

# Marijuana: Download the Facts

Teaching Guide  
for Grades 7–12



**Poster**



**Lesson Plans**



**Student Activity  
Reproducibles**

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**NIDA** NATIONAL INSTITUTE  
ON DRUG ABUSE

National Institutes of Health

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

**HEADS UP REAL NEWS**  
**ABOUT DRUGS AND YOUR BODY**

## Dear Teacher,

Teenagers are increasingly bombarded with mixed messages about marijuana—from TV, the Internet, popular music, and even friends and family. These messages can make it difficult for students to sort fact from fiction. How do they know who or what to believe?

As an educator, you are aware of how important it is for teens to have reliable information about drugs. Scholastic and the scientists at the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) have created this poster/teaching guide, **Marijuana: Download the Facts**, to help students learn how to distinguish facts from myths.

The lessons and critical-thinking activities included in this guide will give your students important tools to help them analyze the meaning behind media and social messages. Paired with essential facts about the risks associated with marijuana use, these lessons will equip your students to make informed decisions.

Thank you for sharing this valuable information with your students.

Nora D. Volkow, M.D.  
Director  
National Institute on Drug Abuse

Ann Amstutz Hayes  
Vice President  
Scholastic Inc.

## ALIGNMENT WITH NATIONAL STANDARDS

### Science (NSES/NRC)

- Life Science
- Science in Personal and Social Perspectives
  - Risks and benefits
  - Personal and community health

### Language Arts (IRA/NCTE)

- Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts.
- Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.
- Students understand how different media are structured to present a particular subject or point of view

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For facts about drugs and health, visit:

- [www.teens.drugabuse.gov](http://www.teens.drugabuse.gov)
- [www.scholastic.com/headsup](http://www.scholastic.com/headsup)
- [www.drugabuse.gov](http://www.drugabuse.gov)

For more printable lessons and student worksheets, visit:

- [www.scholastic.com/headsup/teachers](http://www.scholastic.com/headsup/teachers)

Lesson	Title	Summary	Skills Addressed
Teacher pages	Lesson Plans/Answer Key	Additional resources and answer key	
1	"Marijuana Facts" Activity Reproducible	Facts about drug use with critical-thinking questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Life Science</li><li>• Critical Thinking</li></ul>
2	"Consider the Source" Activity Reproducible	Identifying differences between fact and opinion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Evaluating Sources</li><li>• Critical Thinking</li></ul>
3	"Think It Through" Activity Reproducible	Deconstructing editorial cartoons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Media Literacy</li><li>• Critical Thinking</li></ul>
4	"Analyzing Media Messages" Activity Reproducible	Identifying hidden messages in popular culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Media Literacy</li><li>• Critical Thinking</li></ul>





# Marijuana Facts

**FACT: Marijuana is addictive.**

Delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) is the main active ingredient in marijuana. It stimulates brain cells to release the chemical dopamine, artificially causing a feeling of pleasure. The “high” feeling it creates is one of the reasons some people use it again and again, which can lead to addiction. And the younger you start, the higher your risk for addiction. About one in six teenagers who smoke marijuana will become addicted.

**FACT: Marijuana use can negatively affect your performance in school and athletics.**

THC affects many parts of the brain, including those that control memory and movement. Marijuana users may experience the following:

- problems with learning and memory
- distorted perceptions (sight, sound, time, touch)
- impaired motor coordination
- increased heart rate
- loss of interest and motivation

**FACT: Driving under the influence of marijuana is dangerous.**

Safe driving involves good concentration, judgment, and reaction time. Safe drivers must also be alert and have good coordination. Smoking marijuana—and mixing it with even small amounts of alcohol—negatively affects all of these necessary skills. In fact, up to 14 percent of the drivers who die in car accidents have marijuana or both marijuana and alcohol in their bloodstreams.

**Think It Through:** Considering the scientific facts above, study the following scenarios. Look for marijuana myths and answer the questions on separate paper. Apply facts regarding the dangers present in each situation.

1. Two members of a high school football team are nervous before a big game. A friend gives them a joint and tells them it will help them calm down before the game. What are the risks involved for these two teammates? What about the team as a whole?
2. A young man wants to smoke marijuana with his date before going to a movie. He tells her it will “open her mind” and enhance her understanding of the film. He will be driving her home afterward. What do the facts tell you about the dangers involved in this scenario?
3. A study group gets together to prepare for an important test. During a study break, one member pulls out a joint and offers to share it with anyone who wants to join her. What do the facts tell you about the risks?



# Consider the Source

A **fact** can be verified with data. An **opinion** is a personal judgment based on the knowledge or beliefs the person has at that point in time. Can opinions be trusted? It depends on the source.

Learn more by reading the following statements and then answer the questions below each statement. Decide whether the source of information is reliable or unreliable, and then circle the correct answer at the end of each statement. Finally, answer the “Think It Through” question at the bottom of the page. Use separate paper as needed.



## 1. “Marijuana is not addictive.”

**Source:** *High school student offering marijuana to a friend*

- a) Is the above statement most likely fact or opinion? \_\_\_\_\_
- b) Where might this student have gotten his or her information? \_\_\_\_\_
- c) What do you think is the purpose of this statement? \_\_\_\_\_

Source Reliable

Source Unreliable

## 2. “One in six people who start smoking marijuana in their teens become addicted.”

**Source:** *The National Institute on Drug Abuse*

- a) Is the above statement most likely fact or opinion? \_\_\_\_\_
- b) Where did the information most likely come from? \_\_\_\_\_
- c) What do you think is the purpose of this statement? \_\_\_\_\_

Source Reliable

Source Unreliable

## 3. “I’m okay to drive. I only got a little stoned and had a couple of beers. Besides, if I don’t bring Mom’s car home, I’m dead!”

**Source:** *High school student to a friend after a party*

- a) Can the above statement be verified as true? \_\_\_\_\_

- b) On what kind of information is the student likely basing his or her decision? \_\_\_\_\_

- c) What other factors should the student take into consideration before getting behind the wheel of the car? \_\_\_\_\_

Source Reliable

Source Unreliable

## 4. “Marijuana—sometimes in combination with other drugs and alcohol—is found in the bloodstream of up to 14 percent of drivers who die in car accidents.”

**Source:** *National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA)*

- a) Can the above statement be verified as a fact? \_\_\_\_\_
- b) Where did the NHTSA most likely get its information? \_\_\_\_\_
- c) How can knowing this information make a difference for the student wanting to drive home after a party? \_\_\_\_\_

Source Reliable

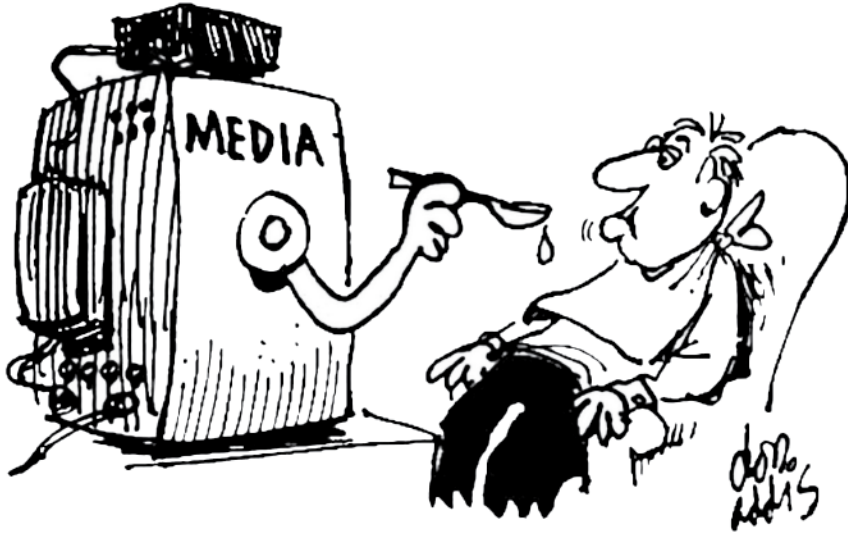
Source Unreliable

**Think It Through:** Every day, you are bombarded with information from a variety of sources, including friends, teachers, family, books, TV programs, the Internet, music, and more. Based on the reliability rating activity you just completed, how can you evaluate sources of information in your daily life to determine whether they are based on fact or opinion?



# Think It Through

Study the editorial cartoon below. Try to identify both obvious and hidden messages in the cartoon **before** answering the questions below.



1. The word “media” is written on the television set in this picture. What does this portray to you?

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2. What does the image of the arm and its actions symbolize?

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3. What is the most obvious message of this editorial cartoon?

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4. Editorial cartoons also have subliminal (hidden) messages. Imagine if this cartoon were portraying YOU in the chair. What message is the cartoon telling you?

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5. Think about the messages—both obvious and subliminal—that you get from popular culture, whether it is a TV show, a chart-topping song, or a post on a website. How does this editorial cartoon apply to those messages and how you should perceive them?

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# Analyzing Media Messages



Just how often are you exposed to messages about drugs and alcohol? If you listen to the same song every day, several times a day, for months, does it start to influence how you think about drugs and alcohol, and the choices you make?

Choose a popular song or music video that mentions drugs or portrays drug use. Remember, even if it isn't said explicitly, there may be hidden messages in the song that suggest that marijuana, tobacco, alcohol, or other drugs are no big deal. Fill in the blanks below, then answer the questions to learn more about the messages you may be getting about marijuana or other drug use.

**Name of song/video you are analyzing:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Intended audience of song/video:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Main theme of song/video:** \_\_\_\_\_

How many times are drugs or drug use mentioned/portrayed in the song/video? Fill in the chart below and indicate whether the drug reference is positive (e.g., "cool," "fun," "not dangerous") or negative (e.g., "not cool," "not fun," "dangerous").

Reference	Positive	Negative	Reference	Positive	Negative
1			5		
2			6		
3			7		
4			8		

1. What messages about marijuana, other drugs, or drug use are mentioned/portrayed in the song/video?  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Based on the information from the chart above, is the overall message about drugs positive or negative?  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. What information about marijuana or other drug use was omitted from this song/video?  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Are any of the messages about drugs in this song "hidden"? If so, what are the hidden messages?  
\_\_\_\_\_



## LESSON PLANS

### Teaching With the Poster/Teaching Guide

The four lessons and activity reproducibles included in this teaching guide may be used individually or as additional resources for larger class discussions. The classroom poster can be used to prompt discussions about media and peer messages.



Classroom Poster

#### Lesson 1: Marijuana Facts

**Objective:** Students will review some basic facts about marijuana, and understand how to use this knowledge, along with critical thinking skills, to make informed decisions about marijuana use.



**Time Required:** 20-minute class period with additional time for extension activity

**Materials:** Class set of “Marijuana Facts” Activity 1 reproducible, pen or pencil

##### Directions

**Setup:** Hand out the activity sheets. Ask students to read the information about marijuana located at the top of the page. As a class, discuss the effects that marijuana use can have on their bodies and in their lives as described on the activity sheet. Ask them what else they know about the effects of marijuana on their brains or bodies. Where did they get this information? How reliable is it?

**Activity:** Have students read each of the three questions located in the “Think It Through” section. Instruct students to use the facts they have learned to “think through” each of the scenarios and answer the questions.

**Wrap-up:** Select students to read their answers aloud and then lead a class discussion on each of the scenarios.

**Extension:** Ask students to write their own scenario involving marijuana. They should also provide responses to the scenarios based on their new knowledge of the risks and dangers associated with marijuana use.

**Evaluation:** Did the students use the facts provided in writing out their responses? Did they support their answers with details?

#### Lesson 2: Consider the Source

**Objective:** Students will understand the difference between a fact that can be verified and a personal opinion. Students will also determine the difference between an opinion based on facts vs. an opinion based on special interest.



**Time Required:** 20-minute class period with additional time for extension activity

**Materials:** Class set of “Consider the Source” Activity 2 reproducible, pen or pencil

##### Directions

**Setup:** Ask students what they think is the difference

between a fact and an opinion. Have students explain how opinions are formed. Also ask them which opinions may be more or less trustworthy and why.

**Activity:** Hand out activity sheets and have students study the directions. Instruct students to complete the worksheet by responding to the questions, then circling the correct answer to indicate whether the source is reliable or unreliable.

**Wrap-up:** As a class, discuss how the activity may inform their perspective on the messages they receive about drugs. Ask them about other messages they could evaluate using these assessment questions.

**Extension:** Have students write a paragraph answering the critical-thinking question in the “Think It Through” section. The paragraph should include a topic sentence, a supporting argument, and a closing sentence.

**Evaluation:** Did students understand how to use the questions to rate the statements included in this exercise? Did students understand the difference between information obtained from a study vs. someone's personal situation?

#### Lesson 3: Think It Through

**Objective:** Students will learn how to “read” and understand editorial cartoons.



**Time Required:** 20-minute class period with additional time for extension activity

**Materials:** Class set of “Think It Through” Activity 3 reproducible, pen or pencil

##### Directions:

**Setup:** Explain the concept and purpose of an editorial cartoon to the class. Hand out activity sheets and ask students to study the editorial cartoon. Have a class discussion about the difference between the obvious and hidden messages of the cartoon.

**Activity:** Separate students into groups of four. Have them work together to complete the activity sheet as a group. Each student should also provide their own response to the questions on their activity sheet.

**Wrap-up:** Have students discuss how important it is to be able to identify both hidden and obvious media-related messages, whether in cartoons, on TV, or in music.

**Extension:** Have students draw their own editorial cartoons about understanding media messages.

(continued on next page)





## LESSON PLANS *continued*

**Evaluation:** Were students able to understand the difference between hidden and obvious messaging? Were they able to determine what ideas the cartoon was portraying? Did they understand the overall message of the cartoon?

### Lesson 4: Analyzing Media Messages

**Objective:** Students will practice analyzing messages in a popular song or music video to better understand the number of messages they are exposed to and how, over time, that exposure might influence their decision making.



**Time Required:** 20-minute class period with additional time for extension activity. Additional time needed for outside classroom research.

**Materials:** “Download the Facts” poster, class set of “Analyzing Media Messages” Activity 4 reproducible, pen or pencil

#### Directions

**Setup:** Show the class the “Download the Facts” poster. Generate a classroom discussion that reveals elements students should consider when viewing and evaluating the poster. Ask students who they think created the message, who is the target audience, what values it emphasizes, and why they think the message was directed to its specific audience.

**Activity:** Explain to the class that they are surrounded by many different messages, and that being aware of these messages is a way to help them understand how their beliefs and behaviors may be influenced. Ask students what messages they may have seen or heard during the day. Make sure they consider songs, advertising, television, the Internet, texts, and word of mouth. Ask students to consider how many messages they are exposed to daily. Instruct students to choose a song or video that mentions or portrays drugs. Have them analyze the song/video by completing the “Analyzing Media Messages” activity sheet.

**Wrap-up:** Select students to share their findings with the class. Conduct a class discussion of some of the most interesting findings presented by the class. You can also ask students how hearing and seeing the same messages over time affects the listener or viewer.

**Extension:** Separate students into teams of two. Have each team choose a song that a student analyzed. Ask them to rewrite the song to change the message to one that does not glorify drug and/or alcohol use or that includes the negative consequences of drug and alcohol use.

**Evaluation:** Did students understand the concept and purpose of analyzing messages in popular songs? Were students able to re-create more positive messages for their selected songs?

### Activities Answer Key

The activity sheets in this guide are comprised of critical-thinking questions that are intended to have more than one possible answer or interpretation. Most student answers will vary, but should demonstrate that students understand that they are exposed to a wealth of messages that may, without them realizing it, influence their behavior, and that all messages they are exposed to should be reviewed for reliability. It is equally important that, upon completion of the exercises, students understand that marijuana use has serious consequences.

**Lesson 1: Marijuana Facts:** 1. One or both of the players could have a hard time remembering or properly executing plays during the game. Worse, they could get injured during the game. As for the team, if two members are not performing well, the entire team’s performance may suffer. 2. Marijuana can affect a person’s coordination and reaction time, and thus his or her ability to drive safely. This effect can last hours after using the drug, especially if mixed with even a little alcohol. 3. Smoking marijuana affects a person’s ability to concentrate and remember facts. So students studying under the influence of marijuana may not learn as much and do poorly on their test.

**Lesson 2: Consider the Source:** 1) a. opinion; b. A friend or popular culture; c. To justify smoking marijuana and prove it is not harmful. Source Unreliable. 2) a. fact; b. From a scientific study; c. To report the rate of marijuana addiction among individuals who began smoking during their teen years. Source Reliable. 3) a. No, this is the student’s opinion; b. His own personal feelings at the moment; c. He should consider that mixing alcohol and marijuana can impair his ability to drive even more than either marijuana or alcohol alone. He should also consider that he is putting himself and his passengers in serious danger, even if he feels “okay to drive.” Source Unreliable. 4) a. Yes; b. A study of fatal traffic accidents; c. The student can use this information to make a decision about whether to use either drug and also whether to drive after taking these drugs. The student can make these decisions based on the facts and not on his own personal situation or feelings. Source Reliable.

**Lesson 3: Think It Through:** 1. “Media” represents all the messages, hidden and obvious, that you see in ads, TV shows, public service announcements, hear in music, read in magazines, etc.; 2. The arm represents the media as a powerful, dominant force “spoon-feeding” the viewer information on what to eat, buy, wear, etc. The man represents the lazy consumer accepting information without questioning the source or making choices for himself; 3. The obvious message is that people don’t think for themselves; 4. The hidden message is that you should think for yourself and question what you see and hear; 5. Any media message (just like the TV in the cartoon) could be attempting to spoon-feed you with messages that reflect their own interests. You should consider the source, subjective messaging, and the facts when making decisions.

**Lesson 4: Analyzing Media Messages:** Answers will vary according to the song or music video chosen for evaluation.