

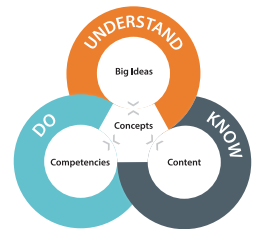
Why do we feel so bad about feeling good?

Pleasure is the motivation for many things people do in life. One of the many ways people choose to experience pleasure is by using drugs, whether it is caffeine, tobacco, cannabis or alcohol.

Yet, seeking pleasure is something that we are sometimes made to feel guilty about. Researchers point out how certain pleasures are strictly regulated in modern discourse. This is particularly true when it comes to drugs.

So why might it be important to talk about pleasure in the context of drug use? Well, it turns out that, for all of us, our motivations operate within a tension between short-term pleasure and long-term goals. Furthermore, the pleasures of drug use are inextricably bound up with its risks. We cannot effectively talk about the one without the other.

This lesson plan aims to engage students to think more critically about the concepts of pleasure, pain and risk related to drug use and to explore why pleasure is often missing from the conversation about drugs. This helps equip students to make more informed choices in their pursuit of pleasure.



Instructional strategies

1. Watch the following [video](#) with your students, and then facilitate a discussion about the topic of pleasure with questions such as those below.
 - What does pleasure mean to you?
 - Why do humans seek pleasure? Is experiencing pleasure important? What does it bring us?
 - Why might people value some pleasures more than others? Why might different people value different pleasures?
 - Is there such a thing as a “bad” pleasure? If some pleasures can have bad consequences, does that mean we should avoid those pleasures?
 - Can you ever have too much pleasure? Can you ever have too much of one kind of pleasure?
 - Is pleasure the ultimate good? If so, does that mean pain is never good?
2. Ask students to read the “[why do we feel so bad about feeling good](#)” article at the end of the lesson about the link between drugs and pleasure. Facilitate a class discussion about the article/soundtrack with questions such as those below.
 - If most people who use drugs do so “just for the fun of it,” why is it that pleasure never seems to be part of the conversation about drugs? Should it be? Should it not be?
 - If we did talk about the pleasure as well as the potential harms would more people use drugs? Would it change how people use them? Explain.
3. Have students write a media story (or other genre) on the following issue.

While Canada only recently shifted toward a legalized approach to recreational cannabis (only for adults), we have had legalized medical



cannabis for several years. Many people believe that some people claiming to use cannabis for medical reasons were actually using it for recreational purposes.

Thinking about these issues, write a media article (or other genre) exploring **some** of the following questions. Is there a difference between medical use and recreational use? Is pleasure a kind of medicine? Is there a danger in making medicine taste good (pleasurable)? Who should decide about using medicine? Who should decide what pleasures people should enjoy? Are all pleasures good? Are pleasures always good? If a pleasure is good for one person, does that mean it is good for everyone?

Drug literacy

Big ideas

- ✓ Drugs can be tremendously helpful and also very harmful
- ✓ As humans, both individually and as communities, we need to learn how to manage the drugs in our lives
- ✓ We can learn how to control our drug use by reflecting on the different ways people have thought about drugs, exploring stories from various cultures and listening to each other

Competencies

- ✓ Explore and appreciate diversity related to the reasons people use drugs, the impact of drug use and the social attitudes toward various drugs
- ✓ Develop social and communication skills in addressing discourse and behaviour related to drugs
- ✓ Recognize binary constructs (e.g., good vs bad) and assess their limitation in addressing complex social issues like drug use

Links to curriculum

English Language Arts 11 – Composition

Big ideas

- ✓ The exploration of text and story deepens our understanding of diverse, complex ideas about identity, others, and the world
- ✓ People understand text differently depending on their worldviews and perspectives
- ✓ Questioning what we hear, read, and view contributes to our ability to be educated and engaged citizens
- ✓ Engagement with writing processes can support creativity and enhance clarity of expression

Competencies

Comprehend and connect (reading, listening, viewing)

- ✓ Think critically, creatively, and reflectively to explore ideas within, between, and beyond texts personal, social, and cultural identities

Create and communicate (writing, speaking, representing)

- ✓ Respectfully exchange ideas and viewpoints from diverse perspectives to build shared understandings and extend thinking
- ✓ Use writing and design processes to plan, develop, and create engaging and meaningful texts for a variety of purposes and audiences
- ✓ Transform ideas and information to create original texts, using various genres, forms, structures, and styles
- ✓ Experiment with genres, forms, or styles of creative and communicative texts

English Language Arts 11 – New Media

Big ideas

- ✓ The exploration of text and story deepens our understanding of diverse, complex ideas about identity, others, and the world
- ✓ People understand text differently depending on their worldviews and perspectives

Competencies

Comprehend and connect (reading, listening, viewing)

- ✓ Think critically, creatively, and reflectively to explore ideas within, between, and beyond texts
- ✓ Recognize and identify personal, social, and cultural contexts, values, and perspectives in texts, including gender, sexual orientation, and socio-economic factors
- ✓ Construct meaningful personal connections between self, text, and world

Create and communicate (writing, speaking, representing)

- ✓ Respectfully exchange ideas and viewpoints from diverse perspectives to build shared understandings and extend thinking
- ✓ Use digital and multimedia writing and design processes to plan, develop, and create engaging and meaningful literary, imaginative, and informational texts for a variety of purposes and audiences
- ✓ Transform ideas and information to create original texts, using various genres, forms, structures, and styles

English Language Arts 12 – Composition

Big ideas

- ✓ The exploration of text and story deepens our understanding of diverse, complex ideas about identity, others, and the world
- ✓ People understand text differently depending on their worldviews and perspectives
- ✓ Questioning what we hear, read, and view contributes to our ability to be educated and engaged citizens

Competencies

Comprehend and connect (reading, listening, viewing)

- ✓ Think critically, creatively, and reflectively to analyze ideas within, between, and beyond texts
- ✓ Identify and understand the role of personal, social, and cultural contexts, values, and perspectives in texts
- ✓ Construct meaningful personal connections between self, text, and world

Create and communicate (writing, speaking, representing)

- ✓ Respectfully exchange ideas and viewpoints from diverse perspectives to build shared understandings and extend thinking
- ✓ Use writing and design processes to plan, develop, and create engaging and meaningful texts for a variety of purposes and audiences
- ✓ Transform ideas and information to create original texts, using various genres, forms, structures, and styles



English Language Arts 12 – English Studies

Big ideas

- ✓ The exploration of text and story deepens our understanding of diverse, complex ideas about identity, others, and the world
- ✓ People understand text differently depending on their worldviews and perspectives
- ✓ Questioning what we hear, read, and view contributes to our ability to be educated and engaged citizens

Competencies

Comprehend and connect (reading, listening, viewing)

- ✓ Think critically, creatively, and reflectively to analyze ideas within, between, and beyond texts
- ✓ Recognize and identify personal, social, and cultural contexts, values, and perspectives in texts, including gender, sexual orientation, and socio-economic factors
- ✓ Construct meaningful personal connections between self, text, and world

Create and communicate (writing, speaking, representing)

- ✓ Respectfully exchange ideas and viewpoints from diverse perspectives to build shared understandings and extend thinking
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English Language Arts 12 – New Media

Big ideas

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Comprehend and connect (reading, listening, viewing)

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This resource was developed by the **Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research** with funding provided by the **British Columbia Ministry of Health**. Any views expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Ministry or the Institute.

Drugs for fun: why do we feel so bad about feeling good?

Policy conversations about drugs often avoid one simple fact: drugs can be fun

CBC Radio · Posted: Aug 14, 2017 2:01 AM PDT | Last Updated: August 14, 2017



(Rafferty Baker/CBC)

People do drugs for all kinds of reasons to do drugs — to improve an athletic performance, treat an illness, or, for people in the throes of addiction, because they feel powerless to do otherwise.

But some people — maybe even the majority of recreational drugs users — just do it for fun.

So why is it that pleasure never seems to be part of the conversation around drugs?

Back in 1976 Peter Tosh released his ["Legalize It"](#) album, that helped popularise the idea that pot should be legal by emphasizing the medical benefits. Two years later, he expanded his message, suggesting that legalizing pot would boost the Jamaican economy and reduce harm caused by police enforcement.

But a mention of smoking pot for fun is nowhere to be found.

In the early 1990s, Cypress Hill was a little more up front about smoking pot for pleasure, with the release of their album ["Black Sunday."](#) But even for Cypress Hill, when it came to seriously advocating for the merits of weed, fun wasn't a big part of the conversation. Instead, the album's liner notes had an itemized list of facts about pot, including its potential benefits of hemp as a source of fibre for creating rope, and even bird seed.

The Biology

And why does using drugs feel good anyway?

According to Edward Hagen with Washington State University's anthropology department, that question remains a mystery, especially because drugs like tobacco, cocaine and and opium are all dangerous plant toxins.

"It makes sense that we have pleasurable responses to sex and food — both of those are key for survival and reproduction. What was really surprising, about half a century ago, neurobiologists discovered that plant-based drugs activated those same reward mechanisms."

A longstanding, widely accepted account of drugs, is that they are substances we simply didn't evolve to deal with, and that they therefore trigger reward mechanisms in our brain, just by chance.

"The problem with that is that actually we've had a very long exposure to these kinds of substances. And so to us it's relatively implausible that these potent toxins could accidentally trigger a reward mechanism. After all, the last thing a tobacco plant wants to do is encourage herbivores to eat it," said Hagen.

"One hypothesis we've put forward is that although these drugs are very toxic and dangerous to us, they're even more toxic and more dangerous to our parasites."

So there is potential that drugs have some evolutionary benefit — just like sex and food, some plant-based drugs may act as a kind of natural medicine.

The Psychology

According to Carl Hart, the chair of psychology at Columbia University, the failure to acknowledge the pleasurable dimension of why we take drugs is a serious problem, with serious consequences.

"Addiction is a small part of drug use but we act as if it's the largest part," he said. "We have to think of recreational drug use just like the way we think of other psychoactive drugs that are legal, like alcohol. Why do people use alcohol? It's used as a social lubricant. It's used to make people and things more interesting sometimes. Heroin, cocaine, all of these drugs can be used — and are used — in a similar fashion," he said.

Hart said that when we frame all drugs as dangerous, rather than substances that can be used to enhance life, we end up with policies that treat drug use as a problem, ignoring possible benefits.

"I try to get people to focus on the behaviour of interest. And the behavior of interest isn't drug use. It's are those people meeting their obligations and responsibilities? Are they good citizens? Do they treat people well?"

So why do we view alcohol and drugs so differently — and why have we been made to feel so bad about something that feels good?

The Philosophy

According to Peg O'Connor, a professor at Gustavus Adolphus College, the answer may lie in philosophy.

Ancient Greek and Roman philosophers enjoyed pleasure — and drew a sharp separation between the soul and body. But religious influences changed that.

"Pleasure starts to get coded, particularly with the rise of the Catholic church and scholastic philosophy, pleasure becomes suspect because it gets tied too closely to the bodily," she said.

This is present in many aspects of culture — from framing certain foods, films, or music as "guilty" pleasures, or in the ways we view people who sacrifice enjoyable aspects of life as strong-willed heroes.

"It's so odd because experiencing pleasure is part of what it means to be human, and yet we've pathologized that and we've moralized against it. But we all seek comfort in certain kinds of ways from the time that we are born."

"Pleasure is always suspect, unfortunately."