded with. We could all benefit from thinking more about value and spending less time wondering about meaning. At this moment, what do you need to feel happy and well? What is truly being offered for your time and effort? Navigate your life by prioritizing value over meaning, and I promise you'll feel far more rewarded for your efforts. Meaning promises fulfillment, enlightenment, and a path to “living right.” In reality, it too often delivers confusion, and a sense of somehow being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Meaning can manifest as just another box we can never manage to tick. When we stop thinking about what our lives could be, we return to the reality of what they are. If we accept that existence doesn't have a reason, then all we have is this life and this precious, fleeting moment. With that perspective, how do we spend our time differently? For me, each second feels like a rare treat to be enjoyed and savored. Even a mundane day is a gift that will never be repeated. The world feels larger, but also smaller. I'm able to move more clearly now. What makes me happy? What do I need right now? Where is pleasure really found? The answers are simpler and closer than you think. A perfect peach, time with loved ones, a midday walk in the sun. These actions are “meaningless,” but they are the tiny blocks that build a beautiful (pointless) life. This article originally appeared in the Next Big Idea Club magazine and is reprinted with permission. Share on Pinterest! Right now, the world seems loaded with huge, way-of-life-altering events and power struggles that have one thing in common—they seem hopelessly, emphatically out of our control. Like everyone else, we went to our NYE parties thinking that 2020 would maybe continue the streak of weirdness that has been the last few years, but business would continue more or less as usual. A face mask, three pairs of very lived-in sweatpants, and a ton of Netflix box sets later, we're happy to throw our hands up and admit that we were wrong. We were all so wrong. Understandably, that can make an individual feel very small and extremely anxious. According to a review paper published while the world was locked down, early evidence suggests that 16 to 28 percent of people showed symptoms of anxiety and depression in response to COVID-19, and 8 percent reported stress. Rajkumar RP, et al. (2020). COVID-19 and mental health: A review of the existing literature, a finding that will be of no surprise at all to those grasping at the enormity of what's been happening, sleepless nights were commonly linked to anxiety and depression. Even without a pandemic in the mix, life can be pretty complicated. Although most of us have plenty to manage in our day-to-day lives—jobs, relationships, family, exercise, sleep, wondering how “Baby Shark” has almost 6 billion views—there are only a few elements we can truly control. We believe it's absolutely central to happiness that you take stock of these, own them, and accept the wildcards life draws on your behalf. This might sound like a distant concept when 2020 rocks up at your door, foaming at the mouth and flipping the bird. It's exhausting to even think about changing your mindset. We know. If you got out of bed today, it sincerely counts as an achievement. But hear us out. Once we become mindful of the seven parts of life that are 100 percent ours to manage and master, we may well be able to navigate to a brighter place. It's very easy for the mind to enter a worrisome spiral when trying to take in everything we can't control. Instead, it's more productive to plow energy into controlling the few things you can. Seven is not many. You can count on two hands what's really under your jurisdiction. But it's still something. And if you can control even some elements of your life, you have a way to effect real change throughout your life. Happiness and success (however you define either one) are regular bedfellows. Most people believe you can't be happy until you're successful. But a 2005 study found that happier people go on to have more success. Lyubomirsky S, et al. (2005). The benefits of frequent positive affect: Does happiness lead to success? Of course, being successful can lead to happiness, but it's not the only ingredient. And there's plenty of materially successful but desperately unhappy people. You can galvanize your path to both happiness and success by making small tweaks to your routine. Little by little, these add up to major changes in your lifestyle and mindset. People make millions of seemingly insignificant decisions all the time. The result of each one is either net positive, net negative, or neutral. The more net positive decisions we can make (and the fewer net negative ones), the better. Net positive decisions—brushing your teeth before bed, eating healthy meals, and regularly going to the gym—help you feel good and bring you one step closer to your goals, despite the effort they entail. Net negative decisions, such as filling up on food that doesn't make you feel good, skipping the nightly teeth-brushing, partying 'til the early hours for 5 days straight, or forgoing the gym—make it difficult to reach your goals. These decisions won't make you feel healthy, empowered, or confident. They take more out of you than they give, interfere with your energy levels, sap your motivation, and cloud your focus. While the healthier choice may seem harder, it pays dividends further down the line. And you'll be surprised by just how sound these choices can be once you can muster the effort. By learning to master what you can control, you will start to make more net positive decisions and fewer net negative ones. With time and practice, empowering, positive behaviors will become second nature. So let go of all the stuff you can't control, and start using your time to use what you can control to feel better and live life to a fuller extent. The 7 Questions I Asked That Seriously Changed My Life 1. Your breath Share on Pinterest! Most people don't even think about their breathing, but the ability to inhale and exhale sweet, sweet oxygen is one of the few things almost everyone has in common. Either you or a friend will, at some point, have started jabbering on for minutes without breathing. Breathing is obviously important (yet never gets a shoutout in Oscar speeches, the ungrateful assholes). However, the ability to focus on it is equally vital for returning the mind to its center. It's a built-in hack for slowing a refocusing an anxious mind. If focussing can be difficult for you, we've a few questions to ask yourself while breathing deeply. When you focus on your breath, you can count “one” as you inhale, “two” as you exhale. Start over on reaching 10. Can you feel your chest expand when you inhale? Does it get softer when you exhale? Where do you feel the rise and fall most? Can you feel the air moving past your lips? As soon as you experience something unpleasant, just take a few deep breaths and focus not on how horrible the situation was, but on how awesome it is that you're a living human being and you can breathe. The chances of that coming to be are so slim, but you're to doing the hell out of it. You can't control the horrible thing that's happening. But breathing is a start. 2. Your self-talk You need only look at the gazillion different cuts of “Blade Runner” to see the same movie is made sucky by an overdramatic and annoying voiceover and amazing without. Our brains are similar, and we don't have a Ridley Scott to remove our self-talk in a Final Cut. Our inner monologue is here to stay. So it's helpful for our growth to make it more comfortable as a physical communicator. The authors of a study in 2010 found that rocking a power stance can increase testosterone and reduce levels of the stress hormone, cortisol. Carney DR, et al. (2010). Power posing: Brief nonverbal displays affect neuroendocrine levels and risk tolerance, example, adopting a powerful stance—arms on your hips and feet planted wide, causing you to take up more space—increases testosterone and decreases the stress hormone cortisol. More recently, in 2019, researchers carried out a similar experiment and found that “power posing” didn't significantly affect the levels of these hormones, so the jury's still out on whether regularly striking a dominating pose actually makes more hormones whizz around your body. Metzler H, et al. (2019). Repeatedly adopting power postures does not affect hormonal correlates of dominance and affiliative behavior. If power posing makes you feel more confident, then go for it. Think about this before you meet with a potential client, go to a job interview, or even just before you leave the house. Yoga can be a wonderful way to address many of the controllable aspects of life, especially posture and physical comfort. Learn 30 basic yoga moves. 5. Your mental and physical fitness You mind and body are your soul's house and garden. Only you have the keys to access what's right for you, and using discipline to advance the health of both can be a powerful tool in regaining a sense of control over your life. Yes, we know it can be hard. But ignore the sweating for a second. Exercising is a chance to listen to your music and think about nothing. It's glorious. You don't have to go to the gym, but we all ought to take 20 minutes out of our days and move it. Researchers have even found that walking, sedate as it may seem, can enhance creative thinking. Oppizzo M, et al. (2014). Give your ideas some legs: The positive effect of walking on creative thinking, your brain a workout is also easy and crucial for well-being. It might seem like hard work at first. But it's way easier than running through worrying hypotheticals and their outcomes in your head. Drown out the noise with some good, old-fashioned thinking. Whether you play Sudoku, smash out crossword puzzles, play video games, or read books, your brain will feel the difference. You can get a similar benefit from meditation. People can feel the mental health benefits after just 30 minutes of exercise per day, such as feeling less anxiety and depression and having improved cognitive function. And if you have health conditions that get in the way of exercise, talk to a doctor or physical therapist about exercises you can do that are comfortable and sustainable. Essentially, exercise makes your brain work and feel better, and you get to control the role that it plays in your day. Sharma A, et al. (2006). Exercise for mental health. Your diet Even though it might taste great, junk food is a net negative. It makes your brain and body slow and sad. Consuming too much sugar has been linked to all kinds of medical conditions (including metabolic syndrome and cardiovascular disease). However, the food we eat also fuels our brain. And how would your car run if you stuffed the gas tank with Cheetos? Yeah, didn't think so. Eating healthier simply means that we have enough nutrients to make all of the necessary processes in the body run smoothly. A review of studies from 2020 found that cutting out processed food and sticking to dietary requirements can have a significant reducing effect on depression, helping to prevent and treat it. Ljungberg T, et al. (2020). Evidence of the importance of dietary habits regarding depressive symptoms and depression. fixes like keeping a bag of carrots or a bowl of fruit handy help us pick up the healthier choice when we're depleted and hungry and reaching for the closest snack. Easy-to-whip-up, convenient-to-carry portable snacks can be delicious and nutritious. We came up with 32 ideas for healthy snacking on the go. 7. Your sleep Share on Pinterest! Zzz's. So good. A consistent, sustainable sleep pattern is one of the happiness touchstones. Depression and anxiety may well provide a barrier to sleep, but you can strike back by nurturing your sleep cycle to regularly. The National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI) says that getting enough sleep at the right time is critical for staying at peak mental and physical health, as well as maintaining a good quality of life. Hacking your sleep cycle can feel so far away on those sleepless nights, but the solution is pretty simple: It's best to set a routine. Make an active decision to turn off all screens and distractions by, say, 9 p.m. and actually follow through. You can then treat yourself to a sunrise when you wake up. If your brain can't calm down while you're trying to fall asleep, tell yourself, “I'm proud of the work I accomplished today. I'm going to let my brain and body rest now.” You can also try other trusted you-snooze-you-win methods, including cutting back on alcohol (since people who booze more sleep less, according to research). Ebrahim IO, et al. (2013). Alcohol and sleep: Effects on normal sleep. DOI: 10.1111/acer.12006 It's a refreshing thing to realize that you have control over some essential aspects of life. This is the first step to building some resilience to life's rockier events: Knowing you have and can control the tools to outlast uncontrollable events. However, that's the key to enduring adversity, not building a balanced, mindful, and joyful life. Setting goals for yourself is a way of crafting the chaotic abandoned Lego set of the universe into a neat little Millennium Falcon that looks exactly how you imagined. Plus, exactly like the Lego Millennium Falcon, you get the satisfaction of knowing you built it. There are three steps we feel are central to setting and achieving goals. Here's how to build a system that helps with any goal you set for yourself. 1. Visualize it Whatever it is you most want to be doing, you must be able to see yourself doing it. For most of us, the work we do while procrastinating is probably the work we should be doing for the rest of our lives. Practice visualizing this concept with your eyes closed for a few seconds. You can ask yourself a few questions to guide the visualization, such as: Where are you working? What's the room like? What's the temperature like? How's the lighting? How do you feel? Are you drinking a cup of coffee or a glass of water? What time of the day is it? The more senses you involve, the more vivid this visualization of your future will be, and the more you'll feel motivated to reach your goals. 2. Believe in it You have to believe that you already have everything you need to be successful. Knowledge you don't have can be learned. Resources you don't have can be worked for. Remember: You don't need money to try out an idea. There are plenty of free and low-cost ways to get started with all kinds of projects—social media, blogging, smartphone apps, or fundraising sites, to name just a few. When it comes to having the courage and can-do spirit—well, that's not waiting for you on the shelf at Sam's. That's free and in you right now. And free shit is great. 3. Talk it up Talk about what you do everywhere you go. Help can come from all angles. Make your goals known and build relationships, both professional and personal, that help you stack your life toward the goals that make you happy. Whatever problem you're solving or project you're launching, share your knowledge and experiences with everyone who can benefit from them. When you help as many people as you can, those people will connect you to everything you need to get started. Just let it happen, and smile to yourself about it when you can. A helping hand is not one to turn down when you feel like the whole universe cannot be controlled and hates you. There's nothing like knowing a person you have no control over has helped you out of their own free will because they like you. Implementing any of our suggestions from this article won't instantly make the world a totally kind, comfortable, and predictable place. Our aim was, however, to provide you a few tools for navigating feelings of powerlessness. Focus on the few things you can control, and try to let go of any fear of the things you can't. You can control what you eat, how much attention you pay to your breathing, and how long you sleep. You can control how much you exercise and the way you talk to yourself. Remind yourself that you're lucky to have power over such elemental parts of being a happy, healthy human.

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