



## The Marshmallow Test: Lesson Plan

Topic	
The Marshmallow Test was conducted by psychologist Walter Mischel to explore self-control in a group of children. Children were given a plate of marshmallows and told to wait fifteen minutes. If they could successfully do so, they would get two marshmallows. Otherwise, they would only get one. Children who waited used more of the logical “cool” system of thinking, while children who wanted to eat their treat immediately used more of the impulsive “hot” system of thinking.	
Possible subjects/classes	Time needed
Psychology, Sociology, Philosophy	30-45 minutes
Video link:	
<a href="https://academy4sc.org/topic/the-marshmallow-test-youre-hot-then-youre-cold/">https://academy4sc.org/topic/the-marshmallow-test-youre-hot-then-youre-cold/</a>	
Objective: <i>What will students know/be able to do at the end of class?</i>	
Students will be able to... <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Summarize how the Marshmallow Test was conducted.</li><li>• Define and differentiate a “hot” system of thinking from a “cool” system of thinking.</li><li>• List some benefits/advantages that correlate with a “cool” system of thinking.</li></ul>	
Key Concepts & Vocabulary	
Impulsivity, SAT scores, BMI	
Materials Needed	
Worksheet, Student Internet Access	
Before you watch	
<b>Quick write:</b> Think about choices you've made over the past week (big or small). Write down an example of a decision that you made very quickly, without much	

thought, and an example of a decision that you made carefully, after a fair amount of thinking.

#### While you watch

1. What would happen if a child rang the bell in the original experiment?
2. What did Mischel find out about children who waited longer to receive their marshmallow treats in his follow-up studies?
3. What did Casey's results show in the retesting of the original Marshmallow Test participants?

#### After you watch/discussion questions

1. Would you categorize yourself as a person who uses a more "hot" system of thinking or someone who uses a "cool" one? Give examples of personal choices that you've made to support your argument.
2. Are there situations where it's better to rely on a "hot" system of thinking than a "cool" one? Explain your answer.
3. What character traits or difficulties can you hypothesize that "hot" headed people might have?

#### Activity Ideas

- A later 2018 replication of the Marshmallow Test found that the link between delayed gratification and later life success could be attributed to another factor. Get into groups and create a list of potential flaws and confounding factors of the original experiment. Write down your guess of what this third factor could be. Afterward, look up Watts, Duncan, and Quan's replication and their findings. Write a short paragraph reflection on how influential this third factor is on later life success and the ability to delay gratification.
- Write a journal reflection on how you think you'd fare at the Marshmallow Test. Do you think your results are accurate to how well you usually delay gratification in your everyday life? Which type of thinking do you most often tend toward? Write roughly two to three paragraphs.
- Individually complete the Worksheet. Then review answers as a class.

#### Sources/places to learn more

1. Gibbs, Nancy. "The EQ Factor." *Time*. [content.time.com, http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,133181,00.html](http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,133181,00.html).
2. Heshmat, Shahram. "10 Strategies for Developing Self-Control". *Psychology Today*,



<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/science-choice/201703/10-strategies-developing-self-control>.

3. Mischel, Walter. *The Marshmallow Test: Mastering Self-Control*. First edition., Little, Brown and Company, 2014.
4. Watts, Tyler W., et al. "Revisiting the Marshmallow Test: A Conceptual Replication Investigating Links Between Early Delay of Gratification and Later Outcomes." *Psychological Science*, vol. 29, no. 7, 2018, pp. 1159–1177. *hollis.harvard.edu*, doi:[10.1177/0956797618761661](https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797618761661).
5. "'Willpower' over the Life Span: Decomposing Self-Regulation." *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience*, vol. 6, no. 2, Apr. 2011, pp. 252–56. *academic.oup.com*, doi:[10.1093/scan/nsq081](https://doi.org/10.1093/scan/nsq081).