Despereaux is not just a children's fairy tale, but a study in happy behaviors. There are 4 characters that model a path to a happy life; Despereaux the mouse, Chef Andre, Roscuro the rat, and Miggery. Each has been hurt by someone else and each responds to their pain in a different way leading them all to a happy life.

The Tale of Despereaux begins in the kingdom of Dor which is known for its delicious soup. When the Queen drowns in a bowl of the famous soup after seeing the rat Roscuro, the King bans rats and soup- thus plunging the whole kingdom into melancholy and overcast skies with no rain.

The princess is full of longing- for the sun, the rain, the soup, and the happiness that used to characterize the kingdom. Her role is to inspire others- to save her, to be her and to hurt her.

Despereaux is the first model for finding a happy life. He is an energetic optimist who sees, hears and smells more than any other mouse and who is totally unaware of his small size. Despereaux represents the traditional hero. He is brave, honest, true and following a quest- first to explore the world, then to define himself as a knight and gentleman and finally to save the princess. Practicing virtue and using strengths to work at a challenge to benefit a worthy cause is the first model of happiness.

Chef Andre and his vegetable alter ego represent the path of passion or flow. Chef Andre is passionate about soup. When soup is banned, he follows the edict for awhile, but finds he must create soup anyway. When he does, he helps bring out the sun and restore happiness to the kingdom. They represent the second model behavior for a happy life- do what you love and what you are good at.

Miggery is a young woman with nothing but a dream. She was abandoned as a child with a cruel man who beats her and has made her deaf, yet she knows that deep inside she is a princess and someday she will live in the castle. Miggery is happy to be sold into servitude at the castle, until she realizes that she is still a servant and not a princess after all. She finds her dream in an unlikely place, but has the heart to recognize it and embrace it when she sees it. Miggery models faith and vision and the flexibility to see her dream even when it doesn't look exactly as she imagined.

In the end, it is Roscuro who provides the most interesting example. He falls from the world of people, light and delicious soup into the world of rats, cruelty, darkness, and garbage. He doesn't fit in with the others and cherishes his secret little hole that lets in a little light. He meets Despereaux through an act of compassion and Despereaux inspires him to go apologize for his mistake. But it all goes terribly wrong. In pain and hurt, he tries to turn evil, but in the end, he shows compassion and forgiveness towards the people who banished him and ran from him in fear. When he does, the whole world improves. Roscuro models the healing power of forgiveness and compassion and being true to yourself and your own values.

The Tale of Despereaux is also a Newberry Award winning children's book. The book plot is slightly different, although the happy behavior models are the same. No matter what your age and stage in life, the Tale of Despereaux is an inspiring story that models several paths to a happy life through the trials and tribulations we all suffer.

Although it is an animated cartoon, the character sophistication, plot twists, beautiful music and art all make this an entertaining and enlightening film for adults and children. Plus, the Tale of Despereaux models many of the Elements of Happiness to help with your happy life.

Over the past 20 years, scientists all over the world have looked at happy people and what they have in common. It turns out that no matter where you live or what your religion, those of us who are consistently happy with our lives all follow some pretty consistent patterns. These patterns are the formula for happiness.

The really good news about this is that these patterns show that at least half of our happiness is due to things within our own control!

In his book, Authentic Happiness, Dr. Martin Seligman reveals the elements of happiness. He says that the formula for happiness is:

Level of Enduring Happiness = Happiness Set Point + Life Circumstances + *Individual Habit Patterns

      *Individual Habit Patterns = Happy Thoughts + Happy Activities

Enduring Level of Happiness

Researchers use a life satisfaction survey to measure people's enduring level of happiness. Each person rates his or her general happiness on a scale of 1 to 4 or 1 to 7 for four questions, and then takes the average result. These tests are designed to measure a happy life based on the over all level of happiness across a lifetime. Scientific conclusions about the elements of happiness are almost all based on this approach.

Set Point

Research on twins has shown that many of our traits, like body weight, pessimism, and being an extrovert are inherited genetically from our parents. About 50% of our tendency for these traits comes from our genes. The other 50% comes from our habits or training. So, we may not be able to completely change our nature, but we can learn to live in the happier part of our range by adopting new behaviors and thought patterns. This is the real secret to happiness: we cannot change our nature, but we can choose happiness by choosing thoughts and activities that maximize our happiness within our nature.

Circumstances

Our circumstances, like health, wealth, social life and education do impact our level of happiness somewhat. Researchers have identified many of the long term circumstances that are elements of happiness and how much each contributes. The answers may surprise you.

Variables

Dr. Selligman divides the variable factors for happiness into pleasures and gratifications. Pleasures include sensory and emotional experiences. For example a delicious taste, or comforting warmth are sensory pleasures and glee or delight are emotional pleasures. Pleasure is subjective, meaning the person needs to feel the pleasure, no matter what anyone else's definition is. Pleasures are also fleeting and momentary, so lasting happiness depends on pleasure that can be sustained over time. For example, drinking wine might make you feel good for a few hours,

but over time the effect wears off and too much will severely degrade health over time thus reducing happiness. Gratifications are activities we enjoy primarily because of the result. When we help someone or achieve something important we feel gratified.

Another way to look at the variable factors for happiness is to divide them into happy thoughts and happy activities. When we think happy thoughts we are aware that we are experiencing happiness. We might think to ourselves about the pleasure we feel at that moment, or how gratified we feel helping someone. Any one of the positive emotions can lead to happy thoughts.

It is not in the pursuit of happiness that we find fulfillment, it is in the happiness of pursuit.
Denis Waitley

Happy activities, on the other hand, may not necessarily feel happy at the time. These activities absorb and engage us fully. When we are doing happy activities, we are not aware of how we feel in the moment, but after the activity is over, we look back and realize we had fun, or feel proud of the result. Gratifying activities often produce a state of mind called flow, or being in the zone.

The Secret to a Happy Life

The secret to a happy life is to choose happiness. Choose happiness by choosing activities that maximize the elements of happiness in the formula for happiness. So, in the words of Bobby McFerrin, don't worry, be happy. Enjoy the life you have now, keep building a happy future, and remember your past fondly.