OVERVIEW
Hospice care is rarely associated with singing and laughter, but the care provided at Strathcarron Hospice is different. At this remarkable Scottish hospice center, patients face pain, uncertainty and the possibility of life’s end with song and humor.

In this lesson, students will use the documentary *Seven Songs for a Long Life* by Amy Hardie to explore the experience of living with a terminal illness or providing care for someone with a terminal illness. In doing so, students will also examine their own attitudes toward death and dying. Through the stories of nurses and patients at Strathcarron, students will learn about the challenges of balancing physical care with quality of life and reflect on the value of arts and music in palliative care.

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
By the end of this lesson, students will:
- Examine social and cultural attitudes toward death and dying
- Understand the function and value of palliative care and hospice care for chronically and terminally ill patients and their communities
- Compare and contrast the experiences and priorities of patients featured in *Seven Songs for a Long Life*
- Research local services and/or policies related to hospice care and write essays assessing the quality and accessibility of care for people in their community

GRADE LEVELS: 9-12+

SUBJECT AREAS
Health  Life Skills
Language Arts  Social Studies

MATERIALS
- Film clips from *Seven Songs for a Long Life* and equipment on which to view them
• Computers with Internet access
• Student handouts
  o Student Handout A: Case Studies
  o Student Handout B: Group Discussion
• Teacher handout
  o Teacher Handout: Curing and Caring

**ESTIMATED TIME NEEDED**
One 50-minute class period plus homework

**FILM CLIPS**
Film clips provided in this lesson are from *Seven Songs for a Long Life*

**Clip 1:** “Trailer” (1:32 min.) [www.pbs.org/pov/sevensongs/](http://www.pbs.org/pov/sevensongs/)
This is the official trailer for the film.

**Clip 2:** “Get Back to the Actual Person” (1:19 min.)
This clip starts at 6:03 min. with Mandy saying, “When I started nursing, I thought I wanted to do very technical intensive care,” and ends at 7:22 min. with her asking, “How on earth do they plan their future?”

**Clip 3:** “Wouldn’t It Be Loverly” (2:48 min.)
This clip starts at 13:00 min. with Mandy saying, “I think the skills that we have developed here as nurses are those of not wanting to fix everything,” and ends at 15:48 min. with Mandy singing with another nurse as her voiceover says, “I think it’s one of the last things to deteriorate.”

**Clip 4:** “Iain” (2:20 min.)
This clip starts at 21:15 min. with Iain in bed and saying in voiceover, “It’s easy to give in to MS,” and ends at 23:35 min. with Moyra saying, “The bungalows are… phenomenal prices, you know?”

**Clip 5:** “Julie” (1:31 min.)
This clip starts at 27:08 min. with Julie and her daughter entering the church hall and her voiceover saying, “You don’t have a crystal ball,” and ends at 28:39 min. with Julie saying, “Nobody likes to talk about death, but it’s just one of those things in life—you’ve got to.”

**Clip 6:** “Alicia” (2:37 min.)
This clip starts at 29:46 min. with Alicia watching the shopping network and ends at 32:21 min. with Alicia finishing her song by singing, “Sad am I, without thee.”

**Clip 7:** “Nicola” (5:33 min.)
This clip starts at 46:18 min. with Nicola writing in her notebook and saying in voiceover, “The pain that I was in was horrendous. I really can’t remember,” and ends at 51:51 min. with Nicola and Mandy finishing their song and the patients clapping.
VOCABULARY

The following are abbreviated versions of definitions from the Merriam-Webster Dictionary online: www.merriam-webster.com

- **Art therapy:** therapy based on engagement in artistic activities as a means of creative expression and symbolic communication
- **Hospice:** a facility or program designed to provide a caring environment for meeting the physical and emotional needs of the terminally ill
- **Music therapy:** therapy based on engagement in musical activities: the therapeutic use of music that typically involves listening to music, singing, playing musical instruments or composing music
- **Occupational therapy:** therapy based on engagement in meaningful activities of daily life (as self-care skills, education work or social interaction) especially to enable or encourage participation in such activities despite impairments or limitations in physical or mental functioning
- **Palliative care:** medical and related care provided to a patient with a serious, life-threatening or terminal illness that is not intended to provide curative treatment but rather to manage symptoms, relieve pain and discomfort, improve quality of life and meet the emotional, social and spiritual needs of the patient
- **Physical therapy:** the treatment of disease, injury or disability by physical and mechanical means

FACILITATOR NOTE:

This lesson plan focuses on issues surrounding palliative care and social and cultural responses to death and dying. Educators and facilitators are strongly encouraged to review all of the materials and film clips to be sure the topic and lesson are appropriate for their curricula and students. At the teacher’s discretion, a preliminary discussion with the class may be required, as it may be advisable to identify students who might be personally and/or adversely affected by this material. Teachers should also consult with school counselors, social workers and/or administrators to provide students with support or the option of not participating in the lesson where appropriate. Some students may not be open to talking about death and/or may have recently experienced the deaths of loved ones. Please be sensitive about their desire to communicate when ready.

ACTIVITY

**Step 1: Talking About Death**

In this activity, students will examine their responses to death and dying and discuss some of the factors that shape attitudes toward this topic.

Do Now Think-Pair-Share: Write the following quote by Jok Church (writer, educator, animator, cartoonist) on the board:

*Death is a part of life... And you know, that part of life needs everything that the rest of life does.*
Have students rewrite the quote in their own words and share their responses with partners. Ask for volunteers to share their responses with the class and then hold a discussion.

Discussion prompts:
- Do you agree with this quote? Why or why not?
- When do we typically encounter conversations about death and dying? In what context does this topic come up?
- What are some factors that shape how we respond to the topic of death and dying? (Family, tradition, culture, movies, music, news, religion and so on.)
- What benefit, if any, is there in discussing death and dying?

Explain to students that they are going to have a conversation about how we respond—personally and culturally—to the process of dying and how we care for people who are living with terminal illnesses.

Have students complete the following sentence in writing. (Note: Students may share their responses now or keep them private until the end of the lesson, when they will refer to them again as part of a journaling activity.)

When we talk about death and dying, I feel ____________________________, because ________________________________________

**Step 2: Understanding Hospice Care**

In this activity, students will explore and discuss palliative and hospice care through the experiences of nurses treating chronically and terminally ill patients at Strathcarron Hospice in Scotland.

Introduce the lesson plan vocabulary (palliative care, hospice, physical therapy, art therapy).

Explain: Today, we will be watching clips from the film *Seven Songs for a Long Life*, which follows the stories of several hospice patients at Strathcarron Hospice in Scotland as they confront the challenges of living with terminal illness.

Screen and discuss **Clip 1**, the official trailer for *Seven Songs for a Long Life* and **Clip 2**, featuring Strathcarron palliative care nurse Mandy explaining her personal experience as an end-of-life caregiver and the value of art and music therapy. Have students take notes while watching the clip with a focus on the following prompt: "What are the responsibilities of a palliative care nurse?"

(Facilitator note: Explain that **Clip 2** is short, so students will need to engage in proactive viewing.)

After screening **Clip 2**, review the students’ notes and discuss:
How did Mandy’s attitude toward her roles and responsibilities change over time?

What did Mandy highlight as her most important responsibility?

Explain: Palliative care professionals (doctors, nurses and other staff members) have to balance two very important priorities when working with patients: treating physical illness and caring for wellbeing. Sometimes what is good for the body can be hard on the patient and the patient’s quality of life (for example: some treatments cause extreme pain and discomfort) and vice versa (for example: minimizing difficult treatments could limit opportunities for improvement). In each case, outcomes are uncertain, so no guarantees can be given. This situation requires caregivers to work with the patients to make difficult decisions about the physical and emotional cost and benefits of each treatment.

Ask for volunteers to read the Teacher Handout: Curing and Caring to the class and discuss:

- How does Mandy balance curing and caring?
- Mandy says, “We can’t fix everything and what we have to learn to do is listen. And sometimes you have to sit on your hands because all you want to do is fix it, and you can’t fix it, you just listen. And listen properly.” What does she mean by this? Why does she stress the importance of listening “properly”? How does this relate to what we read about curing and caring?

Screen Clip 3 and have the class record scenes and quotes that demonstrate Mandy and her colleagues curing, caring and listening.

After viewing the clip and before the class discussion, have students free-write for one minute using the following prompts and share their feedback with the class:

Discussion prompts:

- What feelings did you have when the patients and nurses started singing? What was your first response?
- Why do you think we reacted the way we did to the patients and nurses singing? Why do you think singing inspires so many emotional responses in us? How might these complex reactions be beneficial for patients and caregivers in a hospice?
- What surprised you most in this clip?
- How does Mandy balance curing and caring in her work with patients?
- Can you give an example of Mandy “listening properly”?
- How does this strategy help to balance her responsibility to both cure and care for Dorene?
- What personal reason does Mandy give for why she chose to incorporate music into her patients’ therapy?
- What benefits do you think music can offer to people who are experiencing illness?
- Can you share an example from your own life of music or art helping you through a difficult time?
Step 3: Living and Dying with Dignity
In this activity, students will compare and analyze the goals and priorities for end-of-life care through the case studies of patients featured in *Seven Songs for a Long Life*.

Organize students into small groups. Assign each group a patient—Nicola, Iain, Julie, or Alicia—as a case study and have each group view their patient’s video clip.

Distribute a copy of Student Handout A: Case Studies to each student and instruct the groups to collaborate on completing the viewing and discussion worksheet. (Although the students will collaborate on the handout, each should complete a worksheet for use later in this activity.)

*Facilitator note:* If there are not enough computers available for each group to view its case study clip independently, play Clips 4 through 7 (12:01 min. total) for the class, then divide the students into their case study groups.

When all the groups have completed their worksheets, reorganize the class into new groups of four or more students, so that each new group has at least one representative for each case study patient.

Distribute one copy of Student Handout B: Group Discussion to each new group. Instruct the new groups to review their case study worksheets with each other and share what they learned from their patients’ stories. They should then use the prompts in Student Handout B to discuss further the similarities and differences in their patients’ experiences.

*Facilitator note:* To save class time, teachers can go straight from the case study groups to a class discussion. Ask a representative from each case study group to share that group’s findings with the class, followed by a class discussion using prompts from Student Handout B.

Step 4: Reflection
Conclude the lesson by asking students to write journal entries using one of the following prompts (this can also be completed as a homework assignment):

- Revisit how you described your feelings about death and dying in step 1. In what way, if any, has your response changed and why?
- If you were one of the patients (or caregivers) at Strathcarron, what would be your “song for a long life”? Why would you choose this song? How do you think music and art help to reinforce the rights and dignity of patients in hospice?

Step 5: Hospice in My Community
Have students research and report on palliative care services in their community, including the quantity and quality of options available; the resources and services provided; and the average cost of care for inpatient services over the course of one year. Students should also:

- Identify opportunities for improvement
- Explain how they could personally contribute to improving care in their community
Conclude the assignment by having students draft descriptive essays detailing what they have learned and how they can personally contribute to improving care in their community.

EXTENSIONS/ADAPTATIONS

1. **The Rights of the Dying**
   In this activity, students will work together to draft a patients’ bill of rights for people living with terminal illnesses based on discussions from this lesson and supplemented with additional research.

   Distribute sticky notes, a sheet of chart paper and markers to each group. Have the class reflect on the stories of the patients and nurses depicted in *Seven Songs for a Long Life* and give them five minutes to brainstorm the rights they believe hospice patients and people living with terminal illnesses should have. Remind students that these rights have to balance patients’ physical and emotional needs and should uphold and reinforce the patients’ dignity. Each student should brainstorm her/his own ideas (one idea per sticky note).

   Have each group review and organize their members’ ideas by theme and use this brainstorm to draft a bill of rights for end-of-life patients on the chart paper. (If time allows, students can also research the legal rights of terminally ill patients as well as existing frameworks for hospice patients and the terminally ill to refine their work.)

   Follow with a gallery walk and feedback session, and then refine the groups’ work into a single collective bill of rights for the class.

2. **Sharing Seven Songs for a Long Life**
   Organize a visit to a local hospice and have students interview the patients. The students should prepare questions in advance and include questions about the importance of music, visual arts, dance and so on in their subjects’ lives. The interviews can be documented through written notes or audio/video recording. Have the students create multimedia oral histories about their subjects that feature meaningful songs from the patients’ lives, and then have them return to the hospice to present their projects to the patients.

3. **The Politics of Palliative Care**
   Have students research local and national laws and policies related to end-of-life care, with a focus on the following questions:
   - What public policies influence the quality of care?
   - Are there national standards or do they vary from state to state?
   - What influence do your local government and representatives have on the quality and options for care?

   Conclude the assignment by having students draft persuasive essays to a local community leader or political representative. The essays should explain why hospice care is important for the community and describe the end-of-life care that is available, the improvements that are
needed and the current barriers to quality care. Students should also explain how they can personally contribute to improving care in their community.

4. On Death and Dying: The Stages of Grief
Motivated by the lack of curriculum in medical schools on the subject of death and dying, Swiss doctor Elisabeth Kübler-Ross began to examine death and those faced with it at the University of Chicago medical school. Her research, which included patient interviews, became the foundation for her 1969 book On Death and Dying. This book introduced the concept of the “stages of grief,” and although it has met with criticism and controversy since it was published, it remains highly influential in the field of palliative care. Have students research the history and impact of On Death and Dying and the arguments for and against Kübler-Ross’ findings. If possible (and appropriate), have each student interview a person who has experienced the loss of a loved one and compare that experience to Kübler-Ross’s findings. Have students conclude the project with a presentation incorporating their research and interviews.

5. The Stem Cell Debate
Several patients in Seven Songs for a Long Life speak about participating in stem cell treatments and trials for their terminal conditions. Is stem cell research the great hope for people who suffer from debilitating diseases, or is it an unethical treatment of human life? Stem cell research is a controversial subject due in part to the debate over whether embryonic stem cells should be used.

Have students facilitate a debate about stem cell research and the use of embryonic and adult stem cells to provide therapies for diseases and injuries.

Create an anticipation guide with questions about the moral, ethical and political issues related to stem cell research, and then have students research the science and politics behind the use of stem cells in medical treatments.

Give all students the opportunity to share their projects and opinions with the class or in small groups.

6. The Debate Over the Right to Die
Do people have a right to die? How does this right compare to a person’s right to free speech or other similar rights? Why are certain groups and individuals particularly opposed to euthanasia? How is this issue covered in news and entertainment media?

Have your students research basic facts about euthanasia and current state and national policies regarding an individual’s right to die.

Have them discuss and assess the precedents for a government’s right and ability to intervene in personal health decisions and the impact that legalizing euthanasia has had in states and countries where that has been implemented.
Each student can complete the research by writing two persuasive essays, each taking an opposing position on the issue.

RESOURCES

The Film

POV: Seven Songs for a Long Life
www.pbs.org/pov/sevensongs/
The film’s official POV site includes a discussion guide with additional information, resources and activity ideas, a reading list of suggested books and more.

Seven Songs for a Long Life
www.sevensongsfilm.com/
The film’s official website provides information on the film and filmmakers, as well as suggestions for using the film.

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.

POV: Seven Songs for a Long Life Discussion Guide
http://www.pbs.org/pov/sevensongs/discussion-guide
The POV Seven Songs for a Long Life discussion guide includes information on Strathcarron Hospice and caring versus curing, as well as prompts for discussion, taking action steps and resources.

POV: Seven Songs for a Long Life Delve Deeper Reading List
This list of fiction and nonfiction books provides a range of perspectives on the issues raised by the film.

Buy the Film
http://www.sevensongsfilm.com/edu
Purchase Seven Songs for a Long Life for your classroom. The educational edition of the film includes:
• The feature version of Seven Songs for a Long Life
• Four interactive sessions with the characters in the film
• Education clips: 11 excerpts from the film that expand upon palliative care from patient and staff perspectives

American Art Therapy Association
www.arttherapy.org
This group provides resources for the advancement of art therapy as a mental health and human services tool.

American Music Therapy Association
www.musictherapy.org
This group provides information and resources on the development of the therapeutic use of music in rehabilitation, special education and community settings.

*End of Life: Helping with Comfort and Care*
The National Institutes of Health publish this resource, which offers information and guidance for individuals facing the end of life.

Hospice
www.hospicenet.org
This website serves as an information clearinghouse for patients and families coping with terminal illness.

The National Institute on Aging
www.nia.nih.gov
The website of this government organization, part of the National Institutes of Health, offers information on resources and services for older adults.

**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)

CCSS.SL.9-10.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 topics, texts and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.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.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.2 Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally), evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.2 Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) in order to make informed decisions and solve problems, evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source and noting any discrepancies among the data.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.4 Present information, findings and supporting evidence clearly, concisely and logically such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, substance and style are appropriate to purpose, audience and task.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.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.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.5 Make strategic use of digital media (e.g., textual, graphical, audio, visual and interactive elements) in presentations to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning and evidence and to add interest.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.5 Make strategic use of digital media (e.g., textual, graphical, audio, visual and interactive elements) in presentations to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning and evidence and to add interest.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary describing political, social or economic aspects of history/social science.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including analyzing how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term over the course of a text (e.g., how Madison defines faction in Federalist No. 10).

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.6 Compare the point of view of two or more authors for how they treat the same or similar topics, including which details they include and emphasize in their respective accounts.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.7 Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

Content Knowledge: [http://www2.mcrel.org/compendium/](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).

Behavioral Studies, Standard 4: Understands conflict, cooperation and interdependence among individuals, groups and institutions.
Health, Standard 3: Understands the relationship of family health to individual health.
Health, Standard 4: Knows how to maintain mental and emotional health.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Allison Milewski has developed media education resources for a range of award-winning filmmakers and national media organizations, including PBS LearningMedia, Independent Television Service (ITVS), Latino Public Broadcasting, HBO Documentaries and Tribeca Film Institute. She is also the founder of the international media education program PhotoForward.org.
Curing
“The 'medical model' of dying says there comes a time when all possible treatments have been tried and there is nothing left to do that will prevent death. In this view, we must 'give up' fighting against death when we have no other choice.
“When doctors, nurses and direct caregivers think this way, they might quit giving good care to a dying person because they feel there is nothing more that can be done. They feel they have lost control because they can't 'fix' the problem, and may feel helpless and guilty. These feelings can lead them to avoid the dying person. People at the end of life can sense this in their caregivers, and they may fear being abandoned. This fear increases their loneliness and discomfort.”

Caring
“The 'caring model' of dying says the end of life is an important period of an individual's life. During this final phase, curing the problem is no longer possible, and the focus shifts to caring for the person. When caregivers think this way, they concentrate on the many things they can do to make a dying person comfortable, to improve the quality of the dying person's life and to provide opportunities for the person to meet his or her final life goals.
“When caregivers focus on caring, they shift their energies from whether the person will die to how they will die. Helping to relieve pain and other symptoms, giving emotional and spiritual support and providing family time are all things that caregivers can do to care for a dying person.”

Excerpted from:
HCP. “End-of-Life Care.” www.hcpro.com/content/40619.pdf
Instructions: Watch the film clip(s) about your case study patient and collaborate with your group members to complete the following worksheet. (Note: If you need more space you may write your responses on the back of this page or on a separate sheet of paper.)

CASE STUDY SUBJECT’S NAME: ____________________________________________________________

1. What physical problems is your patient experiencing? What is the patient not able to do now that they could do before the illness?

2. What impact has the patient’s illness had on their relationships with family and friends?

3. How has your patient’s illness affected their emotional wellbeing? What are your patient’s biggest worries? Please give examples from the film.

4. How does your patient feel about death and dying? Please give examples from the film.

5. What activities, resources and support systems are available to the patient to help them cope with the emotional impact of their illness? List as many as you can.

6. What role does music play in this patient’s care?

7. Select a quote (1-3 sentences) from your patient’s film clip that best illustrates how they feel about their experience. Write the quote below.
Instructions: Watch the film clip(s) for your case study patient and collaborate with your group members to respond to the following questions. (Note: If you need more space you may write your responses on the back of this page or on a separate sheet of paper.)

1. What are the most common emotional challenges that the patients are facing?

2. What are some similarities in the coping strategies and support systems that the patients are using?

3. What common benefits do music and art provide for the patients?

4. *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines *dignity* as “the quality or state of being worthy of honor and respect.” How does the palliative care at the hospice reinforce the dignity of the patients who are being treated there? Give examples from the film for each patient to support your response.