

SHOULD WE DEFUND THE POLICE?

THIS ACTIVITY SHOULD TAKE ABOUT 90 MINUTES. IF LEARNERS ARE ABLE TO REVIEW MEDIA PRIOR TO THE LESSON, ACTIVITY TIME SHOULD BE 45 TO 60 MINUTES.

INVESTIGATE

Read, watch, and listen to the three media resources on the Thinkalong module. Learners can use the Investigate graphic organizer to summarize each piece of media and record new information. Below are summaries of the three pieces of media curated in the Thinkalong module.

2 VIEWS ON THE FUTURE OF AMERICAN POLICING

PBS News Hour | June 8, 2020 | Video
10:38 minutes

PBS News Hour hosts a joint interview with Charlene Carruthers who is an organizer for the Movement of Black Lives and Chuck Wexler, the Director of Police Executive Research Forum about police reform as opposed to the movement to defund police stations across America.

- Recently, there has been a shift underway in reforming police practices. Some activists are calling for defunding the police as a viable alternative, stating that reform itself does not work.
- Defunding the police can include shifting money away from the police and towards community programs. These programs employ social service and mental health crisis workers, who might be better equipped to handle crisis situations. In other cases, people who support defunding the police are calling for outright abolition of the police.
- Charlene Carruthers, author and organizer for the Movement for Black Lives, says that fundamentally the problem for many people is that police departments are often invested in too much at the expense of community investment.
- She would like to see city budgets across America be reallocated from police departments into programs such as public education, quality housing, healthcare, and the environment.
- Chuck Wexler, Director of Police Executive Research Forum, agrees that safety is a joint responsibility with the community. He sees the need for increased investments in institutions that support homelessness, drug abuse, and mental health.
- He stated that currently, in the 18,000 police departments in the country, there are no national standards and no guidelines on use of force. He thinks that we need the police in crisis situations, who will behave smartly and humanely.
- Carruthers believes that it's not simply a case of a few bad police officers. She states that the police department has its origins in slavery and institutional racism.

IN CAMDEN, VIOLENT CRIME DOWN AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT UP

PBS- NJTV News | July 13, 2020 | Video

New Jersey Public Television, a local division of PBS reports Camden County's police department as an excellent example of police reform.

- Camden County Chief Scott Thomson is proud that over the past 7-8 years, they've gone from having poor police management in tense situations to now modeling ideal crisis de-escalation behavior

Using public media — video, audio and digital reports — about newsworthy topics, these classroom-based exercises help students to think critically about media messages, develop informed opinions, and practice how to take a stand.

- In Camden, there was a training seminar hosted by the Police Executive Research Forum. It spotlights some of the best practices in law enforcement.
- Chris Porrino, the New Jersey Attorney General, stated that de-escalation training is now mandatory. In de-escalation training, police officers are shown real-life videos, equipped with decision-making skills, and presented with proper protocol regarding intense situations.
- Due to these new protocols, violent crime in Camden is down. The city recorded only 9 homicides in 2017, 65% less than the previous year. Community engagement is at an all-time high.
- A Washington Post study shows that nationally, nearly a thousand people were killed by police in 2015 and 2016. A quarter of the individuals killed had a mental illness.

WHAT WOULD DISMANTLING MINNEAPOLIS' POLICE DEPARTMENT LOOK LIKE?

NPR: National | June 8, 2020 | Audio

5:15 minutes

NPR speaks to Minneapolis City Council President Lisa Bender about ongoing plans to defund the city's police department after national protests.

- Though Minneapolis is a relatively small city with only 430,000 people, there have been multiple deaths caused by police in recent years.
- Bender states that Minneapolis has reformed police multiple times with tactics such as with diversification. Though the Minneapolis police chief is on board with reform, Bender states that the police unions continue to resist change. She believes that the death of George Floyd highlighted that these reforms have not been working to change police culture or to protect Minneapolis citizens.
- Bender says that the city already has an alternative in place called the Office of Violence Prevention. They have been giving grants to community organizations to accomplish community-based safety for years.
- Bender and her team did a full analysis of the reasons that people call 911 because they wanted to create an alternative to police that could appropriately respond to calls for help. Bender states that the city is starting to accept expert help offers from states and other nations, which have successful community-based safety strategies.
- A soundbite from Lori Lightfoot, the Chicago Mayor, states that the change needs to happen at the supervision level instead of focusing on policies for police reform.
- The mayor of Minneapolis, Jacob Frey is currently against defunding the police. Bender and other community members will continue to have many conversations over the next many months to figure out the next steps.

KEY WORDS

Look out for these important keywords in the news stories. Discuss the definitions with your learners and see how they affect the understanding of the story.

- Community
- Defund
- Reform
- Reallocate
- Investment
- Crisis
- De-escalation

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CONTEMPLATE

Learners will use media literacy questions to critically engage with news by thinking about its purpose, searching for bias and discussing missing perspectives. They will answer the 5 Key Questions of Media Literacy created by the Center for Media Literacy, which are:

1. Who created this message?
2. What creative techniques are used to attract my attention?
3. How might different people understand this message differently than me?
4. What values, lifestyles and points of view are represented in, or omitted from, this message?
5. Why is this message being sent?

A graphic organizer is included in this guide and the Thinkalong website to help learners answer these five questions about each piece of media.

DEBATE

Use the debate tool on the module webpage to help form evidence-based responses to the debate question.

Thinkalong is designed to help learners engage with real issues that are relevant to their lives. [Structured discussions](#) allow learners to practice their critical thinking skills through evidence-based debate with their peers. Discussions are designed to take about 30 minutes. Educators are encouraged to modify aspects that work best for their learners.

To encourage civil discourse, please review the [Code of Conduct](#) with your learners.