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## Element of a Decision: Pinpoint Your Preferences

### Unit 5

### Intro Questions

#### What Do You Think?

Read the quotation to the right. What exactly do you think would happen to you if you have a goal, but that goal isn't very clear?

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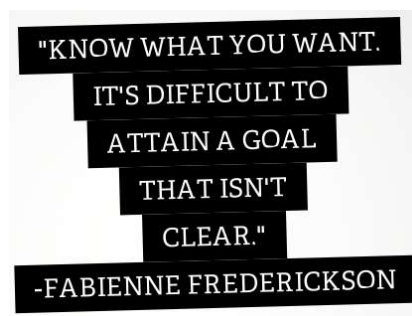
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What does it mean to make something a **priority**?

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List what you consider to be the top three priorities in your life right now and briefly describe why each is important to you.

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Do you have any ideas about what you will make a priority when you're searching for high schools to apply to? Explain.

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### Class Activity #1

#### Explore Your Preferences

High school is a time to explore what you might pursue in college or your career, and it's okay if your interests change as you take classes and learn more about yourself. But if you completely avoid thinking about what interests you and don't take the time to learn about what classes a high school offers (and what it requires students to take), you're likely to be confused about where to apply. There are many factors that you could consider when choosing a high school. A high school probably won't have everything that you'd want, but it's still important to think about your **preferences** so you can have an easier time narrowing your list. When you have a small list of schools that connect with most of your needs and interests, you can spend your time getting to know each one well.

#### Decision Trap: The Bandwagon Effect

Before you identify your preferences and start researching schools, you need to make sure you're dedicated to doing what's right for you. Being aware of the **bandwagon effect** will help you.

What happened in the clip from *Dead Poets' Society* when the teacher told the three students to walk?

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What point was the teacher trying to demonstrate?

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Sayings like "dare to be different" remind us that it's not easy to make an unpopular choice when we're facing uncertainty. People often choose to do the same thing as one another because they don't want to miss out on experiences, be left out, or face danger. Sometimes these are good choices (for example, if everyone is leaving a baseball stadium because a major lightning storm is overhead, you should probably follow along), but many

times, people are "jumping on the bandwagon." "Jumping on the bandwagon" is a saying used when people adopt beliefs or ideas simply because they seem popular. This saying originated in the 1800s, when Dan Rice, a clown who ran for political office, attracted attention for his campaigns by riding on a bandwagon (a horse-drawn wagon with a band playing music on it). Other politicians wanted attention for their campaigns and spectators wanted to join in on the fun, so they climbed on Rice's bandwagon without questioning his ideas.



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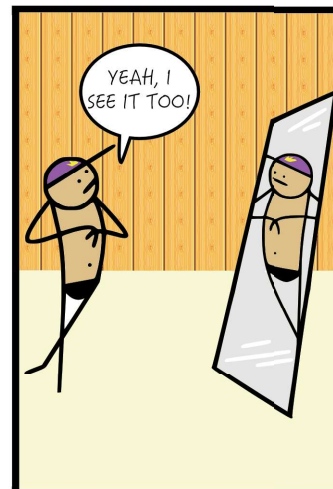
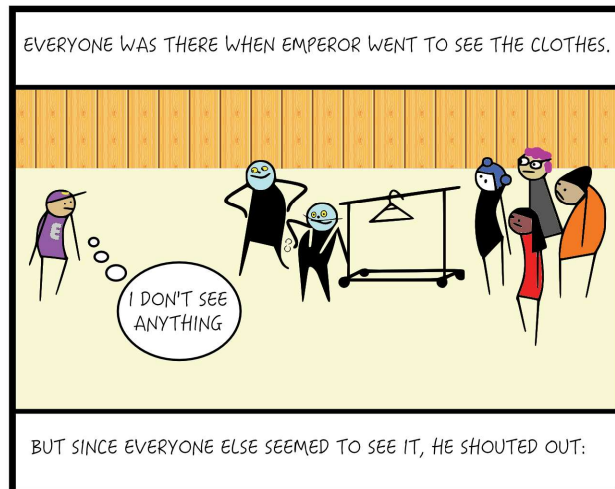
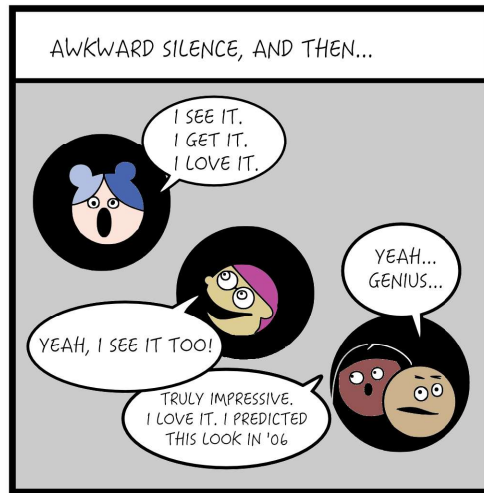
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### Class Activity #2

Read the retelling of the fairy tale “The Emperor’s New Clothes” to see one way that the bandwagon effect can influence the thinking within a group of people.





## React to “Emperor’s New Clothes”

To show that you understand the bandwagon effect, answer these questions about the story on the previous pages.

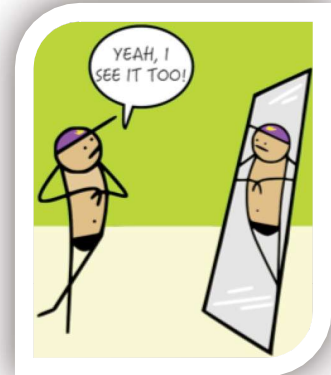
1. Why does Emperor want what the swindlers are selling?

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2. How do we know that Emperor’s entourage jumps on the bandwagon?

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3. What makes Emperor’s entourage jump on the bandwagon?

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4. How does the entourage’s behavior affect Emperor?

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### Class Activity #3

#### Other Examples of the Bandwagon Effect

News stations want to increase their viewer ratings, so they often overhype snow forecasts. People rush to buy items like bread, eggs, and milk because they're afraid of being stranded at home. News stations film the frantic people at the grocery store, which makes viewers think they need to rush out to buy food because "everyone else" is doing it – even if they have enough food to last a few days and different TV stations are providing different forecasts.



Countless extreme-looking clothing and hair trends have caught on over the centuries simply because more and more people were joining in. Years later, people typically look back at pictures of themselves and wonder why they spent money on something that looked so bad and served no practical purpose.

How could the bandwagon effect be a problem when you're trying to figure out what high schools you'll apply to?

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What are some strategies you could use to avoid the bandwagon effect?

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As you think about what you want in a high school, don't be overly influenced by people who describe schools as cool or fun and don't just copy what your friends choose. When the whole experience of high school is unknown to you, it's easy to follow the crowd because you're afraid of being alone in a new place or missing out on fun, but when you take the time to think about what you want and investigate what schools have to offer, you'll feel more confident about making choices that work for you, and it won't matter as much if it's what "everyone" is doing.

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### Class Activity #4

#### Get to Know Yourself

High school can be as much of a fresh start as you want it to be. You usually have opportunities to stick with activities you already like and want to improve in, and you can also try new things. As you search for high schools to apply to, it helps to have an idea of what's important to you and any special needs you have. You also need a realistic understanding of how high school admissions officers could view your middle school grades, attendance, and disciplinary record. Your responses to these questions will guide you as you're looking for schools that match your needs and interests.



What do you like about school?

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What do you dislike about school?

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Describe the habits you have with completing assignments and studying for tests. How would you want to change them in high school?

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List the subjects in which you have earned the grade:			
A or B	C	D	F

Describe your middle school attendance record: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Describe any disciplinary incidents you have had: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

List any careers that interest you and explain why they interest you.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



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### Class Activity #5

### High School Interests Survey

Listed below are academic and extracurricular opportunities that are commonly offered at urban high schools in addition to the major subjects you are required to take. Within each category, circle the experiences that you think you'd really want to participate in. You can choose as many or as few (or none) within each category as you think are reasonable. If you have a serious interest that is not listed, add it in an appropriate "Other" space.

#### School Offerings

Which <b>school themes</b> interest you?			
Arts	Ethnic	Religious	Other: _____
STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math)			

Which <b>vocational programs</b> interest you?			
Automotive	Carpentry	Construction	Cosmetology
Culinary Arts	Fashion Design	Health Professional	Plumbing
Welding	Other: _____		

Which <b>Advanced Placement classes</b> interest you?			
Art History	Biology	Calculus	Chemistry
Computer Science	English	Environmental Science	History
Music Theory	Physics	Politics	Psychology
Statistics	Foreign Language (Specify: _____)		Other: _____

Which <b>foreign languages</b> interest you?			
Chinese	French	Italian	Latin
Spanish	Other: _____		

Which <b>electives</b> interest you?			
Art (Specify: _____)	Band	Chorus	Creative Writing
Orchestra	Video Production	Web Design	Other: _____

Which <b>clubs</b> interest you?			
Anime	Chess	Community Service	Dance
Debate Team	Drill Team	Environmental	Ethnic
Gay-Straight Alliance	Literary Magazine	Mock Trial	Newspaper
Robotics	School Spirit	Student Government	Yearbook
Yoga	Other: _____		

Which <b>sports</b> interest you?			
Baseball	Basketball	Bowling	Cheerleading
Cross Country	Diving	Football	Field Hockey
Golf	Ice Hockey	Indoor Track	Lacrosse
Rowing	Rugby	Soccer	Softball
Swimming	Tennis	Track & Field	Volleyball
Wrestling	Other: _____		

Other criteria including any special needs you have, the kind of environment you want to be in, and the transportation you'd be willing to take affect your happiness with a school. Be realistic about what you need, want, and would be willing to do as you think about the following criteria.

### Other Criteria

Do you have any <b>special needs</b> that will require support in high school?		
English as a Second Language	Emotional Support	Learning Support
Other: _____		

What <b>population size</b> would you prefer?		
Doesn't matter	Less than 100 in each grade	100-200 in each grade
200-300 in each grade	More than 300 in each grade	

Would you prefer to attend a <b>single gender or coeducational</b> school?		
Doesn't matter	Single gender	Coeducational

How much time would you be willing to spend on your <b>commute</b> ?				
Up to 15 minutes	16-30 minutes	31-45 minutes	46-60 minutes	Over an hour

What <b>kinds of transportation</b> would you be willing to take?			
Walking	Car	Bus	Subway/Train

How important is the school's <b>overall academic performance rating</b> to you?		
Doesn't matter	Somewhat important	Very important

How important is the <b>overall safety rating</b> of a school to you?		
Doesn't matter	Somewhat important	Very important

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### *Independent Activity*

If we aren't sure what are priorities are, we can feel uncertain when we learn information and hear other people's opinions about situations that are new to us. That's why this activity requires you to rank the general **criteria** from the High School Interest Survey in order of their importance to you. The ranking you create will help you remember your priorities throughout your high school application process.

Keep in mind that the specific courses listed on the survey won't be offered at every high school, or they might be slightly different, so you probably can't "have it all" at one high school. It's important to be flexible when you examine what schools actually offer. You might discover options that you hadn't thought of before, or you might find that there are courses that are similar to what you originally had in mind. Understanding your main interest areas will make it easier for you to recognize good opportunities.



#### Directions:

- Review the items you circled on the High School Interests Survey and observe what stands out as most important to you.
- Cut apart the strips marked "Student" that list the general criteria you should consider when choosing high schools to apply to.
- In the following chart, arrange the strips in the order that represents their importance to you. Briefly note your reasons for each ranking.

Take your time with this! It may take several tries to find an order that feels right. When you think you have it, tape or glue the strips in the order or your ranking in the numbered spaces.



### High School Criteria Ranking (Student)

	Criteria	Reasons
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		
7.		
8.		
9.		
10.		
11.		
12.		
13.		

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**Student**

School theme
Vocational Programs
Advanced Placement Classes
Foreign Languages
Electives
Clubs
Sports
Special Needs
Population Size
Student Gender(s)
Commute Time and Transportation Method
Overall Academic Performance
Overall Safety

**Family Member**

School theme
Vocational Programs
Advanced Placement Classes
Foreign Languages
Electives
Clubs
Sports
Special Needs
Population Size
Student Gender(s)
Commute Time and Transportation Method
Overall Academic Performance
Overall Safety



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### Family Activity

Ask a family member who will be helping you with your high school selection process to complete the same exercise you did for the Independent Activity. Cut apart the list of high school factors marked "Family Member." Ask your family member to arrange the slips in the spaces below, according to how important he/she thinks each high school factor is for you to consider.

### High School Criteria Ranking (Family Member)

	Criteria	Reasons
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		
7.		
8.		
9.		
10.		
11.		
12.		
13.		





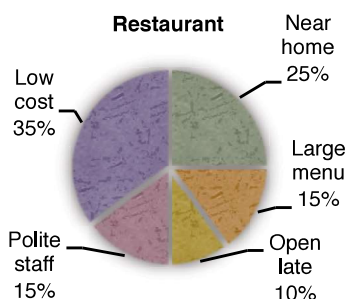
Compare the rankings you made for the same criteria in the previous activity with your family member's. Discuss why your rankings are similar and different. What can you learn from one another's perspectives?

It's important for you to **compromise** with one another about the criteria you will prioritize. Agree on the top five criteria that you will focus on and list them:

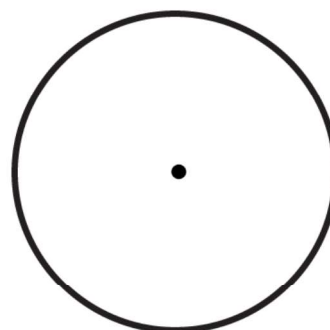
1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

Now, think about how much you value each one. Draw a pie chart in the circle below that visualizes how much you weight each of the criteria you listed. Make sure that you fill the entire circle with pieces that add up to 100%! Label the criteria and approximate percentages they represent.

This example shows how you might weight criteria you consider when you're deciding where to eat.



Student-Family Member Compromise



When we see something very positive or very negative (or something that attracts a lot of attention) at a school, it's easy for us to focus too much on that one thing. But if you refer to this pie chart as you research and visit schools, you'll be reminded to focus on getting information related to all of your priorities.

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### *Check Your Understanding*

Answer these questions to make sure that you understand the concepts from this unit and will be able to apply them to decisions you make.

What is the bandwagon effect? How could it interfere with choosing the high schools you'll apply to?  
How can you avoid the bandwagon effect?

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Do you have any needs or characteristics that could affect where you should apply to high school?

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What interests do you want to pursue in high school?

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What would you consider your top priorities in a high school? Does your family agree with them?

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How can being open-minded help you as you're identifying your preferences in a high school?

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How could being overconfident interfere with identifying your preferences in a high school? What about being stuck in your comfort zone?

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