



The Piano Stairs Experiment: Lesson Plan

Topic	
<p>The piano stairs experiment was part of The Fun Theory, an ad campaign run by the car company Volkswagen Sweden and the ad agency DDB Stockholm to promote Volkswagen’s new, more fuel-efficient brand. The groups turned a normal staircase at a subway station in Sweden into a “piano staircase,” where stepping on a stair produced a sound. Commuters were significantly more likely to choose the stairs over the escalator when the staircase was a piano than when it was a regular staircase.</p>	
Possible subjects/classes	Time needed
Psychology, Politics, Philosophy	30 - 45 min
Video link:	
https://academy4sc.org/video/the-piano-stairs-experiment-making-life-more-fun/	
Objective: <i>What will students know/be able to do at the end of class?</i>	
<p>Students will be able to...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe the piano stairs experiment. • Explain the results and implications of the piano stairs experiment. • List possible applications and limitations of the piano stairs experiment. 	
Key Concepts & Vocabulary	
Marketing campaign	
Materials Needed	
Worksheet, computers	
Before you watch	
Turn and Talk: What are some ways to make unpleasant tasks more fun?	
While you watch	

Complete the While You Watch section on the Worksheet.

After you watch/discussion questions

1. What are some other tasks that could be made more fun in a similar way to the piano stairs experiment?
2. Do you agree that people can be incentivized to make better decisions by making those decisions fun? Are there limits on this hypothesis? Are there tasks that could not be made fun?
3. What are some possible confounding factors in this experiment? In other words, are there other possible reasons more people took the stairs in the second part of the experiment besides the fact that they were piano stairs?

Activity Ideas

- Come up with an experiment like the piano stairs experiment that could incentivize people to do something beneficial but usually unappealing. Briefly present your idea to the class.
- Another part of The Fun Theory was the world's deepest bin experiment. Watch the video of that experiment, found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cbEKAwCoCKw>. Get into small groups and discuss the following questions:
 - How does this experiment compare to the piano stairs experiment?
 - What are some potential confounding factors in the world's deepest bin experiment?
 - Can both experiments have long-term effects on people's behavior? If that staircase is always a piano staircase and if that bin always has special sound effects, will people's behavior eventually go back to normal? How could these experiments be modified to have long-term effects?
- Individually complete the Thinking Further section of the Worksheet. Then discuss answers as a class.

Sources/places to learn more

1. Cashmore, Pete. "The Fun Theory: Volkswagen Masters the Viral Video." *Mashable*, Mashable, 11 Oct. 2009, mashable.com/2009/10/11/the-fun-theory/.
2. Ramos, Kelsey. "Volkswagen Brings the Fun: Giant Piano Stairs and Other 'Fun Theory' Marketing." *Los Angeles Times*, Los Angeles Times, 15 Oct. 2009, latimesblogs.latimes.com/money_co/2009/10/volkswagen-brings-the-fun-giant-piano-stairs-and-other-fun-theory-marketing.html.



3. "SiOWfa15: Science in Our World: Certainty and Controversy." *Sites at Penn State*,
sites.psu.edu/siowfa15/2015/09/16/the-fun-theory/#:~:text=The%20concept%20was%20for%20each,Sweden%2C%20next%20to%20an%20escalator.