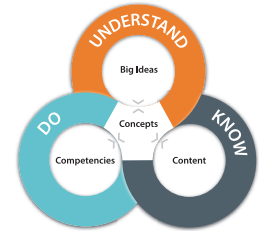


A Solution without a Problem?

“[Cannabis] is not really new but, as yet, is comparatively unknown in the United States and Canada, although three of the American States—California, Missouri and Wyoming—have legislated against its use, the authorities and police officers generally being woefully ignorant of its nature or extraordinary menace.”

— Judge Emily Murphy



In 1923, cannabis was added to the schedule of the Opium and Narcotic Control Act, effectively making it illegal to use in Canada. But since cannabis use was not really a social issue at the time, it has been argued that adding the plant to the Act was “a solution without a problem.” Indeed, the first seizure of marijuana cigarettes in Canada did not occur until 1932, nine years after the law was established, which begs the question: Why was cannabis criminalized?

In this lesson, students are invited to explore a CBC article on how Canada’s anti-cannabis policy was created and to examine passages from *The Black Candle*, Emily Murphy’s collection of statistics and news commentary on drug use in North America in the early 1920s. The exercise prompts students to explore and assess factors that may have influenced drug policy in Canada in the past and consider those influencing drug policy today.

Instructional strategies

- Invite students to read and reflect on the CBC article [Marijuana was criminalized in 1923, but why?](#) (also available as a [handout](#)). Begin by posing and discussing a few questions like those below and then suggest students each write a similar question they would like to discuss. Have the class select several of those for further discussion.
 - According to the article, “cannabis indica (Indian hemp) or hasheesh” was mysteriously added to a list of prohibited drugs in a drug control bill in 1923. The bill passed without any discussion about cannabis in the House of Commons or the Senate. Should anything be made illegal without discussion? What, if anything, do you think should have been considered or discussed before cannabis was made illegal? Why?
 - When something is declared illegal, does that make it wrong? How about when something becomes legal? Does that make it right?
 - What impacts might criminalizing, or decriminalizing, something have? Are those impacts the same for everyone? Do all such acts mean someone wins and someone loses? Explain.
- The article [Marijuana was criminalized in 1923, but why?](#) claims that “Canada liked to see itself as a leader in the drive for international drug control.” Have students explore what was happening in terms of international drug control in the late 1800s and early 1900s using the [Drug History Timeline](#). Have them develop an argument for how this may have influenced the 1923 bill.



3. Project or handout copies of the [Selected Passages](#) handout. Give students time to review the document and then, in small groups or as a class, invite them to discuss using questions like:
- The passages reflect how a judge, police chief, and doctor talked about cannabis a century ago. How does that compare to how authorities talk about cannabis today? What does this tell us about North American society and values? How can we explain these changes?
 - The *Black Candle* was a best-seller, and its contents were published earlier in a series of Mclean’s magazine articles. How might Murphy’s ideas about cannabis have influenced the lack of debate in government about criminalizing cannabis? Have ideas in more recent media had any influence on government debate about cannabis legalization? Explain.
 - Consider the emphasis on “them not us” in the passages. How is “otherness” related to stigma? Can you think of other examples of “otherness” in our society? What is the impact of “otherness” on individuals and society?
4. The expression “a solution without a problem” has been used to describe the 1923 decision to criminalize cannabis use. Invite students to reflect on that expression and consider what it might mean in their daily lives. Are there rules or policies that they have ever wondered about? What would a person or group have to do change a rule or policy?
- a. Have students work in small groups. Ask each group to choose a community or school policy that they might call into question.
 - b. Invite groups to consider the various stakeholders and issues that might have been involved in the creation of the policy (e.g., who made the policy, and why; what various points of view were involved in developing the policy; which, if any, were not likely considered; who’s most affected by the policy,

When young people have the opportunity to engage in the decision-making processes that affect their lives they are more likely to report better health, higher self-esteem and greater educational aspirations

—McCreary Centre Society. (2009).
A Seat at the Table.

and why; etc.). Then invite groups to research/ explore everything they can find out about how and why the policy came into being and how the policy might be changed.

- c. Have groups present their findings and engage their fellow students in learning how to go about making changes to a policy.

Drug literacy

Big idea

- ✓ People have been using drugs for thousands of years and in almost every human culture
- ✓ 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

- ✓ Recognize binary constructs (e.g., good vs bad) and assess their limitation in addressing complex social issues like drug use
- ✓ Recognize how official responses to drugs may have less to do with the drug than with other factors
- ✓ Develop social and communication skills in addressing discourse and behaviour related to drugs

Links to curriculum

Social Studies 10

Big ideas

- ✓ The development of political institutions is influenced by economic, social, ideological, and geographic factors
- ✓ Worldviews lead to different perspectives and ideas about developments in Canadian society
- ✓ Historical and contemporary injustices challenge the narrative and identity of Canada as an inclusive, multicultural society

Competencies

- ✓ Use Social Studies inquiry processes and skills to ask questions; gather, interpret, and analyze ideas; and communicate findings and decisions
- ✓ Assess the significance of people, places, events, or developments, and compare varying perspectives on their significance at particular times and places, and from group to group (significance)
- ✓ Assess the justification for competing accounts after investigating points of contention, reliability of sources, and adequacy of evidence, including data (evidence)
- ✓ Assess how underlying conditions and the actions of individuals or groups influence events, decisions, or developments, and analyze multiple consequences (cause and consequence)
- ✓ Explain and infer different perspectives on past or present people, places, issues, or events by considering prevailing norms, values, worldviews, and beliefs (perspective)
- ✓ Make reasoned ethical judgments about actions in the past and present, and assess appropriate ways to remember and respond (ethical judgment)

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.