

## "The Meth Epidemic" Teacher's Guide

### **ABOUT THE FILM:**

In *The Meth Epidemic*, FRONTLINE, in association with *The Oregonian*, investigates the meth rampage in America: the appalling impact on individuals, families and communities; the difficulty of controlling an essential ingredient in meth – ephedrine and pseudoephedrine -- sold legally in over-the-counter cold remedies; and the impasse that lawmakers have reached in trying to regulate it. United States Attorney General Alberto Gonzales has called meth "the most dangerous drug in America," while the United Nations has labeled it "the most abused hard drug on earth." *The Meth Epidemic* chronicles the history of the drug's development and use in the United States, while exploring through firsthand accounts how destructive meth addiction can be. The documentary provides an excellent avenue for classroom discussions on the impact and dangers of meth use.

### **WATCHING THE FILM:**

Teachers can either assign the 60-minute film for viewing as homework or show the film in class. Suggested discussion questions are provided. The film is also available to view by chapters on the FRONTLINE Web site. The featured lesson and activities in this guide can be used without having viewed the film.

### **A NOTE TO TEACHERS:**

For classes in social studies, language arts, current events, history, psychology, government and health; Grade level 9th-12th.

*The Meth Epidemic* investigates the development and growth of meth use across the United States and explores the difficulties in trying to regulate it. The teaching activities are designed to help students understand how and why meth use has spread, and learn about the dangers of meth addiction.

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

This guide includes a list of questions for students to discuss after viewing the documentary.

### **FEATURED LESSON PLAN:**

#### **The Most Dangerous Drug In America**

#### **Lesson Objective:**

Students will become familiar with:

- The history of meth use
- The impact that meth has on the user and community
- The difficulty in treating meth addiction

## **ADDITIONAL LESSON IDEAS:**

**Content from *The Meth Epidemic* can be applied to the following lesson plans:**

### **The Great Debates**

Students will learn more about major pharmaceutical companies and the impact of high drug prices on American consumers.

### **Whose Special Interests?**

Students will learn about the influence of special interest groups and lobbyists on congressional legislation.

### **AIDS – 20 Years Later**

Students will look at the lives of drug addicts who have HIV/AIDS and the impact it has had on their communities. Web-exclusive video about the connection between Meth abuse and HIV/AIDS transmission in the gay community can be found at:  
[www.pbs.org/frontline/meth/body](http://www.pbs.org/frontline/meth/body)

On May 30 and 31, 2006, FRONTLINE presents the definitive chronicle of one of the worst pandemics the world has ever known in *The Age of AIDS*. For more information on this program, visit: [www.pbs.org/frontline/aids](http://www.pbs.org/frontline/aids)

### **Regulating Drugs and the Creation of the FDA**

Students will trace the development of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), examine its jurisdiction, and explore the issues facing the FDA today.

## **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

An annotated list of relevant Web sites

### **Purchasing the Film**

*The Meth Epidemic* can be purchased from Shop PBS for Teachers at:

<http://teacher.shop.pbs.org/home/index.jsp>

Also, teachers and students can watch the film streamed in its entirety on FRONTLINE's Web site at: [www.pbs.org/frontline/meth](http://www.pbs.org/frontline/meth)

### **Credits**

This teacher's guide was developed by Simone Bloom Nathan of Media Education Consultants. It was written by educational consultant Patricia Grimmer. Advisers were Debra Plafker Gutt, Stuyvesant High School, New York, and Greg Timmons, curriculum writer and educational consultant.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What changes occur in the lives of meth users and their families?
2. Why are treatment programs for meth addiction less successful than programs for other drug addictions?
3. What role have pharmaceutical companies played in the spread of meth use and how has that role changed over time?
4. In what ways have politicians influenced the meth epidemic?
5. What changes occur in an addict's brain as a result of meth use? What long-term effects will this have on the individual?
6. What social and economic factors might lead people to abuse meth?
7. To what extent is "OnTrack" a successful treatment program for women?
8. What factors turned meth from an "Oregon" problem to a national epidemic?
9. How have lobbyists influenced the meth epidemic?
10. A major issue about cold products containing ephedrine or pseudoephedrine concerns balancing access for legitimate consumers with those who are using it for illicit means. Do you think this is a valid concern? Why or why not?
11. If you were in charge of solving the meth epidemic, what would you do?
12. What do you know about meth use in your state? (Note to teachers: Students can use the interactive map at: [www.pbs.org/frontline/meth/map](http://www.pbs.org/frontline/meth/map) to learn this information.)

## **FEATURED LESSON PLAN**

### **"The Most Dangerous Drug In America"**

#### **Lesson Objectives:**

Students will examine:

- The historical development of meth use
- The impact that meth use has on individual users, their communities and the United States
- The problems of treating meth addiction

#### **Materials Needed:**

Internet access and discussion questions

Student worksheet: "The Meth Education Tool Kit"

For classrooms that do not have Internet access teachers may print the materials for these lessons using the following links:

"The Meth Education Tool Kit": <http://www.metheducation.com/>

Definitions for narcolepsy:

<http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&lr=&oi=defmore&defl=en&q=define:Narcolepsy>

Letters and Poems: [http://www.kci.org/meth\\_info/letters/2005/December-2005.htm](http://www.kci.org/meth_info/letters/2005/December-2005.htm)

#### **Time Needed:**

5 minutes for large group discussion "What Do We Know About Meth?"

15-20 minutes for researching "The Meth Education Tool Kit"

20 minutes for groups to answer the discussion questions

#### **Procedure:**

Step 1: Large Group Discussion: "What Do We Know About Meth?"

Ask students the following questions:

- How is meth produced?
- What products are needed for production?
- How easy or difficult is it to obtain these products?
- What are the signs of meth use?
- What are the long-term effects of meth use?

Step 2: Small Group Discussion

- Distribute copies of the worksheet "The Meth Education Tool Kit."
- Divide the class into four or five groups.
- Students should answer the questions individually and then discuss their findings as a group.
- Students will turn in their completed worksheet.

Step 3: Homework: "The Most Dangerous Drug in America"

- Ask the students to write a short paper evaluating the validity of Attorney General Alberto Gonzales' statement that "meth is the most dangerous drug in America." This information is found at: <http://www.newhouse.com/archive/suo122705.html>
- The paper should include information from the readings and the group discussion.
- Teachers may wish to have students include additional research using materials from the Additional Resources section of this guide.

**Method of Assessment:**

- Completion of note-taking assignments
- Participation in group discussion
- Completion of homework

## **STUDENT WORKSHEET**

### **The Meth Education Tool Kit**

#### Directions:

United States Attorney General Alberto Gonzales has called meth "the most dangerous drug in America." In order to evaluate the truth of this statement, you need to become more familiar with the development and impact of meth on individual users and their communities. You will be answering questions on the worksheet individually and then comparing your ideas with members of your group.

#### **Individual Exercise**

Open the following [<http://www.metheducation.com/>], select the section labeled METH FACTS and answer the questions for each of the following categories.

#### **METH OVERVIEW**

1. What is the relationship between the brain's release of dopamine and meth addiction?
  
2. How is meth made? What dangers are associated with meth production?

#### **EFFECTS OF METH**

3. List six effects of meth use. Which do you think are most dangerous? Why?
  
4. Compare the "before" and "after" pictures. What differences do you see?

#### **DANGERS AND RISKS**

5. Identify five short-term and five long-term risks of meth use.
  
6. Compare the two pictures of the brains. What is the significance of the color orange in these pictures?
  
7. What are three dangers that meth production poses for the community?

## **ROAD TO TREATMENT**

8. Discuss three problems that make it difficult to treat meth addicts.

9. If you could devise a treatment for meth addicts what kinds of things would you incorporate into your program?

## **THE METH TIMELINE**

10. What was the first over-the-counter product used to make methamphetamine? In what year was this produced?

11. In 1937 amphetamines were prescribed for narcolepsy. Read the definitions for narcolepsy at:

<http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&lr=&oi=defmore&defl=en&q=define:Narcolepsy>  
What is the definition for narcolepsy? Why do you think that a meth-like product would help it?

12. What changes in meth production and use occurred in the 1980s? Why was this development important?

13. How has the production of meth changed in the United States from 1995 to the present? What has caused this change?

## **GROUP EXERCISE**

1. Compare your answers to the above questions and add any additional information to complete the assignment.

2. As a group compare your answers on narcolepsy. Why might amphetamines help people with this illness? How might this relate to the use of amphetamines in the 1960s? Record your discussion here.





## **ADDITIONAL LESSON IDEAS**

### **FRONTLINE: The Great Debates**

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/teach/other/postviewing2.html>

The lesson plan *Great Debates* "investigates the battle being waged between major pharmaceutical companies and American consumers fed up with paying the highest drug prices in the world." It explores the following questions:

- Will controlling the prices of prescription drugs hinder innovation?
- How can states control pharmaceutical prices so that all citizens have fair access?
- How do advertising and marketing influence the kinds of drugs doctors prescribe?

### **National Congress of State Legislators: Whose Special Interests?**

<http://www.ncsl.org/public/trust/lessonp3-h.htm>

These lesson plans have been developed to help students:

- Define key terms involved in the lobbying process and interest group politics
- Consider concerns that many citizens have with lobbyists and special interest groups
- Explore arguments in favor of interest group politics
- Discuss the impact of interest groups' activities on congressional legislation

### **HighWired.com: AIDS -- 20 Years Later**

<http://cnnstudentnews.cnn.com/2001/fyi/lesson.plans/05/30/aids/>

This series of lesson plans looks at people living with AIDS and the impact that it has on their communities. Since AIDS is often associated with drug addiction, this site can extend the lesson through the following objectives:

- Examining the demographic profile for people with HIV/AIDS
- Providing information of communities' knowledge of HIV/AIDS
- Compiling information on the global impact of HIV/AIDS

Web-exclusive video about the connection between meth abuse and HIV/AIDS transmission in the gay community can be found at :[www.pbs.org/frontline/meth/body](http://www.pbs.org/frontline/meth/body).

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### **FRONTLINE: Regulating Drugs and the Creation of the FDA**

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/teach/altmed/postviewing1.html>

This two-step lesson plan traces the development of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), examines the jurisdiction of the FDA, and looks at the issues facing the FDA today.

## **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:**

### **A Note about Internet Resources**

Students need to be aware that Web sites sometimes present only one view of an issue. Encourage them to think about Web sites even as they are reading. Guiding questions as they review Web sites are: What did you learn from this site? What didn't you learn from this site? Who sponsors this site? What bias might the sponsor have? How current is the site?

## **WEB SITES**

### **FRONTLINE: *The Meth Epidemic***

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/meth>

The companion Web site to the FRONTLINE documentary provides extended interviews with participants in the film, analysis of significant issues, frequently asked questions, readings and links. In addition, this site contains before and after pictures of meth users, detailed information about the effects of meth on the body and the brain, a timeline chronicling the spread of the epidemic, an interactive map showing the meth problem state by state, and Web-exclusive video about the link between meth abuse and HIV/AIDS transmission in the gay community.

### **The Oregonian Investigative Report: "Unnecessary Epidemic: A Five-Part Series"**

<http://www.oregonlive.com/special/oregonian/meth/>

This site provides a comprehensive look at the growth of meth use in the West and what the government could have done to stop it. The articles are written around the following themes:

- Invisible Victories
- Lobbyists and Loopholes
- Token Deterrents
- Ignored Solutions
- Child of the Epidemic

### **The Faces of Meth**

[http://www.co.multnomah.or.us/sheriff/faces\\_of\\_meth.htm](http://www.co.multnomah.or.us/sheriff/faces_of_meth.htm)

The Multnomah County Sheriff's Office has created a presentation of the effects of methamphetamine use. The site includes interactive pictures showing the decline in the health of meth users. It also provides extensive links to organizations and articles concerned with the meth epidemic.

### **San Diego Natural History Museum: *Epidemic! The Natural History of Disease***

[http://www.cln.org/themes/substance\\_abuse.html](http://www.cln.org/themes/substance_abuse.html)

This site provides multiple links that explore the causes of epidemics and how they have been dealt with over time. It also includes interactive sites to help students to gain an understanding of what causes disease and how to prevent it.

**Community Learning Network**

[http://www.cln.org/themes/substance\\_abuse.html](http://www.cln.org/themes/substance_abuse.html)

This site is designed to help K-12 teachers find educational materials online. "The Substance Abuse Theme Page" includes a collection of Internet resources on substance abuse and links to lesson plans.

**FRONTLINE: *The Alternative Fix***

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/teach/altmed/postviewing2.html>

The lesson plan *Progressive Era: Public Pressure and Government Actions* uses sections of *The Jungle* by Upton Sinclair to:

- Examine the problems in the meat industry at the turn of the 20th century
- Discuss the kinds of food concerns that exist in today's meat industry
- Make connections between regulatory issues in the meat industry at the turn of the century and the alternative medicine industry today.

**United States Drug Enforcement Agency**

<http://www.usdoj.gov/dea/resources/students.html>

Information and publications for students on drug usage and drug prevention programs are found at this site, as well as many links to other agencies.

**Koch Crime Institute: The Anti-Meth Site**

[http://www.kci.org/meth\\_info/faq\\_meth.htm](http://www.kci.org/meth_info/faq_meth.htm)

*Methamphetamine: Frequently Asked Questions*

A detailed discussion of the history and effects of meth can be found at this site.