

# Substance Use and Misuse

## Changes Over Time

GRADES 11–12

60–120 MINUTES

### Lesson Overview

This lesson explores the historical and sociopolitical context of substance misuse and drug education in the United States, highlighting shifts in societal attitudes, policies and practices over time. Students engage with key historical moments through interactive stations and analyze prevention and reduction strategies in real-world scenarios. Through discussion and reflection, they will examine systemic injustices, consider their role in shaping societal attitudes and advocate for informed health-promoting approaches to substance misuse. The lesson emphasizes critical thinking, responsible decision-making and community well-being.

### Essential Questions

- How has substance use and misuse changed in the United States over time?
- How has substance use and misuse policy and education impacted thinking about substance use and misuse?

### Student Learning Goals

- I can understand the historical and sociopolitical context of substance use and drug education in the United States.
- I can explore preventative, punitive and harm-reduction principles and their applications in approaches to substance misuse.

### Related Standards

#### Health Standards

**HS.SUB.4.** Analyze how laws, rules, policies, and regulations influence health promotion and disease prevention related to tobacco, marijuana, and other drugs.

**HS.SUB.8.** Identify potential barriers to making healthy decisions regarding substance use and identify personal strategies and community support to overcome those barriers.

**HS.SUB.13.** Analyze the influence of public health and government laws and policies, as well as media and marketing on alcohol, marijuana/cannabis, tobacco, and other drugs, past and present.

#### Transformative SEL Standards

**Standard 5. Responsible Decision-making and Curiosity.** Demonstrate curiosity and analysis of oneself and society in order to make caring choices that impact personal, social, and collective well-being across situations and environments.

**Standard 4. Relationship Skills and Collaborative Problem-solving.** Establish and maintain healthy, supportive relationships and effectively navigate diverse settings in order to collaboratively solve problems.

## Lesson Materials

- Slide deck
- Station materials
  - Handout 1: Station Overviews
  - Prohibition
    - Documents: [Prohibition poster](#), [Prohibition in Oregon](#), [Mock ballot](#)
  - War on Drugs
    - Website: [History Channel War on Drugs](#)
  - Just Say No
    - Video or transcript: [How should schools educate teens about drugs?](#)
  - Origins of the Opioid Epidemic
    - Documents: [The Class of 2000 'Could Have Been Anything'](#) (Note: This is from the New York Times Learning Network. All resources on the Learning Network are available to teachers.)
  - Purdue Pharma and the Opioid Crisis
    - Document: [Justice Department Announces Global Resolution of Criminal and Civil Investigations with Opioid Manufacturer Purdue Pharma and Civil Settlement with Members of the Sackler Family](#)
- Handout 2: Student Notetaker
- [Fentanyl Toolkit for Schools](#)

## Lesson Plan

### Preparation

Prepare the station materials. Each station has an overview document and other multimedia artifacts. If technology or connectivity is a barrier, print video transcripts.

This lesson allows students to collaborate with their peers on sensitive issues. Before the lesson, revisit the community agreements and expectations to ground the conversation and ensure a safe space for all students, including a reminder about confidentiality. You may also want to remind students to share only their own information and that they are not required to share anything if they do not want to.

This lesson may take 60–120 minutes and can be broken up into multiple lessons depending on your context.

## Learning Sequence

Share the essential questions and learning goals with students. Remind students there is no singular correct answer.

### Activity 1. Activating Schema: Word Association | 10 Minutes

Explain to students that there are words with strong connotations when talking about substance use and drug education.

Ask students what comes to mind when they hear words associated with substance use: drug education, preventative, punitive and harm reduction (Slide 4). Record students' responses verbally, digitally or with sticky notes.

1. Conduct a quick poll: What is the most common reason for substance misuse today (Slide 5)?
2. Highlight any response patterns or biases to set the stage for exploring historical and modern perspectives.

### Activity 2. Explore Historical Context | 30 Minutes

Students can move between stations if there is space for small groups, or you can have students work in pairs and move through stations on their devices. Invite students to explore at least two stations during this activity.

1. Introduce the five stations: Prohibition, War on Drugs, Just Say No, Origins of the Opioid Epidemic, Purdue Pharma and the Opioid Crisis (Slide 6). Ask students to examine different approaches to substance use and misuse during four distinct periods in United States history.
2. Provide an overview document and a resource at each station. Introduce the notetaker for students to capture the year, topic and connection to the terms punitive, preventative and harm reduction introduced in the schema activation. Students will capture their ideas in their notetakers at each station (Slide 7).
3. Ask students to investigate the topic at each station, visiting at least two stations.
4. After the station activity, have a whole-group discussion using the following discussion prompts (Slide 8):
  - What do you notice about how approaches have or have not changed over time?
  - How did policies influence public perception of substance use?
  - What do you notice about systemic injustices across situations and environments?  
Systemic injustices refer to patterns of behavior, policies or practices embedded in the structures of an organization or society, which reinforce or perpetuate disadvantages for historically or currently underserved and underrepresented or oppressed groups.

### Activity 3. Where are we now? | 15 Minutes

Share that our community is committed to educating youth about substance use, building awareness and supporting well-being. This approach supports prevention, harm reduction and response efforts. Share state resources.

1. Share digital or printed versions of the “Fentanyl Toolkit for Schools.” Invite students to preview the table of contents to find a section they would like to read more closely (Slide 9).
2. Allow time for students to read individually or in pairs. Invite students to annotate and capture connections and questions.
3. Prompt students to share with a partner how this is similar or different from the stations they visited earlier in this lesson.
4. When students are ready, shift to a whole-group discussion. Select from the following discussion prompts (Slide 10):
  - How does the approach in the toolkit reflect (or differ from) the approaches discussed during the station activity?
  - Do the resources, like this toolkit, effectively balance prevention, harm reduction and response? Why or why not?
  - How could this toolkit influence your school or community’s response to substance use?
  - What gaps or additional resources are needed to support harm-reduction efforts today?

### Activity 4. Intentional Close | 5 Minutes

Conclude this learning experience by making time and space for students to reflect on how substance use, education and policy appear in their lives.

1. Ask students to respond to the reflective journaling prompt:
  - What role do you see for yourself and your community in addressing substance use and promoting well-being, based on what you’ve learned about the past and present?
2. Offer optional closing remarks to reinforce that understanding history, societal influences and harm-reduction principles empowers individuals to make informed decisions and contribute to community health and well-being.
3. Provide resources with services in case students (or people they know) need them (Slide 12):
  - [Youthline](#) is a helpline with free teen-to-teen crisis support. The services are confidential to a point—conversations are never shared but staff are mandatory reporters.
    - Phone: (877) 968- 8491
    - Text: 839863
    - Email: [Teen2Teen@LinesforLife.org](mailto:Teen2Teen@LinesforLife.org)
  - [988 Suicide & Crisis Hotline](#) is a resource where you can call, text or chat with counselors about mental health struggles, emotional distress, alcohol or drug use concerns or just talk.
  - [Safe Oregon](#) gives kids, parents, schools and communities a way to report safety threats or potential acts of violence confidentially or anonymously.

## Formative Assessment Opportunities

### Look and Listen For

Listen for student understanding of historical context. Are they situating the station in time? Do they understand the topic?

Circulate and review the student notetakers. Consider their thoughts and listen to the discussion.

### Exit Ticket

Collect the reflective journaling prompt to capture students' thinking about their roles.