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Looking at cute photos aids concentration

4th October, 2012

http://www.breakingnewsenglish.com/1210/121004-cute_kawaii.html

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Looking at the picture of this cute little kitten could help you study better. How? Read more....
(Picture - http://farm1.static.flickr.com/83/208625821_be1ca0ad75.jpg)

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THE ARTICLE

From http://www.BreakingNewsEnglish.com/1210/121004-cute_kawaii.html

Researchers* have found that looking at cute things while you work can boost your powers of concentration and increase productivity. A team of cognitive psychologists at Japan's Hiroshima University discovered that skimming through cute photos of things like kittens and puppies helps people focus better on their work. The team based its research on the Japanese concept of "kawaii," which Wikipedia describes as, "the quality of cuteness...a prominent aspect of Japanese popular culture, entertainment, clothing, food, toys, personal appearance, behavior, and mannerisms...literally, 'lovability', 'cuteness' or 'adorableness.'" The scientists believe cute things produce positive feelings and affect performance.

The researchers tested 132 participants doing two tasks. One was to use tweezers to remove items from small holes without touching the sides; the other was to find numbers in a grid. Each participant repeated the task after looking at a set of photos of either puppies and kittens, adult dogs and cats, or "neutral" images of food. Those who looked at the cute pics improved their performance in the second task by as much as 44 per cent. The scientists say cute things, "capture attention, bring a smile to the viewer's face, and induce motivation and behavior for... caregiving". They added that cute objects could be used to "induce careful behavioral tendencies in specific situations, such as driving and office work".

* <http://www.plosone.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0046362#s1>

WARM-UPS

1. CUTE: Walk around the class and talk to other students about cute and cuteness. Change partners often. Share your findings with your first partner.

2. CHAT: In pairs / groups, decide which of these topics or words from the article are most interesting and which are most boring.

cute things / boost / concentration / photos / kittens / puppies / Japanese culture / researchers / tasks / images of food / performance / capture attention / office work

Have a chat about the topics you liked. Change topics and partners frequently.

3. CUTENESS: Are these things cute or not? Complete this table with your partner(s). Change partners often and share what you wrote.

	Cute or not?	What is cute / not cute?	How to make it cute(r)?
a baby			
a 90-year-old			
a mobile phone			
an elephant			
a building			
an insect			

4. PRODUCTIVITY: Students A **strongly** believe looking at cute things increases our productivity; Students B **strongly** believe that's totally and utterly ridiculous. Change partners again and talk about your conversations.

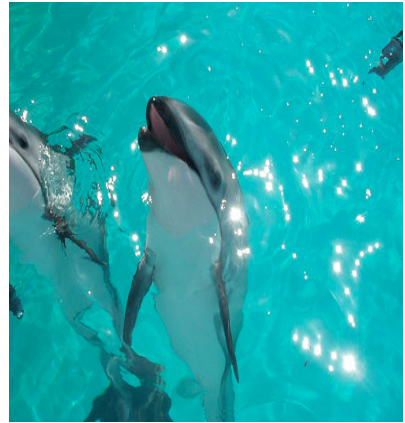
5. SO CUUUUUUTE: Rank these and share your rankings with your partner. Put the cutest at the top. Change partners often.

- kitten
- baby rabbit
- puppy
- dolphin
- newborn baby
- mouse
- your brother or sister
- your favourite item of clothing

6. CONCENTRATION: Spend one minute writing down all of the different words you associate with the word 'concentration'. Share your words with your partner(s) and talk about them. Together, put the words into different categories.

7. "KAWAII-IIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIII": Look at the photos on the next page and discuss what's cute about the pictures.

7. CUTE?: Yes? No? Why?



Images via <http://animalphotos.info/a/> under a Creative Commons license <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>

BEFORE READING / LISTENING

From http://www.BreakingNewsEnglish.com/1210/121004-cute_kawaii.html

1. TRUE / FALSE:

Read the headline. Guess if a-h below are true (T) or false (F).

- a. Researchers say viewing images of cute things helps you focus better. T / F
- b. The researchers cast doubt on whether cuteness aids productivity. T / F
- c. Wikipedia says the Japanese word "kawaii" has historical importance. T / F
- d. The scientists say the positivity from cute things affects our work. T / F
- e. Researchers tested 1,132 people in their cuteness tests. T / F
- f. The test volunteers had to hold kittens, puppies and food in the tests. T / F
- g. The research team found cute pictures improved performance by 44%. T / F
- h. The researchers suggest cute objects could help us drive carefully. T / F

2. SYNONYM MATCH:

Match the following synonyms from the article.

- | | |
|------------------|------------------|
| 1. cute | a. replicated |
| 2. boost | b. traits |
| 3. concentration | c. extract |
| 4. prominent | d. attentiveness |
| 5. mannerisms | e. bring about |
| 6. remove | f. adorable |
| 7. repeated | g. ordinary |
| 8. neutral | h. particular |
| 9. induce | i. important |
| 10. specific | j. enhance |

3. PHRASE MATCH:

(Sometimes more than one choice is possible.)

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. boost your powers | a. aspect |
| 2. increase | b. positive feelings |
| 3. kittens | c. smile to the viewer's face |
| 4. a prominent | d. in a grid |
| 5. cute things produce | e. productivity |
| 6. The researchers tested | f. such as driving |
| 7. find numbers | g. 132 participants |
| 8. scientists say cute things capture | h. of concentration |
| 9. bring a | i. attention |
| 10. in specific situations, | j. and puppies |

WHILE READING / LISTENING

From http://www.BreakingNewsEnglish.com/1210/121004-cute_kawaii.html

GAP FILL: Put the words into the gaps in the text.

Researchers have found that looking at cute things while you work can (1) _____ your powers of concentration and increase productivity. A team of cognitive psychologists at Japan's Hiroshima University discovered that (2) _____ through cute photos of things like kittens and puppies helps people focus better on their work. The team (3) _____ its research on the Japanese concept of "kawaii," which Wikipedia (4) _____ as, "the quality of cuteness...a prominent aspect of Japanese (5) _____ culture, entertainment, clothing, food, toys, personal (6) _____, behavior, and mannerisms...literally, 'lovability', 'cuteness' or 'adorableness.'" The scientists believe cute things produce (7) _____ feelings and (8) _____ performance.

appearance
affect
popular
based
skimming
boost
positive
describes

The researchers tested 132 participants doing two (9) _____. One was to use tweezers to remove (10) _____ from small holes without touching the sides; the other was to find numbers in a (11) _____. Each participant repeated the task after looking at a (12) _____ of photos of either puppies and kittens, adult dogs and cats, or "(13) _____" images of food. Those who looked at the cute pics improved their performance in the second task by as much as 44 per cent. The scientists say cute things, "(14) _____ attention, bring a smile to the viewer's face, and induce motivation and behavior for...caregiving". They (15) _____ that cute objects could be used to "induce careful behavioral tendencies in (16) _____ situations, such as driving and office work".

grid
specific
tasks
capture
items
added
set
neutral

LISTENING – Listen and fill in the gaps

From http://www.BreakingNewsEnglish.com/1210/121004-cute_kawaii.html

Researchers have found that looking at cute things while you work can boost your (1) _____ and increase productivity. A team of cognitive psychologists at Japan's Hiroshima University discovered that skimming through cute photos (2) _____ and puppies helps people (3) _____ work. The team based its research on the (4) _____ "kawaii," which Wikipedia describes as, "the quality of cuteness...(5) _____ Japanese popular culture, entertainment, clothing, food, toys, personal appearance, behavior, (6) _____, 'lovability', 'cuteness' or 'adorableness.'" The scientists believe cute things produce positive feelings and affect performance.

The researchers tested 132 participants doing two tasks. One was to use tweezers (7) _____ small holes without touching the sides; the other was to (8) _____. Each participant repeated the task after looking at a set of photos of either puppies and kittens, adult dogs and cats, or (9) _____. Those who looked at the cute pics improved their performance in the second task (10) _____ per cent. The scientists say cute things, "capture attention, (11) _____ viewer's face, and induce motivation and behavior for...caregiving". They added that cute objects could be used to "induce careful behavioral tendencies in specific (12) _____ and office work".

AFTER READING / LISTENING

From http://www.BreakingNewsEnglish.com/1210/121004-cute_kawaii.html

1. WORD SEARCH: Look in your dictionary / computer to find collocates, other meanings, information, synonyms ... for the words 'boost' and 'power'.

boost	power
--------------	--------------

- Share your findings with your partners.
- Make questions using the words you found.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

2. ARTICLE QUESTIONS: Look back at the article and write down some questions you would like to ask the class about the text.

- Share your questions with other classmates / groups.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

3. GAP FILL: In pairs / groups, compare your answers to this exercise. Check your answers. Talk about the words from the activity. Were they new, interesting, worth learning...?

4. VOCABULARY: Circle any words you do not understand. In groups, pool unknown words and use dictionaries to find their meanings.

5. TEST EACH OTHER: Look at the words below. With your partner, try to recall how they were used in the text:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• boost• cognitive• puppies• quality• personal• positive	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• tasks• sides• set• food• attention• driving
---	--

CUTE SURVEY

From http://www.BreakingNewsEnglish.com/1210/121004-cute_kawaii.html

Write five GOOD questions about cute in the table. Do this in pairs. Each student must write the questions on his / her own paper.

When you have finished, interview other students. Write down their answers.

	STUDENT 1 _____	STUDENT 2 _____	STUDENT 3 _____
Q.1.			
Q.2.			
Q.3.			
Q.4.			
Q.5.			

- Now return to your original partner and share and talk about what you found out. Change partners often.
- Make mini-presentations to other groups on your findings.

CUTE DISCUSSION

STUDENT A's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student B)

- a) What did you think when you read the headline?
- b) What springs to mind when you hear the word 'cute'?
- c) What things do you think are cute?
- d) What is cute about you?
- e) Would you like to be cuter? How could you do this?
- f) Do you think looking at cute things helps your concentration?
- g) What do you think of pictures of kittens and puppies?
- h) What's the cutest thing in the world?
- i) Why do you think cuteness is so important in Japanese culture?
- j) Do you think there's too much "cute" in the world (or not enough)?

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CUTE DISCUSSION

STUDENT B's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student A)

- a) Did you like reading this article?
- b) How important is the "quality of cuteness" in your country?
- c) What do you think of the tests conducted on the participants?
- d) Are you surprised that performance increased by 44% after looking at photos of cute things?
- e) Is cuteness important?
- f) What do you know cute Japanese anime characters, like Hello Kitty and Pokemon?
- g) What brings a smile to your face?
- h) Will you try and look at lots of cute things before you study English?
- i) Should cars be filled with cute things so that we drive more carefully?
- j) What questions would you like to ask the researchers?

LANGUAGE – MULTIPLE CHOICE

From http://www.BreakingNewsEnglish.com/1210/121004-cute_kawaii.html

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The researchers tested 132 participants doing two tasks. One was to use tweezers to remove items from small holes (7) _____ touching the sides; the other was to find numbers in a grid. Each participant repeated the task after looking at a set of photos of either puppies and kittens, adult dogs and cats, or "(8) _____" images of food. Those who looked at the cute pics improved their performance in the second task (9) _____ as much as 44 per cent. The scientists say cute things, "(10) _____ attention, bring a smile to the viewer's face, and induce motivation and behavior for...caregiving". They added that cute objects could be used to "(11) _____ careful behavioral tendencies in (12) _____ situations, such as driving and office work".

Put the correct words from the table below in the above article.

- | | | | | |
|-----|---------------|--------------|-------------|----------------|
| 1. | (a) best | (b) boast | (c) beast | (d) boost |
| 2. | (a) skimmed | (b) skim | (c) skims | (d) skimming |
| 3. | (a) of | (b) on | (c) as | (d) to |
| 4. | (a) podium | (b) jargon | (c) quality | (d) phantom |
| 5. | (a) inspect | (b) respect | (c) aspect | (d) prospect |
| 6. | (a) affect | (b) infect | (c) effect | (d) reflect |
| 7. | (a) wither | (b) without | (c) with | (d) within |
| 8. | (a) neutral | (b) medium | (c) average | (d) nothing |
| 9. | (a) with | (b) by | (c) at | (d) on |
| 10. | (a) juncture | (b) immature | (c) capture | (d) rupture |
| 11. | (a) enrapture | (b) remit | (c) induce | (d) condescend |
| 12. | (a) secondary | (b) such | (c) special | (d) specific |

HOMework

1. VOCABULARY EXTENSION: Choose several of the words from the text. Use a dictionary or Google's search field (or another search engine) to build up more associations / collocations of each word.

2. INTERNET: Search the Internet and find out more about the study on cuteness. Share what you discover with your partner(s) in the next lesson.

3. CUTE: Make a poster about what's cute. Show your work to your classmates in the next lesson. Did you all have similar things?

4. "KAWAII": Write a magazine article about "kawaii". Include imaginary interviews with the researchers and participants.

Read what you wrote to your classmates in the next lesson. Write down any new words and expressions you hear from your partner(s).

5. LETTER: Write a letter to an expert on cuteness. Ask him/her three questions about it. Give her/him three of your opinions on the concept. Read your letter to your partner(s) in your next lesson. Your partner(s) will answer your questions.

ANSWERS

TRUE / FALSE:

- a. F b. F c. F d. F e. F f. F g. F h. F

SYNONYM MATCH:

- | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. cute | a. adorable |
| 2. boost | b. enhance |
| 3. concentration | c. attentiveness |
| 4. prominent | d. important |
| 5. mannerisms | e. traits |
| 6. remove | f. extract |
| 7. repeated | g. replicated |
| 8. neutral | h. ordinary |
| 9. induce | i. bring about |
| 10. specific | j. particular |

PHRASE MATCH:

- | | |
|--|------------------------------------|
| 1. boost your powers | a. of concentration |
| 2. increase | b. productivity |
| 3. kittens | c. and puppies |
| 4. a prominent | d. aspect |
| 5. cute things produce | e. positive feelings |
| 6. The researchers tested | f. 132 participants |
| 7. find numbers | g. in a grid |
| 8. scientists say cute things capture | h. attention |
| 9. bring a | i. smile to the viewer's face |
| 10. in specific situations, | j. such as driving |

GAP FILL:

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Researchers have found that looking at cute things while you work can (1) **boost** your powers of concentration and increase productivity. A team of cognitive psychologists at Japan's Hiroshima University discovered that (2) **skimming** through cute photos of things like kittens and puppies helps people focus better on their work. The team (3) **based** its research on the Japanese concept of "kawaii," which Wikipedia (4) **describes** as, "the quality of cuteness...a prominent aspect of Japanese (5) **popular** culture, entertainment, clothing, food, toys, personal (6) **appearance**, behavior, and mannerisms...literally, 'lovability', 'cuteness' or 'adorableness.'" The scientists believe cute things produce (7) **positive** feelings and (8) **affect** performance.

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LANGUAGE WORK

- 1 - d 2 - d 3 - b 4 - c 5 - c 6 - a 7 - b 8 - a 9 - b 10 - c 11 - c 12 - d