



The Right to Health

Lesson Plan: Equal Access to Health Care in the United States

Grade Level: 8-12



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Lesson Plan: Equal Access to Health Care in the United States

Goal: To understand why it is important for everyone to have access to quality health care.

Objectives:

- Students will understand the meaning of the right to health.
- Students will identify the barriers to accessing equitable health care in the United States and critique the potential solutions.
- Students will discuss the right to health as a civic responsibility, and consider why it is important to participate in civic life.

Essential Question: Does everyone in the United States have equal access to quality health care?

Resources:

- “The Right to Health” fact sheet - download at www.discoverhumanrights.org/toolkits.html
- “Health in the United States Quiz” - download at www.discoverhumanrights.org/toolkits.html
- The Film “Sicko” by Michael Moore - to order go www.michaelmoore.com/sicko/dvd/
- Chalkboard/whiteboard/flip chart and chalk/markers
- Access to the internet

Time Frame: 3-4 class periods

Age Level: 8th grade - Adult

Minnesota High School Standards: This lesson plan meets the Minnesota State Standards in Social Studies and Language Arts outlined below. This lesson plan may also meet the individually identified requirements of Health Science Education and Family and Consumer Sciences programs.

Social Studies Standards (Grades 9-12):

- **Government and Citizenship, A #1:** Students will demonstrate the ability to use the print and electronic media to do research and analyze data.
- **Government and Citizenship, A #2:** Students will compare, contrast, and evaluate various forms of political persuasion for validity, accuracy, ideology, emotional appeals, bias and prejudice.
- **Government and Citizenship, A #3:** Students will know and analyze the points of access and influence people can use to affect elections and public policy decisions.
- **Government and Citizenship, A #4:** Students will understand the importance of informed decision-making and the roles of public speaking, conducting a public meeting, letter writing, petition signing, negotiation, active listening, conflict resolution, and mediation, defending a public policy position in a civil conversation.
- **Government and Citizenship, B #2:** Students will examine the tension between the government’s dual role of protecting individual rights and promoting the general welfare, and the tension between majority rule and minority rights, and will analyze the conflict between diversity and unity which is captured in the concept “E Pluribus Unum.”

- **Government and Citizenship, B #4:** Students will analyze the role of civil disobedience in the United States.
- **World History, I #1:** Students will examine human rights principles and how they have been supported or violated in this century.
- **World History, I #2:** Students will describe and analyze processes of “globalization” as well as persistent rivalries and inequalities among the world’s regions, and assess the successes and failures of various approaches to address these

Language Arts (Grades 8-12):

- **Research:** The students will locate and use information in reference material.
- **Speaking and Listening:** The student will demonstrate understanding and communicate effectively through listening and speaking.
- **Media and Literacy:** The student will critically analyze information found in electronic and print media, and will use a variety of these sources to learn about a topic and represent ideas.



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Procedure:

Activity 1: Barriers to Health Care

In this activity, students will begin to answer the question: What does the right to health mean in the United States and what does it mean to have access to health care? They will learn about the current issues surrounding the right to health in the United States and discuss some of the barriers people face when seeking health care.

1. **Brainstorm.** Ask the class to respond to the following questions:

- What does it mean to have a right to health?
- What do you do when you are sick or hurt and you need to go to the doctor?
- Can you think of reasons why a person might find it difficult to get care when they are sick or hurt?
- What does it mean to have health care coverage?

2. **Explain.** Based on your discussion, you may find that students are confused about the meaning of the right to health and what it means to have access to health care in the United States. Explain to students that the right to health does not mean that an individual has the right to be healthy, since no government can assure a specific state of health, but it does mean that the government has an obligation to ensure that everyone has access to a variety of facilities and conditions that are necessary for good health. This includes such conditions as safe water, food, sanitation, shelter, and working conditions, as well as access to an effective and integrated health care system.

In the United States, access to health care can be a challenge. Explain to the students that most Americans rely on health insurance companies to cover their medical expenses, but an estimated 45 million Americans are uninsured. Some may be uninsured because they are unemployed, or because their employer does not provide adequate coverage. Other Americans are denied health care coverage because of “pre-existing conditions” (e.g., cancer, heart disease, being overweight or smoking). In some places in the United States, it is difficult to get care because there is a shortage of doctors, and some people face even more difficulties because of language and/or cultural barriers (for further details see “Right to Health in the United States” fact sheet).

3. **Quiz.** Handout the learning resource: “Health in the United States Quiz.” After the students have had a chance to complete it, read through the answers. Discuss what may have been surprising to the students. Ask them if they know people who have faced some of the barriers to health care listed on the quiz.

4. **Discuss.** Discuss health as a human right. Divide the students into groups of 2 or 3 and have them discuss and write a definition for the right to health. When they have finished, ask a few of the groups to read their definitions out loud. Make a list of some of the key points. Now, see how many students think that these rights are guaranteed in the United States. Let them know that although the World Health Organization and the United Nations have outlined and guaranteed the right to health, the United States is one of the few industrialized nations that does not guarantee access to health care (see “Right to Health in the United States” fact sheet).

5. **Homework Assignment - Gather Stories.** Have students ask family, friends and neighbors about their experiences with health care. If they know someone living outside of the United States, have students ask about the differences between health care in the United States and health care in other countries. Ask them to write a 2-3 paragraph story describing one of these experiences and be prepared to share what they learned in the next class discussion.



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Activity 2: Health Care Stories

In this activity, students will be viewing portions of “Sicko,” the Michael Moore documentary about health care in the United States. In the selected scenes, people discuss the they have faced when seeking health care coverage.

- 1. Share Stories.** Break students into small groups and have them share the short stories about health care they gathered through their homework assignment. Ask them if they see any common themes among these stories and share with their group one or two problems with health care that were revealed through their research.
- 2. Watch Film.** Let the students know they will be seeing some short clips from the Michael Moore documentary “Sicko,” which describe some of the barriers people face when attempting to receive health care in the United States. Choose as many clips as time allows; after each clip, ask the students the corresponding discussion question(s):

Chapter 2: Examples of health care being denied - minutes 9:50 - 14:30

- What were some of the reasons you heard for why people are being denied health care?
- Why do people in the United States need health insurance? What happens if you don't have health insurance?

Chapter 4: The “Hit Man” and the Story of Tracy Pierce - minutes 21:03 - 28:03

- Why would an insurance company deny a person coverage for certain illnesses? What choices do people have if they are denied this coverage?

Chapter 10: “An American Filmmaker in Paris” - minutes 1:10 - 1:18

- How did Dawnelle Key's experience differ from Karina's story?
- Why do you think Michael Moore tells you these stories about health care in the United States and health care in France?

Chapter 12: Health Care and the Homeless - minutes 1:27:55 - 1:32:09

- How did the USC hospital deal with homeless patients who couldn't afford to pay their hospital bill?
- What barriers do poor people face when trying to receive health care in the United States?

- 3. Homework Assignment - Research.** Ask your students to do some further research about health care in the United States by going to the following PBS web page and answering the questions given in steps 1-3 below. www.pbs.org/newshour/indepth_coverage/health/uninsured/map_flash.html.

1. Click the link “How We Are Insured” and read through the page. Answer the question: How are most people in the United States insured? How do unemployed, low-income, or disabled people get health insurance?
2. Click the link “Who Are the Uninsured?” and read through the page. Answer the question: What is the socioeconomic position of most uninsured people? What factors affect people's ability to get access to health care?
3. Click the link “U.S. vs. Other Nations” and compare the United States to one or two other countries. Answer the question: If you were ill, which country would you like to live in? Why?



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Activity 3: Health Care and Public Policy.

In this class activity, the instructor can encourage students to think about health care as a public policy issue, one that can be solved through engaged civic responsibility. In the previous class periods, students have seen, read, and heard about some of the barriers people face when trying to access health care. Now, ask them to think about what they can do to make a change.

1. Take Action on the Right to Health. Divide the class into small groups and assign one person to take notes. Have each group name the top three reasons why they think the United States health care system needs work. Have them think about the stories they have heard about people trying to access health care and choose the one that made the most impact on them. Finally, have them list as many facts about health care as they can. Using this information, each group should choose one of the activities listed below. The list of activities can be copied and used as a handout for students.

- **Op-Ed Letter:** With your group, compose an “Op-Ed” (opinion/editorial) letter to your local paper in which you express your views about the need for an accessible health care system. An Op-Ed letter is usually about 600-800 words and presents an argument in a clear, concise manner. You might want to begin the letter with a story or anecdote about health care - one you might have experienced yourself or one that you heard about on the news or in “Sicko.” Let the editor know who you are and why you are writing, and support your argument with some of the facts you gathered for homework.
- **Contact Your Legislator:** Compose a letter or email to the person who represents your community in Congress. Let him/her know who you are and why you are writing. You might want to capture your reader’s attention by beginning the letter with a story or anecdote about health care (you can use a personal experience or one you heard about in a previous class period). Be sure to support your position on this issue with some facts about health care in the United States. To find your legislators’ contact information, visit www.govtrack.us/congress/findyourreps.xpd.
- **Prepare a Presentation:** Share what you have learned with other people in your school. Create a 10-15 minute presentation about health care that you could present to another class. Consider acting out one of the stories you have heard, and then follow that with some facts about health care in the United States. How can you help your audience understand why access to health care is an important issue?

2. Take the Next Step. Have each small group brainstorm what they can do next. Send their letters! Present to the class next door!

3. Homework Assignment: Get Involved. Ask students to visit one of the web sites below and come up with at least 3 ways they can get involved in changing the health care problem in the United States.

- www.childrensdefense.org/site/PageServer?pagename=healthy_child_backinfo_whouninsured/ (click any of the links to the left under “Get Involved”)
- www.everybodyinnobodyout.org/
- www.familiesusa.org/



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Optional Extension Activity: Health Care and the Media

In this activity, students will critique the arguments they hear and think about the role that the media plays in shaping our perspectives about health care.

1. Watch Film Clips on the Media.

Play the following clips from “Sicko” that portray different media perspectives on health care:

Chapter 6: The birth of HMO (includes attempt by Hillary Clinton to change health care in the United States)

Chapter 7: Health care coverage in U.S. versus Canada

Chapter 8 & 9: Health care coverage in U.S. versus England

Chapters 10 & 11: Health care coverage in U.S. versus France

2. Group Discussion.

Use the following questions to facilitate class discussion:

- What arguments have been used in the past to avoid making changes to health care?
- What does “socialized medicine” mean, and why do people fear it?
- How does Michael Moore use old film clips to help support his argument?
- What affect does the music you hear have on you? How do you think it helps to support an argument?
- What do people think about health care in countries like Canada, England and France? Why?
- How does Moore use irony and humor to support his argument?
- Many of the clips Moore uses come from the network news. How does this media coverage affect your view of health care in other countries?
- Are documentaries like “Sicko” reliable? Do you think that Moore presents all sides of the argument?

Optional Class Project: Create Your Own Documentary. In small groups or as a whole class, have students use pictures, music and video to create their own documentaries about health care. The following websites are great resources on how to make your own documentary:

Witness

www.witness.org

Learn how to use video to create change. Download the *Video for Change Training Guide*, check out the “Tips and Techniques” training video, or watch short documentaries made by other filmmakers.

YouthLearn

www.youthlearn.org/learning/activities/multimedia/video.asp

Video is a remarkable means of learning. Learn how to teach video production and find out about some useful activities and projects.

Apple Education

www.apple.com/education/documentary/

Turn your students into documentary filmmakers with Apple’s *Documentary Resource Kit*, including “Using iMovie to Create a Documentary,” “Stories Worth Telling: A Guide to Creating Student-Led Documentaries,” and a Documentary Resource CD.

Making Movies

<http://english.unitecology.ac.nz/resources/units/movies/home.html>

This unit plan is all about teaching youth how to make movies and provides tips on how to choose a video project that is challenging but not so ambitious that it cannot be completed.

The Multimedia Project

<http://pblmm.k12.ca.us/TechHelp/VideoHelp/VideoGuide.html>

Students and teachers can use the *Video Guide* to explore the world of video. You’ll find advice sheets, activities, glossaries, and more.

Adobe Digital Kids Club

www.adobe.com/education/digkids/lessons/documentary.html

This step-by-step curriculum teaches your students how to become recorders of reality and create documentaries. The website includes lesson plans, video tutorials and more.



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“The enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being without distinction of race, religion, political belief, economic, or social condition.”

-Preamble to the WHO Constitution

“Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age, or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.”

-Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 25.1

“Human rights are our common heritage and their realization depends on the contributions that each and every one of us is willing to make, individually and collectively, now and in the future.”

-Louise Arbour, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights