Youth Voices
Rethinking the War on Drugs

A Catalyst Curriculum Guide
The Institute of Latin American Studies (ILAS) has commissioned the production of this Catalyst Curriculum Guide to serve as a resource for K-12 teachers in New York City (NYC), with the objective of encouraging and facilitating critical, comprehensive and fruitful conversations --led by youth-- about the War on Drugs from a Latin American perspective.

The ILAS K-12 Outreach Program strives to enhance the professional capacity of teachers in a multicultural New York City environment and promote the inclusion of Latin American and Caribbean history and culture in their classrooms and students’ daily lives. The program draws on the expertise and support of faculty and students across Columbia University to offer educators resources and opportunities to learn about creative ways of incorporating Latin American and Caribbean history and culture into their curriculum.
Dear Teachers,

The following material is designed as a tool to generate teaching and learning opportunities surrounding difficult and controversial topics: drugs, drug policy and the violence that it has generated. While this curriculum was originally designed for a space of non-formal education, drawing from our experience as primary and secondary teachers we adapted it to formal high school classroom settings. Accordingly, please feel free to change the order of the sessions and modify the lesson plans to better fit the context of your classroom. We have made an effort to include materials that represent multiple experiences and understandings of the War on Drugs. That said we are also acutely aware that much has been left out. Please feel free to expand and add to this curriculum. We would be grateful if you would share any successful innovations with us at: info@catalyst-catalizador.org. This is but the first attempt to create a space of learning that will allow us, as young people, to articulate our voices and opinions in face of the War on Drugs and it is very much a curriculum that is evolving. We welcome your participation in that evolution!

-The Catalyst Team
WHAT IS THE WAR ON DRUGS?

For the purposes of this curriculum guide, we use the term “War on Drugs” to name government campaigns of militarization, criminalization and securitization that are fought in the name of prohibiting and eradicating drugs and drug use. Richard Nixon’s administration was the first to popularize the term in the early 1970s and the Reagan administration renewed and intensified the so-called War on Drugs during the 1980s. With significant funding and pressure from the U.S. government, other countries across Latin America—most notably in Colombia and, more recently in Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean—have subsequently taken up aggressive counter-narcotics strategies under the mantle of the War on Drugs. While the stated goal of the War on Drugs is to protect citizens from the risk of drug addiction by eliminating drugs from society, we believe it is impossible to understand the full complexity of the violence these policies have caused without also interrogating the history of imperialism, racism and economic interests that have shaped them. To this end, we take an expanded view of the War on Drugs that encompasses the historical and geopolitical dimensions that underpin prohibitionist drug policy within the Western hemisphere.

The effects of the so-called “War on Drugs” have been disastrous, both domestically and abroad. Thanks by and large to its punitive drug policies, the U.S. presently faces a crisis of mass incarceration that disproportionately targets and affects communities of color. In Mexico, well over 100,000 have been murdered and over 30,000 disappeared since the country declared its War on Drugs in 2006. Colombia’s armed conflict has similarly cost over 220,000 lives and caused almost 8 million to be displaced. Despite the billions spent on eradication efforts, a 2017 UN survey showed that the country is producing record levels of cocaine. Meanwhile, U.S.-led interdiction efforts in Colombia and Mexico have pushed 80% of U.S.-bound drug trafficking routes into Central America, causing an explosion of gang violence that keeps fuelling at migration crisis.

AND WHY DO WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT IT?
The Catalyst curriculum was developed for two reasons. First, because the War on Drugs has played, and continues to play, a central role in shaping the politics and history of the American continent. Second, because we feel the historical, political, social and transnational consequences of the War on Drugs are often excluded from traditional drug education curricula. Despite the wide-reaching and devastating effects of the War on Drugs, there is relatively little space for young people to learn about and discuss the socio-political, let alone the transnational dimensions, of drugs and drug policy. Until a new generation is equipped to confront the full complexity of the structural violence promulgated by the War on Drugs, current drug policies will continue to devastate our continent. In a time where international politics emphasize difference between the north and the south, we raise our voices to build bridges and open space for new and difficult conversations.

For too long, the failed policies of the War on Drugs have been justified in the name of protecting young people without giving them a space for articulating and sharing their own positions within the debates. As the movement to reform drug policies gains force throughout the Americas, it is essential that youth voices be heard and engaged. The Catalyst curriculum is premised on the belief that all young people have a right to a comprehensive drug education. This curriculum guide is meant to create a unique learning space for youth to join conversations about drug policy reform as well-informed, critically thinking stakeholders.

In the Catalyst curriculum students and teachers are asked to analyse information about drugs and drug policy as they relate to their own individual experiences, but also as they relate to wider social, economic and political macro-phenomena that underpin the War on Drugs. To this end, Catalyst fosters a space of curiosity and nonconformity out of which difficult questions can emerge and the connections between apparently distant phenomena may be understood. Students of the Catalyst curriculum will not only gain a deeper understanding of the geopolitics of the War on Drugs, but be empowered to think of themselves as knowledge producers and agents for social change.

Too often, the subject of drugs has been mired in taboos and dogma, foreclosing space for critical analysis and discussion. Most drug education programs focus entirely on questions of individual choices and personal health and pay little attention to complex social considerations that surround the transnational political economy of drugs under prohibition. The Catalyst curriculum moves beyond the traditional discourse of most drug education programs, with their exclusive focus on health risks. It invites both teachers and students to face and dismantle their own prejudices, question over-simplified narratives about the role of drugs within our societies, and to recognize the injustices caused by the War on Drugs.

The Pedagogical Motivations of Catalyst
The Catalyst curriculum operates within a paradigm of “expanded harm reduction.” Traditional, prohibitionist drug education programs focus entirely on the harmful effects of drugs at the level the individual (Fig 1.A). Other, more progressive drug education programs have moved beyond a strictly prohibitionist paradigm to operate within a framework of “harm reduction.” That is, they take for granted that some youths will experiment with drug use and, rather than stigmatizing them, they are offered the strategies and information needed to identify and reduce the risks associated with their personal drug consumption. While such programs are definitely a step in the right direction, they fail to consider the structural “harms” caused by our present drug policy regimes and leave students ill-equipped to identify, think about or act towards reducing these. The Catalyst curriculum is a response to this lacuna and aims to open a space for speaking about policy reform and social change in connection with drugs.

The Catalyst curriculum is premised on recognition that the violence resulting from the War on Drugs has been distributed asymmetrically and unjustly on a number of different axes including geography, race, class, and gender. Catalyst invites students and teachers to confront, question and interrupt the power asymmetries that have given rise to and are perpetuated by the War on Drugs. Proceeding from the feminist principle that “the personal is political,” we employ storytelling and narrative analysis as a means to connect students’ lived experiences to the broader forces that have given rise to the War on Drugs in a way that is personal and engaging. Likewise, our systems thinking approach to analyzing the War on Drugs allows students to connect micro level phenomena to macro level phenomena and vice versa. The overarching goal of this curriculum is for students to recognize that they have a stake in the conversations that surround drugs and drug policy, and to recognize themselves as agents of social change within the complex systems in which they live.

The history of the War on Drugs is littered with examples of seemingly well-intentioned policies going horribly awry. Accordingly, the following guide is geared less towards getting students to produce “solutions” and more towards prompting them to ask better questions. We strongly believe that asking questions that destabilize the narratives sustaining the War on Drugs and open space for considering alternatives is the first step towards a meaningful and just transformation. Our hope is that this curriculum guide will provide educators with a toolbox to turn their classrooms into a site for critical conversations about the War on Drugs.
FIGURE 1A

Traditional Prohibitionist Drug Education (e.g. D.A.R.E.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WAR (ON)</th>
<th>HARM</th>
<th>REDUCTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DRUGS</td>
<td></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Red Circle" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

FIGURE 1B

Progressive Harm Reduction-Based Drug Education (e.g. UpFront)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WAR (ON)</th>
<th>HARM</th>
<th>REDUCTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DRUGS</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Blue Circles" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Blue Circles" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

FIGURE 1C

Progressive Drug Education (e.g. Catalyst)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WAR (ON)</th>
<th>HARM</th>
<th>REDUCTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DRUGS</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Green Circles" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Green Circles" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We are indebted to ReverdeSer Colectivo, a grassroots harm reduction collective based in Mexico City for helping us articulate the above figures.
In this guide, you will find four different units carefully aligned with the New York City Social Studies Framework. Feel free to adapt this content to your pedagogical practice and the unique needs of your classroom. When facilitating discussions, use all, one, or just some of the guiding questions. We would rather your students engage in a longer and deeper conversation about just one question than engaging in a superficial conversation that checks off all the boxes.

In the introductory lesson, we introduce the concept of story and explore the stories students have been told about illegal substances. From there, Unit 1 moves to explore and problematize notions of “drugs,” “use” and “abuse” at the level of the individual and the human brain. With Unit 2, we zoom out to see how the systems and circuits at the level of the individual “plug into” the macro systems of the global economy, giving rise to complex chains of production, distribution and consumption. This unit is designed to throw into question any clean distinction between legal and illegal markets and the stereotypes we associate with each.

In Unit 3, we move to introduce the many different violences caused by the War on Drugs in different parts of the Americas - namely, the U.S., Colombia and Mexico. In Unit 4, we examine how the circulation of information via official, governmental discourse about drugs has shaped public opinion about the War on Drugs, and how the “official story” about the war on drugs often occludes the human costs of prohibitionist drug policies. Finally, in the concluding lesson, students return to the stories they generated in the introductory lesson and reconsider them in light of everything they have learned via the Catalyst curriculum.
# Table of Contents

## Introduction

- **Lesson 0:** What do we know about drugs?  
  14

## Unit 1

### Circuits of Desire: Psychoactive Substances and the Brain

- **Lesson 1:** What is a drug?  
  17
- **Lesson 2:** Why do people use drugs?  
  21
- **Lesson 3:** The use and abuse of drugs and drug users  
  26

## Unit 2

### Circuits of Commodities and Cash: Psychoactive Substances and the Global Economy

- **Lesson 4:** What did you have for breakfast?  
  31
- **Lesson 5:** Chocolate and cocaine: Supply chains and the War on Drugs  
  34
- **Lesson 6:** A porous border between the (il)legal  
  37

## Unit 3

### A War on Drugs or a War on People?

- **Lesson 7:** What is the War on Drugs and who are its victims?  
  41
- **Lesson 8:** The War on Drugs in the United States  
  45
- **Lesson 9:** The War on Drugs in Colombia  
  47
- **Lesson 10:** The War on Drugs in Mexico  
  50

## Unit 4

### Circuits of Information and Knowledge

- **Lesson 11:** Circuits of information: The official story and its critics  
  54
- **Lesson 12:** Visualizing violence  
  57

## Conclusion

### Conclusion: Better Questions

- **Lesson 13:** Activism and resistance in the face of the War on Drugs  
  60

## Appendix

- **Appendix:** Links, Images, and Handouts  
  64
Introduction

What do we know about drugs?

Problematizing Questions

- What stories have been told about drugs?
- How are these stories connected to particular points of view?

Materials

- Notebooks or paper
- Chart paper for KWL charts (or individual KWL charts per student)
- Pencils or pens
- Printed U.S. news about drugs (see page 15)

Preparation

- Print news pieces
- Collect students’ stories at the end of the class (you will use them at the end of the curriculum)

Vocabulary/Key Concepts

- Drug
- Stereotype

Standards

- Identify, describe and evaluate evidence about events from diverse sources
- Analyze evidence in terms of content, authorship, point of view, bias, purpose, format and audience
- Make inferences and draw conclusions from evidence
- Deconstruct and construct plausible and persuasive arguments, using evidence
**Part 1 (15 minutes)**

1. Have students collectively create a KWL chart. Hang three pieces of chart paper at the front of the room and have students write down what they know about the War on Drugs on the first sheet and what they want to know about the War on Drugs on the second.

2. Use the information generated by this activity to scaffold all subsequent learning and units. Sometimes what students “know” aren’t actually facts. Misinformation can be addressed through subsequent lessons or in the moment. Alternatively, to leave more time for discussion, have students fill out individual KWL charts as homework before this lesson.

**Part 2 (20 minutes)**

Individually, students will identify, and write in their notebooks, two paragraph-long stories they have been told about drugs/the War on Drugs. Ask students to be as specific as they can with details they remember about the two stories they have selected.

**Part 3 (10 minutes)**

Once students are ready, ask them to highlight the main characters of each story, and the adjectives they used to describe them. Next, encourage them to analyze in what light the stories present drug involvement, and what assumptions underpin how they portray drugs in their narratives.

**Part 4 (15 minutes)**

Create a roundtable discussion so students can share their stories. Create a space where students enjoy the freedom to share experiences and are able to take risks with their opinions. If you want to learn more about safe spaces click here, and here.

**Part 5 (30 minutes)**

1. To connect personal stories with broader social issues, and problematize common stereotypes connected to the use and commercialization of illegal substances, distribute these news articles among students.

   - Suspected Mexican cartel leader smuggled 44 pounds of fentanyl into NYC, officials say (Fox News)
   - Customs seizes $4 million in liquid meth from Mexican smuggler in Texas (Fox News)
   - Kansas lawmaker says African Americans are more susceptible to drug abuse because of ‘character makeup’ and ‘genetics’ (The Washington Post)
   - Who is behind Mexico’s drug-related violence? (BBC)
   - Mexico maelsstrom: how the drug violence got so bad (The Guardian)

2. Ask students to name some of the stereotypes these sources reproduce. Have students compare how similar social actors are portrayed in the different sources they are working with and record their observations in their notebooks. Then, with the objective of coming to understand how personal viewpoints affect what an individual says and writes, encourage them to consider within a group...

3. To close the activity, or as homework, ask students to go back to their initial stories and to approach them critically. Have them rewrite/edit their stories so that they do not reproduce common stereotypes.
Lesson 1
What is a drug?

In this lesson, students will question the distinction that is drawn between drugs and medicines and explore the social and political ramifications of drawing such a distinction.

Problematizing Questions
- What is a drug?
- What is a medicine?
- Why do we draw this distinction?

Materials
- Laptops with Internet access
- Large pad of paper
- Markers
- "Psycho Active Substance Information" Handout (see Appendix)

Preparation
- Place two large pieces of paper at the front of the room – one with the word Drug, one with the word Medicine
- Ready computers with Internet access

Vocabulary/Key Concepts
- Drug
- Medicine

Standards
- Define and frame questions about events and the world in which we live, and use evidence to answer these questions
- Identify, describe and evaluate evidence about events from diverse sources
- Analyze evidence in terms of content, authorship, point of view, bias, purpose, format and audience
- Make inferences and draw conclusions from evidence
- Deconstruct and construct plausible and persuasive arguments, using evidence
Part 1 (20 minutes)

1. Students brainstorm words they associate with each term and create a word cloud on each of the papers. Ask students to list some examples of drugs and examples of medicines. Then question:
   - What emotions do you attach to each of these words?
   - Why do we feel so differently about Drugs and Medicines?

2. After 15 minutes, ask students to write down their definition of "drug" and "medicine."

Part 2 (25 minutes)

1. Break students into groups of 2-3. With your guidance, assign each group a substance:

2. Using the Internet, students research their substance and fill out the Psycho Active Substance Information handout (see Appendix).

Recommended Resources: Drug Facts

For English-speaking students:
- The National Drug Policy Alliance
- DrugScience
- National Institute on Drug Abuse for Teens
- Alcohol and Drug Foundation
- Just Say Know

For Spanish-speaking students:
- Universo de las Drogas

Recommended Reading:


Click on the photo to the left to access.
Part 3 (25 minutes)

1. Ask students to reconvene and give brief presentations summarizing their findings. Have the students who are not presenting take notes and jot down any questions that occur to them during their classmates’ presentations.

2. When students present their decision on whether the substance is a drug or a medicine, ask difficult questions to problematize any categorical designation of the substance as either “good” or “bad”.

For example, in the case of Oxycontin:
- What is Oxycontin when it is prescribed to a cancer patient suffering acute pain?
- What is it when a person buys it on the street or starts injuring themselves on purpose so as to get prescriptions?

Or in the case of Cocaine:
- What is cocaine when it is used as an anesthetic?
- What is cocaine when it is used to fuel long work hours on Wall Street?
- What is it to somebody who is going into debt in order to support their cocaine habit?
- What is cocaine to somebody who uses the drug once a year during a night of partying?

Or chocolate:
- What is chocolate to a diabetic who eats a small amount of dark chocolate every day to help increase their sensitivity to insulin?
- What is chocolate to somebody who enjoys eating it every once in a while for dessert?
- What is chocolate to somebody who can’t stop eating it even though their doctor has advised them not to?

Part 4 (20 minutes)

1. At the end of the presentations, students revisit the word clouds they generated at the beginning of the lesson and re-evaluate whether they still apply. Steer the discussion with some of the following questions:

- If the substances themselves can’t be categorically defined as either a drug or a medicine, as either toxic or non-toxic, or as addictive or non-addictive, can the problem of drugs really be attributed to the substance alone?
- What is the effect of designating something either a drug or a medicine?
- Why do you think we are taught to regard certain substances as drugs and certain substances as medicines?
- Why don’t we think of alcohol, tobacco, coffee or chocolate as drugs?
Part 4 (cont.)

- Where do our attitudes towards “drugs” come from? (School? Church? Family? Friends?)

- How does morality influence the distinction we draw between drugs and medicines?

- What are some of the problems with lumping many of these very different substances together under the term “drugs”? Can we really talk about “drugs” in the abstract?

2. Propose the term “psychoactive substances” as a more accurate designator of these substances and ask students for their thoughts.

- Break down the word “psycho” - “active” and ask students what these words conjure for them.

- Ask students to write down a potential definition of “psychoactive substance” and have a few students share their definitions with the group.

- Share the World Health Organization’s definition of “psychoactive substances” with your students and ask them to respond to it:

  Substances that, when taken in or administered into one’s system, affect mental processes, e.g. cognition or affect. This term and its equivalent, psychotropic drug, are the most neutral and descriptive term for the whole class of substances, licit and illicit, of interest to drug policy. ‘Psychoactive’ does not necessarily imply dependence-producing.

- In what ways might talking about “psychoactive substances” instead of drugs help undo some of the stereotypes we associate with “drugs” or “medicines”?

- Are there any problems with lumping all these substances together under a single term (i.e. psychoactive substances)? Why might it be important to draw distinctions between different substances and their effects?

3. Remind the class to use everything they have learned so far when responding to these questions.
Lesson 2

Why do people use drugs?

*In this lesson, students will explore why people make use of psychoactive substances and will familiarize themselves with the basic neurobiology of the brain’s reward system.*

**Problematizing Question**
- Why do most humans use psychoactive substances?

**Materials**
- Projector or whiteboard
- Laptop computers or smart phones with Internet access
- "The Reward Circuit of the Brain" Handout (see Appendix)
- Sticky notes

**Preparation**
- Cue up links to online materials
- Print or photocopy handouts

**Vocabulary/Key Concepts**
- The Reward Circuit of the brain
- Positive feedback

**Standards**
- Define and frame questions about events and the world in which we live, and use evidence to answer these questions
- Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively
- Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally
- Make inferences and draw conclusions from evidence
- Deconstruct and construct plausible and persuasive arguments, using evidence
Part 1 (15 minutes)

1. Begin the lesson by having students brainstorm responses to the question: “Why do we consume psychoactive substances?” Invite students to write potential reasons on the board or, alternatively, have students write their responses on sticky notes.

2. Once everyone has contributed, have students take a step back and get them to identify any common patterns that emerge from their responses.

3. To summarize the discussion, indicate that studies of drug use have identified 4 main reasons that people consume psychoactive substances:

   1. They feel good/they’re fun.
   2. They are calming/relaxing (remove stress, pain, hunger, etc).
   3. They enhance performance (focus, energy, perception, etc.).
   4. Social bonding (peer pressure, social rituals among friends, etc.).

Part 2 (45 minutes)

1. Draw students attention to the fact that all 4 of the principal reasons that people use psychoactive substances is associated with some form of reward -- be it outright pleasure, the absence of pain/stress, improved performance on a given task, or social rewards such as a sense of belonging or community.

2. Explain that in order get to get a better understanding of how psychoactive substances produce sensations of pleasure and reward within humans, you are now going to review the brain circuitry responsible for producing reward.

3. Explain that the Reward Circuit of the brain is the product of evolution and is a mechanism that serves to ensure we pursue those activities and behaviours that are conducive to both our own survival and the survival of the species--for example, eating, physical activity and having sex. The fact that most human brains end up processing these activities as pleasurable and rewarding ensures that humans seek them out and engage in them repeatedly, thereby ensuring the survival of the species.

   But we are no longer cavemen struggling for survival. Our environments have changed greatly since those days. The modern world includes a much wider variety of pleasurable stimuli that engage the brain’s reward system: video games, porn, amusement park rides, fast cars, shopping--and of course, a wide range of psychoactive substances, from chocolate cakes to heroin. This expanded range of pleasures comes with an expanded risk that the circuitry responsible for processing rewards might malfunction and cause problems such as addiction.

4. Pass out the “Reward Circuit of the Brain” handout to all students. Click here to download.
5. Give an introductory overview of the reward circuitry of the brain (VTA, Amygdala, Nucleus Acumbens, Prefrontal Cortex and Hippocampus) and the different roles each part of the circuit plays in creating a reinforcing loop. For teachers who do not feel comfortable teaching this material this video on the reward pathway in the brain (Khan Academy) may be shown to their class.

6. Have students draw the circuit onto their “Reward Circuit of the Brain” handouts as it is explained to them.

ALTERNATIVELY

If students are having a hard time grasping the reward system, or if you are looking to simply reinforce what students have learned, have your students “act out” the reward circuit. Begin by assigning one student to “play” each component of the system.

For example:
- Juan will play the hand.
- Anita will play the mouth.
- Jane will play the VTA.
- Jerone will play the Amygdala.
- Ahmed will play the Hippocampus.
- Songqiao will play the Nucleus Acumbens.
- Sarita will play the Prefrontal Cortex.

- Using the example of eating a piece of chocolate cake, have students perform the chain of actions that results in the reward circuit of the brain.

For example:
- Juan, as the hand, begins by relaying the piece of cake to Anita, the mouth.
- Anita, as the mouth, relays the stimulus provided by the cake to Jane, the VTA.
- Jane, as the VTA, sends out dopamine signals to:
  - Jerone (the Amygdala) who in turn responds, “OMG, this is amazing, I’m so happy right now!”
  - Ahmed (the Hippocampus) who in turn responds, “OK, I’m going to be sure remember this!”
  - Songqiao (the Nucleus Acumbens) who in turn responds, “Let’s make this happen again!”
  - Sarita (the Prefrontal Cortex) who responds, “Ok, directing all attention towards making this happen again!”
- Together, Songqiao and Sarita relay the message to Juan (the hand) to repeat the initial action and the whole cycle repeats.

Encourage students to perform the circuit faster and faster and with more energy with each repetition, to illustrate the positive feedback effect.
Part 2 (cont.)

10. Once the students have grasped the mechanics of the reward circuit, ask them to consider what would happen to this circuit if left to its own devices.

11. Introduce the concept of “positive feedback” and solicit possible definitions of this term from students.

“Positive feedback” is the enhancement or amplification of an effect by its own influence on the process that gives rise to it.

In other words: when the product or behaviour produced by a system feeds back into the system and causes an increased production of same product or behaviour, ad infinitum.

For example, in the case of the reward circuit, the stimuli that sets the reward circuit into action results in behaviour that seeks out more of the same stimuli.

12. Explain that in healthy, functional brains there are systems in place to keep the reward circuit in check so that it doesn’t spiral out of control. These systems are comprised of “inhibitory neurons” whose job is to inhibit/slow down the reward circuit when it starts getting too active.

13. Explain that different drugs affect the functioning of this circuit in different ways and to different degrees.

- For example, cocaine causes an excess of dopamine to be released from the VTA and sets the reward circuit into overdrive.
- Alcohol, on the other hand, interferes with the inhibitory neurons that keep the reward circuit in check.

14. Call attention to the fact that this circuit is involved in a whole range of pleasurable behaviours from eating through to sex to playing games to exercise and that it is not unique to drug use. For this reason, people can become addicted to video games, sex, exercise just as they can become addicted to drugs. Addictions arise when certain neurochemical changes cause the reward circuitry of the brain to go into overdrive.

Part 3 (20 minutes)

1. Open a discussion about the wider implications of what has just been learned:

- What might we conclude about the nature of human desire based on what we’ve just learned about the neurobiology of reward?
- What would happen if we tried to prohibit all substances and activities that activate the reward circuit of the brain?
- What implications might what we’ve just learned about the reward circuitry of the brain have for discussions about the prohibition and criminalization of certain drugs?
Part 4 (10 minutes)

Have students re-cap key take away points from the lesson:

- There are many different reasons people use psychoactive substances, but most reasons involve some form of reward.

- Many psychoactive active substances activate the **reward circuitry of the brain**. Different psychoactive substances activate the reward circuitry of the brain in different ways and to different degrees.

- The reward circuitry of the brain forms a positive feedback loop which runs the risk of getting out of control if the mechanisms which normally keep it in balance are disrupted.

- Many other activities activate the reward circuitry of the brain (e.g. sex, eating, exercise).

- Any substance or activity that activates the reward circuitry of the brain can result in addiction.

**GOING BEYOND**

U.S. American journalist, satirist, cultural critic and scholar H.L. Mencken once described Puritanism as “the haunting fear that someone, somewhere, may be happy.”

Engage students to reflect about where our attitudes towards pleasure comes from. This can be done either in the form of a class discussion or as individual journaling.

- In what ways is the puritanical attitude towards pleasure described above still evident in contemporary U.S. society’s attitudes towards pleasure? In what ways have we moved away from these attitudes?
- Why do you think pleasure is surrounded by taboos and fear?
- Who has most shaped your attitudes towards pleasure (family? religion? school? TV/Movies?)
- How do attitudes about pleasure and pain affect discussions about drugs, drug users and the strategies with which our government ought to respond to them?

**Additional Reading:**

- [Why research is biased against pot to focus on its harm and not its benefits](Dallas News)
Lesson 3

The use and abuse of drugs and drug users

In this lesson, students will explore why some people’s substance use can turn into an addiction, and question whether the problems associated with drug abuse justify waging a War on Drugs.

Problematizing Questions

- Why do some people get addicted to psychoactive substances while the majority of others do not?

Materials

- Projector and screen
- Various slices of swiss cheese (either real or made of paper)
- Laser pointer

Preparation

- Have projector on standby and cue video
- Prepare three slices of swiss cheese for the “Swiss Cheese Model of Addiction” demonstration (i.e. punch a hole through 3 pieces of swiss cheese such that you can shine a laser pointer through them)

Vocabulary/Key Concepts

- Use vs. abuse
- Set and setting
- Swiss Cheese Model of Addiction

Standards

- Define and frame questions about events and the world in which we live, and use evidence to answer these questions
- Make inferences and draw conclusions from evidence
- Deconstruct and construct plausible and persuasive arguments, using evidence
- Work to influence those in positions of power to strive for extensions of freedom, social justice, and human rights
Part 1 (15 minutes)

Open the lesson with a discussion of the following:

- Why do you think some people can enjoy a few drinks every now and again while others become alcoholics? Why is it that some people can smoke socially while others end up smoking a pack a day? Why is it that some people can use drugs recreationally and others develop serious addictions?

- Why do you think that some people find a certain drug pleasurable while others might experience the same drug as unpleasant or as having no effect at all?

- What are some of the factors that might make somebody more or less likely to become addicted to a substance or an activity?

Part 2 (15 minutes)

1. When thinking about drug use and abuse, there is a tendency to think only about the drugs and not the wider contexts in which they are used or about the makeup of the person who is using them.

2. Psychiatrist Norman Zinberg argued that in order to understand drug use and abuse, we need to take into account both the context in which a given substance is being used and the specific individual who is consuming the substance. He coined the terms “set” and “setting” in order to talk about these factors.

3. “Set” refers to the mental and physical state a person brings to the experience: their thoughts, their mood and expectations, any genetic predispositions they might have towards mental illness or addiction, their psychological history (past traumas, confidence issues, family issues, anxiety, depression, etc.).

4. “Setting” refers to the context in which the drug is being consumed: where? when? with whom? in a context of poverty? in a (un)familiar setting? in a safe setting? in an unsafe setting?

5. When thinking about drug use and abuse, we need to take into account not only the chemical composition of the substance being consumed and the dose at which it is consumed, but also the “set” of the person taking the drug and the “setting” in which it is consumed.
Part 3 (20 minutes)

A 2008 report from the United Nations Office on Drug Control, showed that only about 10% of illegal drug users are in fact problematic drug users.

The Swiss Cheese Model of Addiction helps us further understand how drug, set and setting interact in different ways such that some individuals end up abusing drugs, while the majority of drug users can use drugs recreationally with less risk of becoming addicts.

1. Explain the Swiss Cheese Model of Addiction (Khan Academy) to your students. If you are feeling ambitious, demonstrate the model with actual pieces of swiss cheese and a laser pointer!

2. Have students analyze the Swiss Cheese model in terms of “Set” and “Setting”
   - Which risk factors form part of the “set” (e.g. biological and psychological factors)?
   - Which risk factors form part of the “setting” (e.g. social factors)?

3. If time permits, show students the following video about addiction. Have them analyze the Rat Park experiment in terms of “set” and “setting” and draw analogies between the experiment and the swiss cheese model of addiction. For example, ask students what the “social” layer of swiss cheese would look like for the rat kept in the cage alone vs. that of the rats kept in the enriched, more social environment. (i.e. the lone rat’s slice would have much larger holes).

4. Be sure to stress that there is no way to be 100% sure about one’s own risk factors. Risk factors are elevated for adolescents whose brains are still developing, whose psychological states are often in a state of flux and whose social worlds are often unpredictable and unstable. Therefore, the safest, surest way to avoid falling into drug abuse is to refrain from using drugs on a regular basis (including the legal ones like alcohol and tobacco).

5. Having made the above disclaimer, open space for a discussion:
   - Does any of this information strike you as surprising?
   - Does it contradict what you have been previously taught about drugs and addiction?
   - "Psychoactive substances are the root cause of addiction and therefore they should be prohibited and their users criminalized." Agree or disagree? Defend your position with evidence.

Part 4 (20 minutes)

Watch the following TED Talk given by Dr. Carl Hart. Encourage students to take notes, paying particular attention to any new information that surprised them.

Let’s quit abusing drug users (TED Talk, Dr. Carl Hart) (19:01)
Part 5 (20 minutes)

1. Engage students in a closing discussion of Carl Hart’s presentation and what surprised them about it.
   - What implications does the material covered by today’s lesson have when thinking about the War on Drugs?
   - Does it make sense to criminalize drug users?
   - Does the rate of addiction/problematic drug use justify the tactics we currently use to prohibit and criminalize drugs?

2. Ask students to imagine that they are in control of the government. Based on everything they have learned about psychoactive substances so far, what strategies would they use to reduce the problems associated with drug abuse?

Additional Resources on Drug Abuse and Addiction:

The Khan Academy has an excellent, clear series on the biology and psychology of drug use and abuse, found here.
CIRCUITS OF
COMMODITIES
AND CASH
Psychoactive Substances
and the Global Economy
Lesson 4

What did you have for breakfast?

In this lesson, students will better understand the connection between individual choices and global networks of trade. Students will be encouraged to analyze where their breakfast comes from. In this lesson, they will first define the term commodity, and then problematize their choices as consumers in a global economy.

Problematizing Questions

- What is a commodity?
- How does consumption link us to distant parts of the planet?

Materials

- Poster paper
- Markers
- Printed copies of global maps for all students
- Headphones
- A pebble

Preparation

- Ask students to bring the packages of the food they had for breakfast
- Computers with Internet access

Vocabulary/Key Concepts

- Commodity
- Global trade
- Supply chain

Standards

- Identify, describe, and evaluate evidence about events from diverse sources
- Analyze evidence in terms of content, authorship, point of view, bias, purpose, format, and audience
- Describe, analyze, and evaluate arguments of others
- Make inferences and draw conclusions from evidence
- Analyze the ways in which incentives influence what is produced and distributed in a market system
**Part 1 (20 minutes)**

1. Explain to students that you have looked at the circuits of the body that underpin drug use; now you are going to zoom out and explore the circuits of the global economy that underpin drug use.

2. Show students the headphones you brought. Ask how many of them have or would like to have headphones. Next, have students list the reasons why they want headphones. Take notes on one poster paper. Use the following questions to direct their answers towards notions of:
   - **Utility**: Are these useful? How so? What do we get from buying headphones?
   - **Desirability**: Do we find these desirable? How many people find them desirable? Why?, and
   - **Value**: Does the value of headphones change over time? Are older versions of these headphones cheaper? What makes value change?

3. Show students the pebble. Use the same questionnaire, and take notes on another poster paper.

4. Have students identify the differences between the headphones and the pebble. Write on the board a collective definition of the term commodity.

**DEFINITION**

A *commodity* is a thing that satisfies human wants -- a thing that is desired. Commodities acquire value through economic exchange; that means value is not intrinsic, it shifts according to parameters of utility and scarcity.

**Part 2 (20 minutes)**

1. Students will gather information on food supply chains to **design a poster** with a focus on global trade. To start, remind students that we interact daily with thousands of commodities, some of which are food.

2. Ask students to check the packages they brought from home and list the food they had for breakfast. Group students according to types of breakfast (i.e. cereal; hot chocolate; eggs; bagels; bananas).

3. Distribute the printed copies of the global map. Ask students to search information that will allow them to:
   - Locate the places (countries and regions, if possible) where their food comes from
   - Trace the routes their food follows before hitting the shelves of the supermarket and their tables
**Part 3 (40 minutes)**

1. Invite students to go deeper in their search and find information about those who produce their food. Ask them to consider:
   - Food producers’ living conditions, property rights over land, monthly wages, and social security
   - The sequence of processes involved in the production and distribution of the commodities (supply chain)
   - The routes that food follows from source to sale to become part of their breakfast

2. Before students turn to the Internet, remind them to: check out the source; examine the evidence presented; check out the limitations of the information they find, and decide to what extent they accept the author’s interpretations.

3. Encourage students to share their findings, and consider the journey their food takes from distant locations to their tables. Build a collaborative definition of global trade (worldwide business that involves the import and export of goods and services across international borders; its benefits are not always equal).

4. Have students design the posters.

**Part 4 (10 minutes)**

1. Have students hang their posters on classroom walls. To prepare for a meaningful discussion, ask students to do a gallery walk. While they analyze their classmates’ posters, ask them to reflect about the answers to the following questions:
   - How are our individual choices connected to the lives of farmers across the world? What makes you say that?
   - Do we feel comfortable with the way in which our money supports (or does not support) those producing our food?
   - What links can we identify between today’s class and our broader discussion about psychoactive substances?
   - Do we find any connection between individual consumption and social change? How so?

2. Close the session with a plenary. Encourage students to do this same exercise with their favorite commodities (including smart phones and headphones!).

3. Save students’ posters for next class!

---

**Tips for Designing a Poster**

- Before you start your poster, write on a piece of paper the information you want to include. Indicate where you think your poster visual elements should go.
- Think of an appealing and clear title for your poster.
- As you design your poster, keep in mind the following: content, clarity, balance, organization, and use of colors.
- Remember: a good poster must speak for itself. Use graphs, charts, pictures, and figures (even the printed map your students just used!).
- A successful poster is engaging, attractive, informative and easy to understand.

**Tips for Assessing a Poster**

- Assess overall appearance, including text size, the use of white space, the balance between visuals, and texts, flow and organization. Also consider the main points the poster makes, and its capacity to represent the trade routes.
Lesson 5
Chocolate and cocaine: Supply chains and the War on Drugs

In this lesson, students will gain a greater understanding of global trade, and the multi-step journey of manufactured goods. This comprehension enables them to understand the economics behind the War on Drugs, and start to problematize the dichotomy between legal and illegal markets.

Problematizing Questions
- How are cocoa and coca alike? How are they different?
- What series of processes make a supply chain?

Materials
- Board to write on or kraft paper
- Tape
- Laptops with Internet access
- Resources on the cocoa-chocolate and coca-cocaine supply chains

Preparation
- Ready computers with Internet access
- Queue all links to the articles on supply chains needed for the lesson

Vocabulary/Key Concepts
- Commodity
- Demand
- Money/Cash
- Market
- Supply chain
- Value

Standards
- Analyze the ways in which incentives influence what is produced and distributed in a market system
- Identify, describe and evaluate evidence about events from diverse sources
- Make inferences and draw conclusions from evidence
**Part 1 (30 minutes)**

1. Use the posters from the last lesson to re-introduce the term *supply chain* and give students the opportunity to list supply chains in which they currently participate. Present chocolate as a supply chain where the greatest number of people take part during Valentine’s Day, Easter, Halloween, and Christmas.

2. Divide the class into four groups. Each group will search for information on the Internet in order to respond to the following questions:

   - **Group 1 (Growing, Harvesting, Fermenting, and Drying)**
     - Who produces cocoa? Where? How? How are these farmers supported by the State? How much time/effort does it take to produce cocoa?

   - **Group 2 (Marketing, Packaging, and Transporting)**
     - Where do farmers sell their cocoa? Who buys it? Who defines the prices? How much money do farmers make? Which companies that you know are involved in this business?
     - Who transports the cocoa to the industries where chocolate is produced?

   - **Group 3 (Roasting, Grinding, Pressing, and Chocolate-Making)**
     - Who transforms cocoa into chocolate? Which companies that you know are involved in this business? Are these companies paying taxes? Can we call chocolate a profitable business? For whom?
     - Who transports the chocolate to the stores in which it is sold? What are the costs/risks involved in transporting the chocolate? How do these costs/risks affect the price of chocolate?

   - **Group 4 (Distributing and Eating)**
     - Who eats/drinks chocolate? How frequently? What’s the difference between the amount of money received by the cocoa farmer and the amount of money paid by the consumer?
     - What happens to the money that is generated from the sale of chocolate?

3. Request students surf the Internet to research the activities that are part of the phase of the supply chain they’ve been assigned. To give them a starting point, refer to the following links on the Economics of Chocolate:

   - [The Economics of Chocolate](https://oxford.universitypressblog.com) (Oxford University Press Blog)
   - [The World of Chocolate: The Economics of Chocolate](https://smithsonianmag.com) (Smithsonian Magazine)

**Additional Resource:**

Cocoa Value Chain: From Farmer to Consumer (World Cocoa Foundation)
Part 2 (30 minutes)

1. Invite students to represent the cocoa-chocolate supply chain on kraft paper.

2. Use students’ visual representation to expand the notion of supply chain as an interconnected system, where multiple actors, institutions and social practices overlap. Also highlight how profit is unequally distributed along the supply chain, and that money gets concentrated in the big industries that turn cocoa into edible chocolate.

Part 3 (20 minutes)

1. Now, invite students to read this article. After they finish reading, encourage them to draw a parallel between the cocoa-chocolate, and the coca-cocaine supply chains. Encourage students to compare these commodities, and reflect upon the key role consumers play in supporting the circulation of particular commodities.

2. Close this activity by asking the following questions:
   - What similarities and differences can we find between both supply chains?
   - What are the implications of being part of an illegal supply chain?
   - Who defines the boundaries between what is legal and illegal? Let students know that you will be tackling this issue in the next class.

Additional Resource:
Lessons from the Failed War on Drugs (Spiegel Online)
Lesson 6

A porous border between the (il)legal

In this lesson, students will problematize the dichotomy between legal and illegal markets through the analysis of chocolate and cocaine. This understanding gives them the opportunity to evaluate the pervasiveness and sustainability of the drug economy.

Problematizing Questions

- How are the boundaries between the legal and illegal markets built? Who draws these boundaries?
- Where do we stand through our consumption habits?

Materials

- Whiteboard, smartboard or kraft paper
- Tape
- Laptops with Internet access
- Two pounds of rice

Preparation

- Ready computers with Internet access
- Print copies of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
- Prepare flash card with the term "Money Laundering"
- Bring a kilo (two lbs.) of rice

Vocabulary/Key Concepts

- Commodity
- Money/Cash
- Supply Chain
- Value
- Money Laundering

Standards

- Analyze the ways in which incentives influence what is produced and distributed in a market system
- Identify, describe and evaluate evidence about events from diverse sources
- Make inferences and draw conclusions from evidence
- Participate in activities that focus on a classroom, school, community, state, or national issue or problem
- Fulfill social and political responsibilities associated with citizenship in a democratic society and interdependent global community by developing awareness of and/or engaging in the political process
Part 1 (10 minutes)

Encourage students to brainstorm the meaning of the term **legal** (permitted by law). Then, do the same with the term **illegal** (contrary to or forbidden by law).

Draw a comparative chart on the board with these terms as titles. Invite students to list examples for each. Draw students’ attention to the fact that in our daily lives we normally conceive the legal and the illegal as opposite. Start your lesson by telling students that you are going to challenge those assumptions by drawing from two cases they now know well: cocoa and coca.

Part 2 (30 minutes)

1. Watch an excerpt of the 2010 documentary *The Dark Side of Chocolate* (from 0:00 to 12:53), and ask students to read this article on "Child Labor and Slavery in the Chocolate Industry" (by the Food Empowerment Project).

2. With the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child in hand, have students, in groups of three, discuss the answers to the following questions:

   - Did you ever expect a dark side in something we love as much as chocolate?
   - What are the illegal practices presented in the reading and/or the video?
   - How do we know these are illegal?
   - What rights are these practices violating?
   - What social forces are coercing children and their families into these marginal positions?
   - How do we make sense of illegal practices in a legal industry?
   - Given these practices and the negative effects they have on society, should chocolate be made illegal?

Part 3 (20 minutes)

1. Ask students to watch an excerpt from the video "Making Cocaine in the Amazon" (from 0:33 – 2:45) from the BBC Series *Amazon with Bruce Parry*, then invite them to answer these questions and draw a parallel with the cocoa case:

   - What are the illegal practices presented in the video?
   - How do we know these are illegal?
   - What rights are these practices violating?
   - What social forces are coercing children and their families into these marginal positions?
   - What are the commonalities between these two commodities? Consider:
     - Geographical location
     - Affected populations
     - Supply chain structure
Bring back the concept of “positive feedback” that was covered in Lesson 2.

In what ways does the cocaine supply chain resemble the reward circuit in the brain?

What effect does the high-selling price of cocaine have upon the circuit formed by the cocaine supply chain?

How might the cocaine supply chain be described in terms of positive feedback?

What role do prohibitionist drug policies play in fueling the positive feedback effect that is at play within global drug markets?

3. Ask your students to write in their journals the answers to these questions (you can also participate):
   - How much money can cartels make selling only cocaine in the U.S.? (Ask students to do the math).
   - What’s the relation between legal/illegal and price?
   - If cocaine was legalized (like the rice kilo you just saw), would it have the same price?
   - Why does making a substance illegal make it so much more expensive?
   - If cocaine were suddenly to sell for the same price as rice, what effect do you think this would have on the crime and violence that currently surround the production, trafficking and distribution of this substance?

4. Encourage your students to imagine they have $3 billion USD (that’s what Forbes claimed El Chapo, a drug lord, had back in 2014). Ask them: Where do you hide that money? It’s just too much, what do you do with it?

5. Explain to your students that drug dealers have been creating ways to put the money back in the bank without raising the suspicions of the authorities -- in many cases with the help of some of the biggest banks on Wall Street.

6. Watch this video on Money Laundering, and then distribute these articles: “HSBC Helped Terrorists, Iran, Mexican Drug Cartels Launder Money, Senate Report Says,” and “Outrageous HSBC Settlement Proves the Drug War Is a Joke.” Have students read the articles individually, and then explore with them the ethical implications of money laundering in the HSBC case.
   - How do you feel about a bank that profits from the violence and pain caused by a system that makes drug illegal?
   - Did you find the verdict fair? How so? What would you do differently?
   - Do you think banks like HSBC will go on to change their conduct after this scandal?
   - What are the dangers of having institutions like HSBC that are deemed “too big to fail”? What effect do such institutions have on a democratic society?
   - Which communities end up bearing the punishments of the War on Drugs?

7. To close the class, invite students to reflect upon other cases where justice has explicitly benefited some individuals over others.
UNIT THREE

A WAR ON DRUGS OR A WAR ON PEOPLE?
Lesson 7

What is the War on Drugs and who are its victims?

In this lesson, students begin to explore the racist origins of U.S. drug policy and analyze the human toll of the War on Drugs. In doing so, they expand their ability to analyze visual narratives. Here, your students will be able to come up with a first definition of the War on Drugs.

Problematizing Questions
- What is the War on Drugs?
- Who benefits from the War on Drugs?
- How does race, class, gender and geography influence a person’s experience of the War on Drugs?
- Who has the capacity to end the War on Drugs?

Materials
- A board to write on or kraft paper
- Laptops with Internet access
- Projector and screen

Preparation
- Prepare projector and have videos on standby
- Print out images for students to analyze/cue the images on the laptops

Vocabulary/Key Concepts
- Race
- Class
- Gender
- Geography
- Stereotypes

Standards
- Identify similarities and differences between geographic regions across historical time periods, and relate differences in geography to different historical events and outcomes
- Recognize the relationship between geography, economics, and history as a context for events and movements, and as a matrix of time and place
- Connect historical developments to specific circumstances of time and place and to broader regional, national, or global processes, and draw connections to the present (where appropriate)
- Ask geographic questions about where places are located, why their locations are important, and how their locations are related to the locations of other places and people
**Part 1 (10 minutes)**

Open the lesson with an exploratory discussion. Write down students’ answers on kraft paper so that the group can refer back to their initial impressions over the course of subsequent lessons and see how/if their thinking evolves. If you want to create an extra writing opportunity for your students, invite them to go back to their journals and write the answers to these questions:

- What is the “War on Drugs” and who declared it?
- Is it possible to fight a war against plants and chemicals?
- What are wars usually fought over?
  - Territory?
  - Capital/Profit?
  - Ideology/Values?
- What do you think the War on Drugs is being fought over?
- Is it possible to “win” a war on drugs? What would a victory look like?
- Who are the victims in the War on Drugs?
- Who benefits from the War on Drugs?

**Part 2 (30 minutes)**

1. Watch one or both of the following videos:
   - Ethan Nadelman on [the racist origins of drug policy in the U.S.](https://example.com) (5:10)
   - Excerpt from [The House I Live In](https://example.com) (0:00-3:06)

2. Split students into three groups and assign each group a substance to analyze. Each group receives a collection of historical images/sources related to their substance. See the appendix for the images associated with each group.

   - **Group 1: Opium**
     - Images: White morphine habitués/Chinese opium dens
   - **Group 2: Cocaine**
     - Images: Commercial cocaine marketed to White people/“Negro cocaine fiend”
   - **Group 3: Marijuana**
     - Images: Mexican marijuana/commercial hemp

3. Give students 10 minutes to analyze the images in their groups:
   - What words/images catch your attention? Why?
   - What kinds of people/characters are portrayed in these images?
     - How does race operate in these images?
     - How does gender operate in these images?
   - What ideas are perpetuated by these images?
   - Can we call the ideas represented by these images stereotypes?
Part 2 (cont.)

- What changes do you see in these images over time?
- What is the historical context of these images?
- What was happening in the U.S. at the time they were published?
- Towards which historical events or processes do you think they are responding?
- What do we learn about the history of the War on Drugs through these images?

4. Reconcile the entire class and have each group give a brief presentation of their findings. Place all images at the front of the class and once all groups have presented, conduct a meta-analysis of the images:

- What common themes run throughout these images?
- How are women represented in these images?
- How is race represented in these images?

Part 3 (40 minutes)

Split students into four groups. Let students know they will analyze four visual narratives on the War on Drugs. Each group should watch one of the videos below. Have students take notes on the different victims of the War on Drugs, paying special attention to the ways in which race, class/occupation, gender and geography influence different people’s experience of the War on Drugs. Bring the class together and have each group give a 5-minute presentation summarizing their observations for their peers.

- Mexico’s Drug War (Peter Wall Institute for Advanced Studies) (13:25)
- Colombia’s Drug War (from Faces of the Colombian War [2010]) (0:00-13:12)
- The Gendered Impacts of the War on Drugs (Drugreporter) (13:38)
- Race and Class in the War on Drugs (The New York Times) (14:02)

Part 4 (10 minutes)

1. Close the lesson with the following discussion:

- Are there any similarities between the original groups who were persecuted by the first drug laws in the U.S. and the groups who continue to be negatively impacted by contemporary drug policy?
- What similarities and what differences exist between the violences of the War on Drugs in the U.S., Mexico and Colombia?
- In what ways do race, class, gender and geography influence a given individual’s experience of the War on Drugs?
- Is the War on Drugs really a war on drugs or is it a war on people? Why do you think governments continue to call it a “War on Drugs”?

Return to the questions and answers offered in the opening discussion and give students the opportunity to change or reframe their responses.

2. Remind students of the importance of thinking about race, class, gender and geography throughout their analysis of the War on Drugs and the ways in which it impacts different communities across the continent.
Given the complexity of the history and politics surrounding the War on Drugs, we recommend taking three lessons to screen the following three documentaries and to read the following three texts to provide your students with a general overview of the conflict as it has played out in the U.S., Mexico and Colombia. Please remember these are not the only countries that have been affected by this policy. The War on Drugs is a phenomenon with global dimensions.

We encourage teachers to take some of the post-viewing questions, and share them with students so they can complete a graphic organizer while they watch the documentaries. This will allow students to feel prepared for a full group discussion.

The documentaries contain graphic and disturbing content. We strongly suggest teachers watch the films before hand and use their discretion in skipping over those parts of the documentary that may be too upsetting for their students, or in selecting excerpts to show their classes.
Lesson 8

The War on Drugs in the U.S.

In this lesson, students will gain an understanding of the relationship between the War on Drugs as it is waged domestically within the U.S., specifically mass incarceration, police brutality and institutionalized racism. They will do so while also expanding their abilities to analyze visual narratives.

Problematicizing Question
- How does the U.S. criminal justice system fuel and perpetuate a racist system of mass incarceration under the pretext of the War on Drugs?

Materials
- Projector and screen
- Ava DuVernay’s documentary, *13th* (available on Netflix)

Preparation
- Assign the chapter reading to students prior to class
- Prepare projector and cue film

Vocabulary/Key Concepts
- Mass incarceration
- Police brutality
- “The New Jim Crow”
- Stop and Frisk
- Institutionalized racism
- Mandatory minimums

Standards
- Identify similarities and differences between geographic regions across historical time periods, and relate differences in geography to different historical events and outcomes
- Recognize the relationship between geography, economics, and history as a context for events and movements, and as a matrix of time and place
- Connect historical developments to specific circumstances of time and place and to broader regional, national, or global processes and draw connections to the present (where appropriate)
- Ask geographic questions about where places are located, why their locations are important, and how their locations are related to the locations of other places and people
Part 1 (20 minutes)

Review the assigned reading with students and answer any questions or concerns they might have:

- Did the reading change anything you thought you knew?
- Did the reading change any of your beliefs?
- Did the reading answer any questions you had?
- What new questions did the reading raise for you?

Part 2 (50 minutes)

Screen the first 50 minutes of Ava DuVernay’s documentary, 13th (2006, Netflix).

Part 3 (20 minutes)

The discussion of the film will have two components: First, a narrative analysis of DuVernay’s piece. Then, a guided analysis of the film’s content.

1. Narrative analysis:

- What is the theme of the documentary? How is the theme constructed?
- What is the argument of the documentary?
- What is the evidence that supports the argument?
- What social actors are represented in the film? How does DuVernay represent them? In what context do they appear? How do you contrast their living conditions?

Let students know that DuVernay’s 13th is a political documentary that denounces mass incarceration as a specific form of social injustice linked to the War on Drugs. Emphasize that crafting and telling stories is also a form of talking truth to power, and promoting social change.

2. Content analysis:

- Based on what we’ve just seen and read, who benefits from the War on Drugs as it is waged in the U.S.? In what ways do they benefit?
- Who suffers the negative consequences of the War on Drugs in the U.S.? In what ways do they suffer?
- What do you understand the term “institutionalized racism” to mean? How might we define this term?
- In what ways are race, class, gender and geography at play in determining who benefits from and who is penalized by the War on Drugs in the U.S.?
- What would happen if we eliminated prisons from our justice system?
- Is it possible to imagine a society free of police? What would it look like? Why might it be difficult for some of us to imagine?

Additional Resource:

For teachers interested in taking a more in-depth look at issues of race, justice, and the War on Drugs in the U.S., Teaching for Tolerance has a wonderful resource for teaching Michele Alexander’s *The New Jim Crow*. 

Source: 13th (2016, Netflix)
Lesson 9

The War on Drugs in Colombia

In this lesson, students will gain a basic understanding of the War on Drugs as it has been waged in Colombia and the role that the U.S. government has played in the longest-running armed conflict in the Western Hemisphere. Students will also begin to think comparatively about the War on Drugs as it is waged in the U.S. and Colombia. Comparing a documentary and a soap opera trailer, students gain deeper understanding of media distortions on the War on Drugs.

Problematizing Question

- What does the War on Drugs look like outside of the U.S.?
- Why does the U.S. government support the War on Drugs in Colombia?
- How does the War on Drugs overlap with Colombia’s Armed Conflict?

Materials

- Projector and screen
- Reading: Colombia’s Civil Conflict (Council on Foreign Relations)
- Infographic: The Human Rights Costs During Plan Colombia (Latin America Working Group)
- Documentary by Gerard Ungerman: Plan Colombia: Cashing in on the Drug War Failure
- Soap opera trailer: El Capo

Preparation

- Assign the reading material and infographic to students prior to class
- Invite students to look into other sources to complement the reading material
- Prepare projector and cue film

Vocabulary/Key Concepts

- Paramilitary
- Guerrilla
- Armed Conflict
- Aerial Fumigation
- Cartel
- Narcotrafficking
- Corruption
- Militarization

Standards

- Identify similarities and differences between geographic regions across historical time periods, and relate differences in geography to different historical events and outcomes
- Recognize the relationship between geography, economics, and history as a context for events and movements, and as a matrix of time and place
- Connect historical developments to specific circumstances of time and place and to broader regional, national, or global processes and draw connections to the present (where appropriate)
- Ask geographic questions about where places are located, why their locations are important, and how their locations are related to the locations of other places and people
**Part 1 (15 minutes)**

Review the assigned reading with students and answer any questions or concerns they might have. While explaining Colombia’s armed conflict, remember:

- Drug trafficking has been the main source of income for left-wing guerrillas and right-wing paramilitary groups.
- Drugs have increased the financial and armed power of non-state actors, therefore increasing political violence across urban and rural areas of the country.
- President Juan Manuel Santos believes the world must re-think the War on Drugs.

**Part 2 (15 minutes)**


**Part 3 (20 minutes)**

Questions for discussion (select the ones you feel most comfortable with):

- Based on what we’ve just seen and read, who benefits from the War on Drugs in Colombia?
- Why do you think the U.S. is invested in fighting a War on Drugs in Colombia?
- What justification does the U.S. have for intervening in Colombian affairs?
- What would happen if the government of Colombia decided to fumigate tobacco plantations in the United States?
- Who are the main actors in the conflict in Colombia? What role do they play in the violence?
- In what ways are race, class, gender and geography at play in determining who benefits and who suffers in the War on Drugs?
- Do the “successes” of Plan Colombia justify the huge costs it had in terms of human lives lost, displacement and human rights abuses?
- For whom was Plan Colombia a success?
- For whom was Plan Colombia a disaster?
- What similarities and differences do you observe between the War on Drugs as it is felt within the U.S. and the War on Drugs as it experienced in Colombia?

If you want to learn more about U.S. participation in Latin America’s War on Drugs, watch this video from The Economics Detective on *The Drug War in Latin America* (6:11).

**Part 4 (5 minutes)**

Screen the trailer for *El Capo* (3:55) (a popular, and problematic Colombian soap opera).
Part 5 (20 minutes)

Questions for discussion (select the ones you feel most comfortable with):

- Based on this trailer, who are the main actors in the conflict in Colombia? What role do they play in the violence?

- In what ways are race, class, gender and geography represented in this soap opera?

- Considering how this soap opera represents the War on Drugs, do you find any analogy in Hollywood productions?

- From your perspective, how do soap operas like this one shape reality?

- How are the lives of drug dealers and their families represented here? How do you compare this representation of the armed conflict in Colombia with Gerard Ungerman’s documentary?

- How do mass media trivialize social suffering? Encourage your students to share more examples.

Invite your students to close this session by brainstorming alternative narratives to tell the real stories related to the War on Drugs.
Lesson 10
The War on Drugs in Mexico

In this lesson, students will gain a basic understanding of the War on Drugs as it is being waged in Mexico and the role that the U.S. government is playing in the conflict. Students will think comparatively about the history and effects of the War on Drugs in the U.S., Colombia and Mexico.

Problematizing Questions
- What does the War on Drugs look like in Mexico?
- In what ways is the U.S. government involved in what is happening in Mexico?
- How do the Colombian and Mexican cases compare?

Materials
- Projector and screen
- Reading: Mexico’s Drug War (Council on Foreign Relations)
- Video: The War on Drugs (Vox; The Global Commission on Drug Policy)
- Video: The Newsmakers: Mexico’s Drug War (TRT World)
- Video: America’s Guns: Arming Mexico’s Cartels (Al Jazeera)

Preparation
- Assign the reading material to students prior to class
- Prepare projector and cue videos

Vocabulary/Key Concepts
- Merida Initiative
- The Disappeared
- State violence
- Cartel
- Narcotrafficking
- Kingpin Strategy
- Corruption
- Militarization

Standards
- Identify similarities and differences between geographic regions across historical time periods, and relate differences in geography to different historical events and outcomes
- Recognize the relationship between geography, economics, and history as a context for events and movements, and as a matrix of time and place
- Connect historical developments to specific circumstances of time and place and to broader regional, national, or global processes and draw connections to the present (where appropriate)
- Ask geographic questions about where places are located, why their locations are important, and how their locations are related to the locations of other places and people
Part 1 (30 minutes)

1. To summarize the history and effects of the War on Drugs, watch the War on Drugs (3:22) video clip with your students.

2. Draw a parallel between the actors and institutions that are represented in the video, and the ones that enforce the War on Drugs nowadays.

3. Review the concept of "the balloon effect" with your students and explain that when the U.S. and Colombian governments cracked down on drug cartels in South America, this only had the effect of pushing trade routes and organized crime into other parts of the continent -- namely, Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean.

The Balloon Effect described:

"The idea is that, given the huge global demand for illicit drugs, drug producers and traffickers don’t just cease to exist when governments go after them. Production and trafficking instead move to other areas, causing the drug trade and the violence that often comes with it to spread. This effect has occurred again and again throughout the history of the war on drugs. During the 1990s, drug production moved to Colombia from Peru and Bolivia after crackdowns in both the latter countries. After Mexico and Colombia, with U.S. aid, went after drug traffickers and producers during the 2000s, criminal operations shifted from Colombia to neighboring Ecuador and Venezuela, and from Mexico to Central America’s Northern Triangle (El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala). In these cases, production didn’t slow for long, if at all. It just went elsewhere.

This trend is often called the balloon effect, because squeezing an inflated balloon just moves the air around, instead of getting rid of it. But it’s also occasionally compared to a hydra, like in this video, because cutting off one head just causes a few more heads — or drug traffickers and producers — to sprout."

Source: The biggest problem with the war on drugs, explained in one video — with dragons, by German Lopez (Vox)

Part 2 (20 minutes)

1. Review the assigned reading with students and discuss any questions or concerns they might have.

2. Watch The Newsmakers: Mexico’s Drug War video (7:38). Discuss with your students:
   - What similarities and differences do you observe between the War on Drugs as it is felt within the U.S., the War on Drugs as it experienced in Colombia and the War on Drugs as it is being fought in Mexico?
   - Based on what we’ve just seen and read, who benefits from the War on Drugs in Mexico?
   - Why do you think the U.S. is invested in fighting a War on Drugs in Mexico?
   - Do you think the U.S. is justified in intervening in Mexican affairs?
   - Do you think the Mexican government has a right to intervene in U.S. politics and demand that U.S. lawmakers introduce gun controls to stop the flow of guns from the U.S. into Mexico?
Part 2 (cont.)

- Who are the main actors in the War on Drugs in Mexico? What role do they play in the violence?
- Based on what we’ve just seen and read, who suffers the negative consequences of the War on Drugs in Mexico?
- Why do you think so much of the violence in Mexico has been concentrated around the border?
- In what ways are race, class, gender and geography at play in determining who benefits and who suffers in the War on Drugs in Mexico?

Part 3 (30 minutes)

Show Al Jazeera’s video on *America’s Guns: Arming Mexico’s Cartels* (26:00).

Part 4 (10 minutes)

End this session with a brainstorm about what the U.S. government could do within its own borders to stop the violence generated by the War on Drugs.

**LOOPING BACK**

Having now seen the devastating violence that has been unleashed by the War on Drugs in different parts of the Western hemisphere, return once again to the concept of "positive feedback".

- In what ways can we understand violence as a positive feedback effect (i.e. violence only begets more violence)?
- What are some examples we’ve seen in the previous three lessons that illustrate the positive feedback effect of violence?
- Is violence ever justified?
- What tactics can used to interrupt these spiraling cycles of violence?

Consider using this 1972 video clip of Angela Davis (2:28) talking about violence as a springboard into this discussion. If video/documentary time is limited in your school, split the group into pairs and ask students to choose readings that tackle the interconnection between different forms of violence. Next, have each group present their findings through an infographic or poster.
Lesson 11

The official story and its critics

In this lesson, students explore the role that political rhetoric plays in shaping public opinion about drugs and drug policy. Here, students analyze official, government discourse about the War on Drugs and contrast it with other more critical points of view. Students are encouraged to identify and problematize popular stereotypes connected to the War on Drugs and reproduced by widely-spread discourses.

Problematizing Question

- How do politicians and their critics talk about the War on Drugs?

Materials

- Computers with Internet access
- Paper
- Pens
- "Instructions for Analyzing an Official Discourse" and "...a Critique" Handouts (see Appendix)

Preparation

- Assign the reading material to students prior to class (see page 55 for the full list of reading materials)
- Prepare projector and cue video

Vocabulary/Key Concepts

- Official discourse
- Media
- Stereotypes
- Primary sources

Standards

- Identify, describe, and evaluate evidence about events from diverse sources
- Make inferences and draw conclusions from evidence
- Participate in activities that focus on a classroom, school, community, state, or national issue or problem
- Fulfill social and political responsibilities associated with citizenship in a democratic society and interdependent global community by developing awareness of and/or engaging in the political process
**Part 1 (15 minutes)**

Open the lesson with a discussion guided by the following questions:

- Where do most people get their information about drugs and the War on Drugs?
- What arguments might be made in favor of the War on Drugs?
- Which sectors of society are in favor of the War on Drugs? Which sectors are against it?
- What role do journalists and critics play in the War on Drugs?
- Despite many critics calling it a failure, the War on Drugs continues to enjoy popular support. Why do you think that is?

**Part 2 (50 minutes)**

1. Split students into three, six, or nine groups. Each group is assigned a different geographical area: the United States of America; Mexico and Central America; and South America. Each group receives:
   - Handouts with instructions on how to analyze a piece of *official discourse* and a piece written by a critic of the drug war (see Appendix)
   - A political discourse (see below)
   - An article that is critical of the war on drugs (see below)

**UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

*Official Discourse:*
President Nixon declares drug abuse "Public Enemy Number One" (Richard Nixon Foundation, June 19, 1971) (Video) (4:37)

*Critique:*
A Former Nixon Aide Admitted the War on Drugs Was Designed to Screw Over Blacks and Hippies (Vice)

**MEXICO & CENTRAL AMERICA**

*Official Discourse:*
2. Plan Merida (U.S. Department of State)

*Critique:*
1. Mexico’s War on Drugs: What has it achieved and how is the U.S. involved? (The Guardian, December 8, 2016)
2. How the U.S.-led War on Drugs Ravaged Central America (TeleSur, April 19, 2016)

**SOUTH AMERICA (COLOMBIA)**

*Official Discourse:*
Plan Colombia Is Well Worth U.S. Support (Op-Ed, U.S. Department of State, 2001)

*Critique:*
15 Years and $10 Billion Later, U.S. Efforts to Curb Colombia’s Cocaine Trade Have Failed (Foreign Policy, February 8, 2016)
Part 3 (25 minutes)

1. Bring the class together and ask one student from each group to present the main findings of their group. Have students identify overlaps and tensions across the different speeches. Ask them to consider geographical location, political stances towards the War on Drugs, and the speeches’ impact.

2. Explain that there are usually discrepancies between official discourse and independent, critical journalism -- especially around controversial issues like the War on Drugs. Stress the importance of consulting multiple sources with different perspectives and on checking references before drawing one’s own conclusions.

3. Now that they have a deeper understanding of the War on Drugs, invite students to write their own position paper towards the War on Drugs, and formulate those difficult questions they would like politicians to answer. To ask more complex questions, encourage them to start with “how” or “why” -- instead of “what”, or “when.”

LOOPING BACK

Here is another opportunity to bring back the idea of circuits and the concept of positive feedback.

Encourage students to think about the circulation of information and opinions in terms of a circuit. Discuss with them the phenomena of the echo chamber effect and the ways in which social media has exacerbated it:

- How do people get their information about the War on Drugs?
- What role does mass media play in the way we learn and talk about the War on Drugs?
- Does everyone who listens to the official discourse of the government seek out articles that are critical of the drug war?
- Does everyone who is critical of the drug war seek out the opinions and arguments of those who are in favor of the War on Drugs?
- How can we think about the concept of “positive feedback” in terms of the circulation of information and media?
Problematicsizing Questions

- How do we make sense of the connections between different forms of violence?
- How can art serve as a medium for communicating and analyzing the violence caused by the War on Drugs?
- How can we transgress the borders of the nation-state when we want to understand transnational phenomena?

Materials

- Computers with Internet access
- Images of art pieces that respond to the violence of the War on Drugs
- Handout: "Instructions for Analyzing an Image" (Download here)
- Kraft paper
- Paints
- Paintbrushes

Preparation

- Setup computers with Internet access
- Print images or cue them up on computers

Vocabulary/Key Concepts

- Official discourse
- Media
- Stereotypes
- Primary sources

Standards

- Identify, describe, and evaluate evidence about events from diverse sources
- Make inferences and draw conclusions from evidence
- Participate in activities that focus on a classroom, school, community, state, or national issue or problem
- Fulfill social and political responsibilities associated with citizenship in a democratic society and interdependent global community by developing awareness of and/or engaging in the political process

In this lesson, through a transnational lens, students will examine the social impacts of the War on Drugs via visual analysis. The purpose is to create opportunities so they can recognize violence as a multi-dimensional phenomenon exacerbated by the War on Drugs.
**Part 1 (20 minutes)**

1. Ask students how much time they spend looking at a photo on Instagram or Facebook.

2. In contrast to the high-paced visual culture students are accustomed to, in this activity they observe a series of images for at least three minutes each. In groups of three, students receive paintings printouts and analyze them:

**Part 2 (10 minutes)**

Once students have completed their analyses, bring the group together. Encourage students to connect their emotions while analyzing the pictures, and share what they think these images try to convey. Use the following questions to guide the conversation:

- Did you make any assumptions about the people represented in these pictures? What stereotypes underlie those assumptions?
- What do the bodies represented in these photos have in common?
- How are these bodies connected to the War on Drugs?
- How could these bodies be better protected? Who could offer them protection?

**Part 3 (20 minutes)**

3. To build stronger links between the different pictures and the events these represent, students break into three groups:
   - **Group 1** will watch *The War on Drugs is an Epic Fall by Jay-Z* (*The New York Times*) (3:58)
   - **Group 2** will watch *Why the War on Drugs is a Huge Failure* (*Kurzgesagt - In a Nutshell*) (6:25)
   - **Group 3** will watch *U.S. Drug War Overflows Latin America* (*RT America*) (7:12)

4. After watching the films, students reconvene and share what they learned with the rest of the group. Students should be encouraged to compare and contrast the different forms of violence that grow out of the War on Drugs paying special attention to the ways in which this violence is distributed asymmetrically across geographical and racial lines.

**Part 4 (40 minutes)**

1. Invite students to paint a picture that conveys the interconnection between mass incarceration, police brutality and urban violence in the U.S., and state violence, organized crime and human rights abuses in Central and South America. In planning their picture, ask them to take into account the visual analysis tools they practiced today.

2. Recap the day by calling attention to the interconnectedness between apparently distant events and by opening up a discussion about the potential that art has to convey important information about the effects of the War on Drugs. If time permits, have students reflect on their experience of reading/listening to the speeches and articles in Lesson 11 in comparison with their experience of looking at the artwork they analyzed in today’s lesson.
CONCLUSION

BETTER QUESTIONS
Lesson 13

Activism and resistance in the face of the War on Drugs

In this last lesson, students recognize how individuals and communities across the hemisphere have opposed the War on Drugs. We hope this lesson will inspire students to ask new questions that will challenge the War on Drugs and help them imagine alternatives.

Problematizing Question

- What’s the connection between good questions and activism?
- Can sharp questions challenge the War on Drugs?

Materials

- Projector
- Computers with Internet access
- Pre-Class Reading: Changing the Drug Policy Narrative (OpenCanada)
- Video: Deborah Small - War on Drugs is Against Black People & Poor
- Video: Lisa Sánchez - The Drug Laws That Are Tearing Mexico Apart (Oslo Freedom Forum)

Preparation

- Prepare projector and cue videos
- Assign the pre-class reading so that students come to class prepared
- Bring the stories students wrote in Lesson 0

Vocabulary/Key Concepts

- Activism

Standards

- Participate in activities that focus on a classroom, school, community, state, or national issue or problem
- Fulfill social and political responsibilities associated with citizenship in a democratic society and interdependent global community by developing awareness of and/or engaging in the political process
Deborah Peterson Small wants you to know that her political education and social activism began early. Soon after graduating high school she went to work for a national youth voter education organization and organized the first statewide voter registration campaign on the campuses of the State University of New York. After a year as an outreach worker for a community based organization in Buffalo, New York she returned to New York City with her infant son and entered the City College of New York as a student in the alternative legal education program started by the late civil rights attorney Haywood Burns. She went on from there to Harvard University as a joint degree student in law and public policy. (...) See Appendix for handout with full bio

Part 1 (20 minutes)

1. Review the pre-class reading with students and discuss any questions they might have.
2. In groups of three, students reflect upon the following questions:
   - What qualifies as a good question?
   - What kinds of questions interrupt our ways of thinking?
   - What questions connect our inner emotions with our political agendas?
   - What does activism look like?
   - Who can be an activist?

Part 2 (20 minutes)

1. Give a brief introduction to Deborah Small using the bio below before showing students the video clip of her speech.

Deborah Peterson Small wants you to know that her political education and social activism began early. Soon after graduating high school she went to work for a national youth voter education organization and organized the first statewide voter registration campaign on the campuses of the State University of New York. After a year as an outreach worker for a community based organization in Buffalo, New York she returned to New York City with her infant son and entered the City College of New York as a student in the alternative legal education program started by the late civil rights attorney Haywood Burns. She went on from there to Harvard University as a joint degree student in law and public policy. (...) See Appendix for handout with full bio

2. To help students unearth the questions that motivate an activist like Small, discuss the following:
   - What questions is she asking?
   - What’s the purpose of her asking those questions?
   - Which ideas or attitudes do her questions challenge or disrupt?
   - What story is she able to tell by asking these questions?

Part 3 (20 minutes)

Give a brief introduction to Lisa Sánchez using the bio below and then show students Lisa’s video. Then, discuss the same questions listed in Part 2.

Lisa Sánchez is the Latin American joint program manager for the Transform Drug Policy Foundation and Mexico Unido Contra La Delincuencia. She has also served as program leader for the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission of the Organization of American States, where she was responsible for the design and implementation of Mérida Initiative’s Drug-Demand Reduction effort. (...) See Appendix for handout with full bio
Part 4 (35 minutes)

1. Students return to the stories they built in Lesson 0. Individually, they revise these stories and make note of whether and how their attitudes and beliefs towards drugs, drug users and the War on Drugs has changed. On the same piece of paper, they create a "Question Manifesto": a series of new questions that have emerged from everything they have learned.

2. The group reconvenes and students share their observations and questions so that they can identify allies within their class who share similar preoccupations and interests.
**Catalyst Team**

The Catalyst team is a growing network of young adults, born in North, Central and South America. We are all committed to designing novel transnational educational interventions that promote the political engagement of youth from diverse backgrounds on matters of pressing global significance. For our first project - Catalyst: Youth Voices Rethinking the War on Drugs - we decided to tackle the contentious and difficult topic of drugs and drug policy. In different ways, the violence of the War on Drugs has touched each of our personal and professional experiences. We shared a common sentiment that the formal drug education we had received as children and teenagers was insufficient for making sense of the complexity of the War on Drugs and the ways in which it was impacting our communities in different corners of the continent. We thus took to designing a curriculum that would allow young people to make better sense of drugs and drug policy and to develop their own position with respect to them. If you are interested in collaborating with us, please feel free to visit our website at [www.catalyst-catalizador.org](http://www.catalyst-catalizador.org) and reach out to us at info@catalyst-catalizador.org. We would love to hear back from you!

---

**Theo Di Castri**

tdicastri@catalyst-catalizador.com

Born in Canada, Theo is the founding director of Catalyst. An alumnus of the Mahindra United World College of India, he holds a BA in Neuroscience and Comparative Literature from Columbia University and an MPhil from Cambridge University in History and Philosophy of Science. His current research interests focus on the intersections of psychiatry & neuroscience, drug policy and the history of pleasure and pain. Theo has worked as a facilitator for a youth radio program and as an educator at an after-school community gardening program in New York City. He is currently based in Mexico City.

---

**Diana Rodríguez-Gómez**

dmr2164@tc.columbia.edu

Diana is an Assistant Professor in the School of Education at Universidad de Los Andes in her hometown Bogotá, Colombia. She holds an Ed.D. in International Educational Development with an Emphasis on Human Rights and Peace Education from Teachers College, Columbia University. Her academic and teaching interests gravitate around the intersections of violence and education in Latin America, particularly in countries affected by the War on Drugs, and armed Conflict. Sponsored by the Fulbright Commission, her doctoral dissertation research aimed to understand how education stakeholders make meaning of refugee status in Ecuador for Colombians displaced by the armed conflict. At the undergraduate and graduate levels, Diana has experience training teachers from the public sector in the U.S. and Colombia in qualitative methods, as well as educational policies and violence. With a focus on the implications of a transnational pedagogy, she lead curriculum development for Catalyst 2017 and Catalyst 2018.

---

**Additional Resources**


Drug Wars (Frontline) [https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/drugs/](https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/drugs/)


Drug Education Resources: Safety First Program (Drug Policy Alliance) [http://www.drugpolicy.org/resources/drug-education-resources](http://www.drugpolicy.org/resources/drug-education-resources)
INTRODUCTION

Lesson 0

Part 4:

**Article:** Five Ways to Create a Safe Space (Learn+Teach+Share, Facing History and Ourselves) (pg. 15)

http://lanetwork.facinghistory.org/five-ways-to-create-a-safe-classroom-space/

**Resource Website:** Restorative Practices (San Francisco Unified School District) (pg. 15)

http://www.healthiersf.org/Restorative Practices/

Part 5:

**Article:** Suspected Mexican cartel leader smuggled 44 pounds of fentanyl into NYC, officials say (Fox News) (pg. 15)


**Article:** Customs seizes $4 million in liquid meth from Mexican smuggler in Texas (Fox News) (pg. 15)


**Article:** Kansas lawmaker says African Americans are more susceptible to drug abuse because of ‘character makeup’ and ‘genetics’ (The Washington Post) (pg. 15)


**Article:** Who is behind Mexico’s drug-related violence? (BBC) (pg. 15)


**Article:** Mexico maelstrom: how the drug violence got so bad (The Guardian) (pg. 15)

UNIT 1

Lesson 1

Recommended Resources: Drug Facts
- Drug Facts (The National Drug Policy Alliance) (pg. 18)
  http://www.drugpolicy.org/drug-facts
- Drugs (Drug Science) (pg. 18)
  http://www.drugs.org.uk/drugs
- National Institute on Drug Abuse for Teens (pg. 18)
  https://teens.drugabuse.gov/drug-facts
- Drug Facts (Alcohol and Drug Foundation) (pg. 18)
- Just Say Know (Students for Sensible Drug Policy) (pg. 18)
  https://ssdp.org/justsayknow/
- Universo de las Drogas (pg. 18)
  http://www.universodelasdrogas.org/#!/

Recommended Reading:
- Book Chapter: “What is a Drug,” from From Chocolate to Morphine: Everything You Know About Mind-Altering Drugs (Andrew Weil, M.D. and Winifred Rose, 2004) (pg. 18)
  http://www.druglibrary.org/schaffer/kids/choc2morph/c2m2.htm

Lesson 2

Part 2:
- Video/Lesson: Reward Pathway in the Brain (Khan Academy) (pg. 23)

Going Beyond:
- Article: Why research is biased against pot to focus on its harm and not its benefits (Dallas News) (pg. 25)

Lesson 3

Part 3:
- Report: “Making drug control ‘fit for purpose’: Building on the UNGASS decade” (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime) (p. 28)

- Swiss Cheese Model of Addiction: Why do some people but not others develop substance use problems? (Khan Academy) (pg. 28)

- Video: Addiction (Kurzgesagd - In a Nutshell) (pg. 28)
LINK DIRECTORY

Lesson 3, Cont.

Part 4:
Video: Let’s quit abusing drug users (Dr. Carl Hart, TED Talk) (pg. 28)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C9HMifCoSko

Additional Resources on Drug Abuse and Addiction:
Drug abuse and drug addictions series | Mental Health (Khan Academy) (pg. 29)

UNIT 2
Lesson 5

Part 1:
Article: The Economics of Chocolate (Oxford University Press Blog) (pg. 35)
https://blog.oup.com/2015/02/economics-chocolate/

Article: The World of Chocolate: The Economics of Chocolate (Smithsonian Magazine) (pg. 35)
https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/economics-chocolate-180954224/

Additional Resource:
Article: Cocoa Value Chain: From Farmer to Consumer (World Cocoa Foundation) (pg. 35)
http://www.worldcocoafoundation.org/about-cocoa/cocoa-value-chain/

Part 3:
Article: From Colombia to New York City: The narconomics of cocaine (Business Insider) (pg. 36)

Additional Resource:
Article: Lessons from the Failed War on Drugs (Spiegel Online) (pg. 36)
http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/global-support-grows-for-legalizing-drugs-a-884750-2.html

Lesson 6

Part 2:
Documentary: The Dark Side of Chocolate (2010) (pg. 38)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Vfbv6hNeng

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (pg. 38)
http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CRC.aspx

Part 3:
Video: Making Cocaine in the Amazon (BBC) (pg. 38)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pObYoB8-B_wt=

Part 4:
Video: Money Laundering a Hypothetical Guide Part 1: The Basics (Minute MBA) (pg. 39)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ObJPaSZxCa
Lesson 6, Cont.

Article: HSBC Helped Terrorists, Iran, Mexican Drug Cartels Launder Money, Senate Report Says (Forbes) (pg. 39)

Article: Outrageous HSBC Settlement Proves the Drug War is a Joke (Rolling Stone) (pg. 39)

UNIT 3
Lesson 7

Part 2:
Video: Ethan Nadelmann: The War on Drugs is Racist (Big Think) (pg. 42)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w0NAGqXqlo0

Video: A Brief History of Drug Laws in America (From 'The House I Live In' Directed by Eugene Jarecki) (pg. 42)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9A_gzEQr-wM

Part 3:
Video: The Human Impact of the War on Drugs (Peter Wall Institute for Advanced Studies) (pg. 43)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bsAtlB7VZtc

Video: How Colombia’s War on Drugs Escalated to Full Blown Civil War (from Faces of the Colombian War documentary, 2010) (pg. 43)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BPYMGr4prFM

Video: The Gendered Impacts of the War on Drugs (Drugreporter) (pg. 43)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tBSNJWoQLCE

Video: Heroin and the War on Drugs (The New York Times) (pg. 43)

Lesson 8

Part 1:
Book Chapter: "The Lockdown," from The New Jim Crow (Michelle Alexander), 2010) (pg. 46)
https://www.tolerance.org/sites/default/files/general/The%20Lockdown.pdf

Talking About Race and Racism:
Online Lesson: Talking About Race and Racism (Teaching Tolerance) (pg. 46)

Video: Race - The Power of an Illusion (California Newsreel) (pg. 46)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y8MS6zublSQ

Additional Resource:
Article: Teaching "The New Jim Crow" (Teaching Tolerance) (pg. 46)
https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/publications/teaching-the-new-jim-crow
Lesson 9

Part 1:
- **Assigned Reading**: Colombia’s Civil Conflict (Council on Foreign Relations) (pg. 48)
  https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/columbias-civil-conflict

- **Article**: Santos to UN: Colombia paid "high price” in drug war (The City Paper Bogotá) (pg. 48)

Part 2:
- **Documentary**: Plan Colombia: Cashing in on the Drug War Failure (Gerard Ungerman) (pg. 48)
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=js_2OkN1w8I

Part 3:
- **Video**: The Drug War in Latin America (The Economics Detective) (pg. 48)
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DutKIJ_zlRw

Part 4:
- **Video**: El Capo (Fox Telecolombia S.A.) (pg. 48)
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wiDa5eEw4dM

Lesson 10

Part 1:
- **Video**: The War on Drugo (Vox; The Global Commission on Drug Policy) (pg. 51)
  https://www.vox.com/xpress/2014/8/30/6083923/drug-war-on-drugo

The Balloon Effect:
- **Article**: The Balloon Effect in Cocaine Production in the Andes (Cato Institute) (pg. 51)
  https://www.cato.org/blog/balloon-effect-cocaine-production-andes

- **Article**: Cocaine: The New Front Lines (The Wall Street Journal) (pg. 51)
  https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052970204331304577145101343740004

- **Article**: How the War on Drugs drives the child migrant crisis (Vox) (pg. 51)

- **Article**: Hydra (Wikipedia) (pg. 51)
  https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lernaean_Hydra

- **Article/Video**: The biggest problem with the war on drugs, explained in one video - with dragons (Vox) (pg. 51)
  https://www.vox.com/xpress/2014/8/30/6083923/drug-war-on-drugo

Part 2:
- **Assigned Reading**: Mexico’s Drug War (Council on Foreign Relations) (pg. 51)
  https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/mexicos-drug-war

- **Video**: The Newsmakers: Mexico’s drug war (TRT World) (pg. 51)
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2qRlIK2H6Oc
Lesson 10, Cont.

Part 3:
**Video:** America’s Guns: Arming Mexico’s Cartels *(Al Jazeera)* (pg. 52)

Part 4:
**Video:** Angela Davis On Violence (pg. 52)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iIDgDFyveS8

UNIT 4
Lesson 11

Part 2:
**Video:** President Nixon declares drug abuse “Public Enemy Number One” *(Richard Nixon Foundation)* (pg. 55)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y8TQLLQID9M

**Article:** A Former Nixon Aide Admitted the War on Drugs Was Designed to Screw Over Blacks and Hippies *(Vice)* (pg. 55)
https://www.vice.com/en_au/article/xd7jkn/a-former-nixon-aide-admitted-the-war-on-drugs-was-designed-to-screw-over-blacks-and-hippies-vgtrn

**Video:** “Limpiemos México” Estrategia Nacional de Seguridad *(InformaciónMéxico)* (pg. 5)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OKMr5NqDcNI

**Article:** Plan Merida (U.S. Department of State) (pg. 55)
https://www.state.gov/j/inl/merida/

**Article:** Mexico’s war on drugs: what has it achieved and how is the U.S. involved? *(The Guardian)* (pg. 55)

**Article:** How the U.S.-led War on Drugs Ravaged Central America *(TeleSur)* (pg. 55)

**Op-Ed:** Plan Colombia is Well Worth U.S. Support *(U.S. Department of State)* (pg. 55)

**Article:** 15 Years and $10 Billion Later, U.S. Efforts to Curb Colombia’s Cocaine Trade Have Failed *(Foreign Policy)* (pg. 55)
http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/02/08/15-years-and-10-billion-later-u-s-efforts-to-curb-colombias-cocaine-trade-have-failed/

Looping Back:
**Article:** The social media ‘echo chamber’ is real *(Ars Technica)* (pg. 56)
https://arstechnica.com/science/2017/03/the-social-media-echo-chamber-is-real/
Lesson 12

Part 3:

**Video/Short Film:** Jay Z: 'The War on Drugs is an Epic Fail' (*The New York Times*) (pg. 58)

**Video:** Why the War on Drugs Is a Huge Failure (*Kurzgesagt - In a Nutshell*) (pg. 58)
[https://youtu.be/wJUXLqNhCal](https://youtu.be/wJUXLqNhCal)

**Video:** U.S. drug war overflows America (*RT America*) (pg. 58)
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S69bFZmZIMw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S69bFZmZIMw)

CONCLUSION

Lesson 13

Part 1:

**Assigned Reading:** Changing the Drug Policy Narrative (*OpenCanada*) (pg. 61)
[https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052970204331304577145101343740004](https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052970204331304577145101343740004)

Part 2:

**Biography:** Deborah Small (Women's Media Center) (pg. 61)

**Video:** Deborah Small - War on Drugs is Against Blacks and Poor (pg. 61)
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Wu_CbV1w08](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Wu_CbV1w08)

Part 3:

**Biography:** Lisa Sánchez (Oslo Freedom Forum) (pg. 61)
[https://oslofreedomforum.com/speakers/lisa-sanchez](https://oslofreedomforum.com/speakers/lisa-sanchez)

**Video:** Lisa Sánchez | The drug laws that are tearing Mexico apart (pg. 61)
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q9-vVu8Jl-U](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q9-vVu8Jl-U)
UNIT 3
Lesson 8

Part 2:
Group 1: Opium

Image 1 (top left):
"The Mongolian Octopus - His Grip on Australia" (1886, The Bulletin)

Image 2 - White Morphine Habituees (bottom left):
"Morphinomanes ou Le Plumet" (1887, Paul-Albert Besnard)
Lesson 8, Cont.

Part 2, Cont.:

Group 2: Cocaine

Image 1 (top right):
"The Cocaine Fiends" (1936 film directed by William O’Connor)
http://1000misspenthours.com/reviews/reviewsa-d/cocainefiends.htm

Image 2 (bottom right):
"Cocaine Toothache Drops" (1885 Advertisement)
Lesson 8, Cont.

Part 2, Cont.:

Group 2: Cocaine

Image 3 (top left): "The Elixir of Life" (1916, Advert for Hall's Coca Wine)
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Advert_for_Hall%27s_Coca_Wine,_The_Elixir_of_Life_Wellcome_L0063962.jpg

Image 4 (bottom left): "Negro Cocaine 'Fiends' Are A New Southern Menace..." (1914 New York Times article)
https://usslave.blogspot.mx/2012/02/negro-cocaine-fiends-new-southern.html
Lesson 8, Cont.

Part 3, Cont.: Group 3: Marijuana

Image 1 (top right): "Is the Mexican Nation 'Locoed' By a Peculiar Weed?" (1915 article in The Ogden Standard)
https://farm3.static.flickr.com/2370/2071339831_b8629dfc35_o.jpg

Image 2 (bottom right): 'Reefer Madness' (1936 film advert)
Lesson 8, Cont.

Part 2, Cont.:
Group 3: Marijuana

Image 3 (left):
Screenshot from "Hemp for Victory" (1942 U.S. government film)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FTnsffBsafo

UNIT 4
Lesson 12

Part 1 (pg. 58):
Image 1 (below):
"Black Lives Matter Protest" (Mark Louis Cohen)
http://www.marklouiscohen.com/
Lesson 12, Cont.

Part 1, Cont.:

Image 2 (right):
"Is My Son Next?" (Mark Louis Cohen)
http://www.marklouiscohen.com/

Image 3 (below):
"Don’t Shoot" (Mark Louis Cohen)
http://www.marklouiscohen.com/
Lesson 12, Cont.

Part 1, Cont.:

Image 4 (left):
"Military Policing" (Mark Louis Cohen)
http://www.marklouiscohen.com/

Image 5 (below):
"What’s His Life Worth?" (Mark Louis Cohen)
http://www.marklouiscohen.com/
Lesson 12, Cont.

Part 1, Cont.:

Image 6 (top right):
"Masacre en Ciénaga Grande" (2001, Fernando Botero)
Acrylic on canvas

Image 7 (bottom right):
"Una madre" (1999, Fernando Botero)
Acrylic on canvas
Lesson 12, Cont.

Part 1, Cont.:  
Image 8 (top left):  
"Carro Bomba" (1999, Fernando Botero)  

Image 9 (bottom left):  
"Secuestrada" (2002, Fernando Botero)  
1. Where does this substance come from? How is it produced/synthesized?

2. What are the substance's effects on the brain?

3. What are the risks associated with its consumption?

4. What are the risks associated with adolescent use of this substance?

5. Can there be any benefits to using this substance?

6. Is the substance used for any medical purposes?

7. Is the substance illegal or legal in the U.S.?

8. What are some of the different contexts in which this substance can be used? What are some of the different reasons people might have for using this substance?

9. Who are the primary users of this substance?

10. Would you classify this substance as a drug or a medicine? Why?
Instructions for Analyzing: A Piece of Official Discourse

Youth Voices Rethinking the War on Drugs
Catalyst Curriculum Guide

UNIT FOUR
Lesson 11 Part 2

1. Read/Listen to the full speech/op-ed.

2. Try to answer the following questions:
   ○ Who wrote the speech/article? In which year?
   ○ Who gave the speech? Who published the article?
   ○ What was the speech’s/article’s purpose?
   ○ What is the main message?
   ○ Where was the speech given? Was the location symbolic? Why?
   ○ Was it spread through mass media? How so?
   ○ To what historical events is this speech/article responding?
   ○ What evidence does this speech/article refer to to back up its arguments?
   ○ Is this evidence reliable? Can you find other sources that back up the claims made by the speech/article?
   ○ How does it describe the actors that participate in the War on Drugs?
   ○ What feelings do you think it provoked in the public?
   ○ What effects did this speech/article have on drug policy?
   ○ What would you think about the War on Drugs if this was the only source of your information about the conflict?
Instructions for Analyzing: A Critique

Youth Voices Rethinking the War on Drugs
Catalyst Curriculum Guide

UNIT FOUR
Lesson 11
Part 2

1. Read/Listen to the full critique.
2. Try to answer the following questions:
   - Who wrote the critique? What else have they written? Are they affiliated with any particular organization or news source?
   - What source published the critique? Does it have a particular political orientation? What other kinds of articles does this news source publish? Who reads this news source?
   - Who is the audience of this particular critique?
   - What feelings does this critique aim to provoke in its reader?
   - What is the critique’s purpose?
   - What is the main message?
   - When was the article written?
   - When did the events that the critique is talking about take place?
   - Does the critique present any new information that wasn’t available at the time the decisions and actions it is criticizing took place?
   - Identify the specific points on which the critique disagrees with the official discourse.
   - What sources/evidence does the critique cite to back up its claim? Are those sources reliable?
   - Are there any comments in the comment sections? If so, what do they say? Do any of the comments that disagree with this critique strike you as reasonable?
   - How does the critique describe the actors that participate in the War on Drugs?
   - Did this critique have any effect on drug policy?
   - What would you think about the War on Drugs if this article were the only thing you’d read about it?
Write the answers to the following questions in your notebook:

**Production**
- How do you believe this image was produced?
- What materials did the painter use? What information did the painter rely on?

**Forms and Colors:**
- What colors did the painter use? Which stand out? Are there contrasts in color?
- Of the forms that are represented here, which ones seem the most important? Are they rigid or curvilinear?
- What takes up the most room in this painting? What takes up the least amount of space? What appears further away and what appears closer? What effect does this have?

**Composition:**
- What elements make up this image? How are they arranged?

**Human Bodies:**
- How are human bodies represented? What races and genders are represented? What roles are played by the different races and genders?
- Is it possible to infer the social class of the people represented? How so?
- What activities are represented in this painting? Who is doing which activity? What does this tell you about what is going on?
- What social actors appear in this painting? Does anything about the way that they are being represented strike you as novel? What common/social spaces are represented in this image?

**Symbols:**
- What symbols appear in this painting? What ideas do they conjure for you?
Deborah Peterson Small wants you to know that her political education and social activism began early. Soon after graduating high school she went to work for a national youth voter education organization and organized the first statewide voter registration campaign on the campuses of the State University of New York. After a year as an outreach worker for a community based organization in Buffalo, New York she returned to New York City with her infant son and entered the City College of New York as a student in the alternative legal education program started by the late civil rights attorney Haywood Burns. She went on from there to Harvard University as a joint degree student in law and public policy.

After several years as a corporate attorney working in the private sector, she found her way back to her true passion – public interest work. She became Legislative Director for the New York Civil Liberties Union and in that capacity she lobbied the state legislature on behalf of the poor, disenfranchised and incarcerated. It was during this period that she became an ardent advocate for drug policy reform as she became increasingly aware of the ways that the “war on drugs” impacted most of the issues she addressed as a lobbyist. Because of her commitment to promoting drug policy reform, she left the NYCLU to become Director of Public Policy & Community Outreach for the Drug Policy Alliance. Ms. Small has been at the forefront of the national movement seeking to change our nation’s failed drug policies. She helped bring public attention and legal support to the victims of the Tulia drug sting and prosecutions; she worked tirelessly to promote reform of New York’s infamous Rockefeller Drug Laws and helped organize community support for ballot initiatives requiring treatment instead of incarceration for non-violent drug offenders. Ms. Small is a nationally recognized leader in the drug policy reform movement and has been a major catalyst in engaging communities of color and their leaders to address the negative impacts of the war on drugs.

More than a decade ago Deborah Small founded Break the Chains: Communities of Color and the War on Drugs, a public policy research and advocacy organization committed to addressing the disproportionate impact of punitive drug policies on poor communities of color. Break the Chains was founded in the belief that community activism and advocacy is an essential component of progressive policy reform. Break the Chains works to engage families and community leaders in promoting alternatives to the failed “war on drugs” by adopting public health approaches to substance abuse and drug-related crime. Break the Chains is an advocate and voice for those affected most by drug policies but too often unheard in policy debates and decisions. The mission of Break the Chains is to build the movement in communities of color in support of drug policy reform with the goal of replacing our failed drug policies with alternatives based in science, compassion, public health and human rights.
Lisa Sánchez is the Latin American joint program manager for the Transform Drug Policy Foundation and Mexico Unido Contra La Delincuencia. She has also served as program leader for the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission of the Organization of American States, where she was responsible for the design and implementation of Mérida Initiative’s Drug-Demand Reduction effort. In 2013, she became a member of the expert group convened by the OAS to produce the “Report on the Drug Problem in the Americas.” Sánchez has argued in favor of drug decriminalization policies as a means to improve public health and to decrease violence, corruption, and organized crime. She has a bachelor’s degree in international relations from Tec de Monterrey and Sciences-Po Paris, and a graduate degree in Political Science from Sorbonne University in France.