

SHOULD ILLEGAL DRUGS BE DECRIMINALIZED?

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.

OREGON MEASURE 110 EXPLAINED

Oregon Public Broadcasting | October 17, 2020 | Video
3:55 minutes

During the 2020 election, Oregon became the first state in the United States to decriminalize the personal possession of illegal drugs, including cocaine, heroin, oxycodone, and methamphetamine. This video explains this measure in detail.

- Based on a 2019 government report, Oregon had some of the highest rates of drug abuse while having some of the lowest levels of access to care.
- With Measure 110 in place, if a person is caught with a small amount of drugs, rather than facing large fines, probation and potentially jail time, they would receive a small fine that could be waived if they seek treatment.
- A state analysis estimates that this measure would greatly decrease the number of drug convictions, ultimately saving the state more than \$20 million between 2021 and 2023.
- Opponents of Measure 110 argue that decriminalizing drugs removes an important deterrent to drug abuse. They believe many people will simply pay the small fine as opposed to getting treatment.

IN PORTUGAL, DRUG USE IS TREATED AS A MEDICAL ISSUE, NOT A CRIME

NPR | April 18, 2017 | Audio | [Transcript](#)
4:06 minutes

In 2001, Portugal became the first country in the world to decriminalize the consumption of all drugs. This NPR segment explores the outcomes of that decision.

- By the 1990's, 1% of Portugal's population had a heroin addiction. According to Joao Goulao, who was a physician at the time, "every family had its own drug habit."
- Goulao is now Portugal's drug czar, and he wrote the 2001 law that decriminalized all drugs. Drug dealers go to jail, but anyone caught with less than a 10-day supply of any drug gets mandatory medical treatment.
- Polls show that the Portuguese largely support this policy, even today.

FROM MARIJUANA TO MUSHROOMS, VOTERS WANT DRUG LAWS EASED

NPR | November 4, 2020 | Article

401 words

In recent elections, voters have made it clear that they want to ease restrictions on recreational drug use.

- On Election Day 2020, residents of Arizona, Montana, New Jersey and South Dakota voted to join the ranks of 11 other states that have eased restrictions on recreational drug use.
- In 2012, Colorado and Washington made the leap to legalize marijuana for recreational use. Colorado has collected more than \$1.23 billion in marijuana taxes and fees since 2014.
- States like Montana and Arizona will allow individuals serving specific marijuana-related sentences to request resentencing or even expungement.

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.

- Decriminalization
- Legalization
- Harm reduction
- Addiction

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.

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