LESSON
The War on Drugs: A Research Project

OVERVIEW
In recent years, the U.S.-Mexico drug war has been discussed as part of policy debates on subjects ranging from prison and sentencing reform to immigration law and border control. In Mexico, the war has become increasingly violent, resulting in more than 27,000 “disappeared” in less than a decade.

There are complex and contentious debates to be had about causes and solutions, but one fact is incontrovertible: the Mexican drug trade is driven by demand from the U.S. It is likely that some students in your school are contributing to that demand.

Typical drug abuse prevention efforts focus on personal harm, i.e., the negative consequences for the user. This lesson has students experiment with a different tactic: creating compassion for the “disappeared” and their families. Using clips from Kingdom of Shadows, a documentary about the drug trade and Mexican families searching for their “disappeared” loved ones, students will conduct research to determine whether prompting subjects to think about the real-life impact of the drug trade on innocent victims increases the likelihood that they will resist using illegal drugs.

POV offers a lending library of DVDs that you can borrow anytime during the school year—FOR FREE! Get started by joining our Community Network.

OBJECTIVES
In this lesson, students will:
• Reflect on the role of “demand” in the U.S. war on drugs and U.S.-Mexico border policy
• Conduct a short social science research study and prepare written and short oral summaries of their results

GRADE LEVELS: 11-12/college

SUBJECT AREAS
English/Language Arts
Health

Media Literacy
Research Skills

MATERIALS
Film clips from Kingdom of Shadows and equipment on which to show them

ESTIMATED TIME NEEDED
Two class periods plus out-of-class work (which may extend over several weeks)
**FILM CLIPS**
Film clips provided with this lesson are from *Kingdom of Shadows*.

**Clip 1: “Demand” (00:39 min.)**
The clip begins at 1:07:40 with Oscar Hagelsieb, an accomplished U.S. border patrol agent, with his family, saying, “I used to kid myself…” It ends at 1:08:19 with Hagelsieb saying, “And so, we have a lot to do with that, too.”

*Oscar Hagelsieb says, “We as Americans tend to look at Mexico as, ‘Oh, you know, those guys are flooding our streets with drugs and they’re flooding our economy with illicit money.’ But, you know, you really wouldn’t have that problem if there wasn’t demand. We’re the country with the highest consumption of illegal narcotics in the world. And so, we have a lot to do with that, too.”*

**Clip 2: “Disappeared” (2:45 min.)**
The clip begins at 1:03:00 with an image of Mexican president Felipe Calderón and the words “In August 2011…” It ends at 1:05:45 with Consuelo Morales saying, “Keep your spirits up.”

*Activist nun Consuelo Morales explains how government troops conducted mass arrests of civilians, including hundreds of young people out socializing on a Saturday night who were never heard from again. She also comforts mothers of the “disappeared.”*

**Clip 3: “The Families” (2:25 min.)**
The clip begins at 1:09:05 with a shot of Morales facing a crucifix. It ends at 1:11:30 just before the slate that reads, “In Mexico…”

*The clip subtly challenges viewers to act. Most of the clip is a montage of family members of the “disappeared” looking straight into the camera (viewers) without saying anything. Morales says, “We are all responsible. And we must transform our faith into action.”*

**ACTIVITY**

1. **Prep (5 min.)**
The lesson begins with a homework assignment. Post (so that all students can see) this statistic:

   Since 2006, more than 27,000 individuals in Mexico have been reported missing or “disappeared.”


2. **Discussion and Research Design (full class period)**
Post the statistic about the “disappeared” again. Ask students what they learned from the reading that helps them understand the statistic. It isn’t important for students to have complete knowledge of detail, but they should understand that the damage from the war on drugs extends beyond the damage of drug addiction and incarceration to include human rights violations committed by drug traffickers and also by government forces.

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Then show **Clip 1** (about U.S. demand) and ask students for their thoughts. How does this information compare with other anti-drug messages they’ve seen or heard? Has what they’ve learned so far influenced their thinking about their own potential role in the demand for drugs?

Tell students they’re going to explore these questions in more depth by doing their own research. Briefly outline the task for them:

a) Working in teams, you’ll survey at least 20 people (increase the number for advanced groups)—half as a control group and half experiencing the experimental condition.

b) The purpose of the investigation is to see whether or not people are less likely to say they’d consider using illegal drugs after seeing an emotional film clip about the “disappeared” in Mexico. The film clip (actually a combination of **Clips 2 and 3**) will be provided to you.

c) Once data is gathered, each group will be required to submit a written summary of its findings and students will share their findings in five-minute in-class oral reports.

Divide the class into teams and let them begin planning how to conduct their research. Decisions should include:

a) Who will be the subjects of their research? Will they survey other students, friends, family members? With advanced students, discuss whether they want a scientific or random sample and how that could be achieved.

b) What, exactly, will they ask? For beginners, you may want to explain how to use a Likert scale and help frame a question. Be sure students understand that basic research ethics prevent them from asking people if they have used or plan to use illegal drugs. Instead, they should focus their questions on attitudes. Also, be sure students plan to ask the same question of the control group and the experimental group. The only difference is that the latter will be asked to view five minutes of film before answering.

c) In addition to asking their main question, do they need/want to ask for any demographic information that would allow them to analyze data by age, gender, job and so forth?

d) How will they record and track answers?

Provide each team with a copy of **Clips 2 and 3** and let them know when their research summaries are due. If applicable, provide a rubric indicating how work will be graded.

**3. Reporting and Reflection (full class period)**

On the day research summaries are due, give each group five minutes to explain what it did and share results. Leave time for students to ask questions of one another.

Review the strengths and weaknesses of their research method(s), whether their results can be generalized to other groups and any explanations they have for the results they got.
Wrap up the lesson by asking students to reflect on what they learned about the war on drugs, anti-drug messages and the power of documentary.

EXTENSIONS/ADAPTATIONS

1. Add complexity to the research task by adding a third group of subjects to the survey. This group is shown a typical anti-drug message rather than the film clips.

2. As a follow-up to reading John F. Kennedy’s, Profiles in Courage, have students view Kingdom of Shadows in its entirety and write a profile of either Consuelo Morales or Oscar Hagelsieb. The profile should answer this question: What makes Morales or Hagelsieb a role model for courage?

3. Research and debate other aspects of the U.S. war on drugs, e.g., building a border fence or eliminating mandatory minimum sentences for drug crimes.

RESOURCES

POV: Kingdom of Shadows
http://www.pbs.org/pov/kingdomofshadows - The site includes a general discussion guide with additional activity ideas.

POV: Media Literacy Questions for Analyzing POV Films
http://www.pbs.org/pov/educators/media-literacy.php - This list of questions provides a useful starting point for leading rich discussions that challenge students to think critically about documentaries.

Borderland Beat
www.borderlandbeat.com – This extensive blog features open-source reporting on the drug war.

Borderzine
http://borderzine.com/ - Borderzine is a journalism education initiative based at the University of Texas at El Paso with partner schools in Mexico and the United States.

The Dallas Morning News: Mexico

Drug War Facts, edited by Douglas A. McVay
www.drugwarfacts.org – An encyclopedia-style aggregation of government statistics and reporting on issues related to the U.S. war on drugs compiled by the organization Common Sense for Drug Policy can be accessed or downloaded on this site.

Fronteras

Students for Sensible Drug Policy
www.ssdp.org - The website of this international network of students dedicated to ending the war on drugs provides a running tally of U.S. federal dollars spent on anti-drug efforts and an extensive set of links to related organizations.

STANDARDS

Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects (http://www.corestandards.org/assets/CCSSI_ELA%20Standards.pdf)

**W.11-12.1** Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

**W.11-12.2d** Use precise language, domain-specific vocabulary and techniques such as metaphor, simile and analogy to manage the complexity of the topic.

**W.11-12.4** Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization and style are appropriate to task, purpose and audience.

**SL.11-12.1** Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11–12 topics, texts and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

**SL.11-12.4** Present information, findings and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective, such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning, alternative or opposing perspectives are addressed and the organization, development, substance and style are appropriate to purpose, audience and a range of formal and informal tasks.

**SL.11-12.6** Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating a command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.

**Content Knowledge:** (http://www2.mcrel.org/compendium/) a compilation of content standards and benchmarks for K-12 curriculum by McREL (Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning).

Language Arts, Standard 1: Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process.
Language Arts, Standard 2: Uses the stylistic and rhetorical aspects of writing.
Language Arts, Standard 8: Uses listening and speaking strategies for different purposes.
Language Arts, Standard 9: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**
Faith Rogow, Ph.D., is the co-author of *The Teacher’s Guide to Media Literacy: Critical Thinking in a Multimedia World* (Corwin, 2012) and past president of the National Association for Media Literacy Education. She has written discussion guides and lesson plans for more than 250 independent films.