Lesson Plan: What Type of Volunteer Are You?

THE FILM
This lesson plan is designed to be used with the film *The English Surgeon*, which follows the volunteer work of an English neurosurgeon as he improves medical care for patients of a brain surgery clinic in Ukraine. Classrooms can use this film and its companion website resources to explore volunteerism and how students can make a difference in their own communities.

Note: This film includes English subtitles, which may be challenging for some readers to follow. It also includes footage of actual brain surgery and some tragic patient cases. Please preview before using the entire film in the classroom.

POV documentaries can be recorded off-the-air and used for educational purposes for up to one year from their initial broadcast. In addition, POV offers a lending library of DVDs and VHS tapes that you can borrow any time during the school year — FOR FREE! Get started by joining our Community Network: [www.amdoc.org/outreach/events/](http://www.amdoc.org/outreach/events/).

Please visit our film library at [http://www.amdoc.org/outreach_filmlibrary.php](http://www.amdoc.org/outreach_filmlibrary.php) to find other films suitable for classroom use.

OBJECTIVES
By the end of this lesson, students will:
- Identify volunteers who serve them and share volunteer experiences of their own.
- Observe the volunteer service of an English neurosurgeon in Ukraine.
- Consider how their interests, skills and availability would best match up with available volunteer opportunities in their communities.
- Volunteer in their communities for at least three hours.
- Reflect on their volunteer experiences in writing.

GRADE LEVELS
6-12

SUBJECT AREAS
Civics, health, U.S. history, current events, world history

MATERIALS
- Method of showing the entire class online video clips and website resources
- Map that shows the locations of the country of Ukraine and the city of London

ESTIMATED TIME NEEDED
One 50-minute class period, plus time spent volunteering outside of class

SUGGESTED CLIPS
Clip 1: Recognizing Needs and Wanting to Help (length 2:22)
The clip starts at 5:20 with Henry Marsh’s video archive and ends at 7:42 when Marsh says, “. . . the more I felt obliged to support him.”
**BACKGROUND**

Ukraine is a nation about the size of Texas that lies between Poland and Russia on the northern shore of the Black Sea. Ukraine, a former component of the Soviet Union, maintains a public health system. Health care is, in theory, provided by the state free-of-charge. However, political and economic realities have given rise to a more hybrid form of medical care, where basic care is provided by the state and individuals pay for other aspects of their treatments, such as supplies and equipment. Infant mortality rates and life expectancy figures in Ukraine are relatively poor; there are 8.98 infant deaths per 1,000 live births, making the country 158th among all nations; the life expectancy for the general population is 68.25 years, which ranks it 150th in the world.

In 1992, prominent brain surgeon Henry Marsh visited Ukraine on a business trip and was greatly disturbed by the medical care he observed there. He decided to volunteer his services and forged a lasting friendship with a Ukrainian doctor, Igor Kurilets. For over a decade, Marsh has brought or shipped needed medical supplies and equipment to Ukraine and mentored Kurilets in modern neurological treatment. The story of Marsh’s service is a great example of volunteerism that can encourage students to give their time and skills to benefit others.

**ACTIVITY**

1. Ask students to name people who volunteer on their behalf. These could be people who serve as volunteers at school, in extracurricular activities, in a religious setting or elsewhere in the community. How do students feel about the service these volunteers perform? Also, invite students to share experiences from any volunteer work they may have done. Have them explain why they chose to volunteer and what benefit their work has brought to the community.

2. Show students where Ukraine and London are on a map. Tell students that you are going to show them some video clips that will introduce them to an English surgeon named Henry Marsh who has been doing volunteer work at a brain surgery clinic in Ukraine for more than 15 years. Clip 1 shows how Marsh’s volunteer work in Ukraine began.

3. After watching Clip 1, point out that Marsh was on a business trip in Ukraine when he recognized the tremendous needs in the Ukrainian medical system and found a way to use his experience and expertise to help. Explain to students that many volunteer experiences begin spontaneously.

4. Tell students that the Ukrainian man shown at the end of Clip 1 is Igor Kurilets, a neurosurgeon like Marsh. They decided to work together to improve the care for patients in Ukraine with neurological disorders. Marsh has both shipped medical supplies to
Ukraine and brought them there in person. He has also mentored Kurilets and taught him advanced surgical techniques. Play Clip 2 to show how the two doctors worked together.

5. Point out that volunteering at the brain surgery clinic in Ukraine was a good match for Marsh because he had the right set of skills to help people there, he was able to do the required travel and he was willing to make the long-term commitment that was needed. While students may not be able to volunteer in similar ways, they should look carefully at their interests, skills and availability when considering volunteer opportunities.

6. Ask students to think more deeply about their potential as volunteers by taking the What Type of Volunteer Are You? quiz at the POV website. Point out that students have the ability to volunteer and make a difference in a variety of areas in the community.

7. Invite students to use websites such as Serve.gov or VolunteerMatch.org to find appropriate volunteer opportunities and perform at least three hours of service.

8. Conclude the activity by asking students to reflect on their experiences in writing. They should explain the details of their experiences, how those they served benefited and how they felt about volunteering.

ASSESSMENT SUGGESTIONS
Students can be assessed on:
• Completing at least three hours of volunteer work
• Thoughtful written descriptions and reflections on their service

EXTENSIONS AND ADAPTATIONS
• Ask students to create and carry out their own service projects. If none of the formal volunteer opportunities identified in the main lesson activity appeal to students, encourage them to adapt the assignment and design their own volunteer experiences. Efforts might include painting a neighbor’s fence, doing free babysitting for a single mother or going grocery shopping for someone who is elderly or ill.

• Discover the personal health benefits of volunteering. Have students read the issue brief The Health Benefits of Volunteering: A Review of Recent Research (http://www.nationalservice.gov/pdf/07_0506_hbr_brief.pdf) (PDF file) and create a list of bullet points to summarize the main points of the report. Tell students to create public service announcements or posters that share these findings with others at school and in the community and encourage people to volunteer.

• Earn money locally and make a difference globally. Invite students to use earnings, allowances or dollars raised through fundraising to support international causes. Students could choose to donate their money to specific organizations, such as Doctors Without Borders (http://doctorswithoutborders.org/), which provides medical assistance to people in crisis. They can also consider using a micro-lending service such as Kiva.org (http://www.kiva.org) to finance small businesses in developing countries.

• Create a detailed timeline that celebrates the history of volunteerism in the United States. First, point out different types of volunteerism, from humanitarian
service to participation in political and social movements, such as those for women’s suffrage, civil rights and peace. Then, ask students to research and write profiles of individuals or groups who made a difference in the United States by donating their time to worthy causes. Ask students to organize their profiles chronologically and then display them on a wall, in a slideshow, on a website or by some other means.

• Learn more about modern advances in brain surgery by watching awake brain surgery. First read the New York Times guide to Brain Surgery (http://health.nytimes.com/healthguides/surgery/brainsurgery/overview.html?scp=1&sq=neurosurgery&st=cse) to get a step-by-step description of what the treatment involves. Be sure to point out the risks of surgery and discuss how patients and doctors must balance the risks of operating versus the risks of not operating when considering surgery. Then, tell students that they will watch actual brain surgery that doctors Marsh and Kurilets performed on a patient named Marian, who suffered from a brain tumor and epilepsy. Explain that Marian remained awake during the surgery so that the doctors could monitor his ability to move and respond while they operated on his brain. Then, watch Clip 3 and explain that the tumor was successfully removed and Marian has not had any seizures since the operation was performed. He has been able to begin working again and live a normal life.

• Compare and contrast the experiences of the people in this film with those in other POV films that deal with patient care such as Critical Condition and Life, Support, Music. After watching each film, ask students what observations they made about the strengths and weaknesses of the medical systems in Ukraine and the United States. What factors guide decisions about patient care in each country? Ask students to research and discuss the pros and cons of various systems of health care (FRONTLINE provides a good summary http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/sickaroundtheworld/countries/models.html) and develop recommendations for how the United States should address the quality of medical care for patients in this country. The educator materials provided for each film include helpful resources that can be used to guide your discussions.

• Examine how Ukraine’s history is affecting the quality of medical care for its citizens today. Begin by studying life in Ukraine in the 20th century, including the structure and practices of the government of the former Soviet Union and the role that Ukraine played in the nation’s economy. How has Ukraine changed since the break up of the U.S.S.R.? Next, watch The English Surgeon in its entirety and take notes on medical care issues that come up in the film. Also, read the BBC article “Ukraine’s Hybrid Healthcare System” (http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7484095.stm). Ask students to write opinion papers that make connections between political and economic changes in Ukraine and the state of patient care for its citizens.

RESOURCES
Neurosurgery
http://www.healthline.com/galecontent/neurosurgery
This overview covers conditions and treatments for disorders treated by Marsh and other neurosurgeons.
Stories of Volunteers
http://www.volunteermatch.org/volunteers/stories/
This page features the real volunteer experiences of a diverse group of people. Consider sharing one or two stories to further encourage a spirit of volunteerism in your students.

STANDARDS
These standards are drawn from “Content Knowledge,” a compilation of content standards and benchmarks for K-12 curriculum by McRel (Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning) at http://www.mcrel.org/standards-benchmarks/.

Behavioral Studies
Standard 1: Understands that group and cultural influences contribute to human development, identity and behavior.

Civics
Standard 10: Understands the role of volunteerism and organized groups in American social and political life.

Standard 14: Understands issues concerning the disparities between ideals and reality in American political and social life.

Health
Standard 2: Knows environmental and external factors that affect individual and community health.

Language Arts
Standard 9: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media.

U.S. History
Standard 31: Understands economic, social and cultural developments in the contemporary United States.

World History
Standard 44: Understands the search for community, stability and peace in an interdependent world.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Cari Ladd, M.Ed., is an educational writer with a background in secondary education and media development. Previously, she served as PBS Interactive’s Director of Education, overseeing the development of curricular resources tied to PBS programs, the PBS TeacherSource website (now PBS Teachers) and online teacher professional development services. She has also taught in Maryland and northern Virginia.

Background Sources