



Lesson Plan: Debate U.S. Government Policy on Hemp

OVERVIEW:

This lesson plan is designed to be used in conjunction with the film *Standing Silent Nation*, which documents the struggles of an Oglala Lakota family to grow industrial hemp on their South Dakota reservation as a means of earning a sustainable living after other crops had failed on their land. This lesson will explore U.S. policies related to hemp, as well as the relationship of the U.S. government to indigenous nations.

P.O.V. documentaries can be taped off-the-air and used for educational purposes for up to one year from the initial broadcast. In addition, P.O.V. offers a lending library of DVD's and VHS tapes that you can borrow anytime during the school year — FOR FREE!

OBJECTIVES:

By the end of this lesson, students will:

- Use viewing skills and note taking strategies to understand and interpret a video clip.
- Work in groups to research a debate question and develop a three-minute presentation.
- Present their arguments and supporting evidence in an oral presentation, and then respond to a challenge question posed by the teacher.

GRADE LEVELS: 7-12

SUBJECTS: U.S. History, Current Events, Geography, Civics

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Computers with Internet access.
- Handout: Viewing Guide (PDF file)
- Method (varies by school) of showing the class a video clip from the P.O.V. Web site for *Standing Silent Nation*, or have a copy of the film and a VHS/DVD player and monitor.

ESTIMATED TIME NEEDED: Two 50-minute class periods

SUGGESTED CLIPS:

[Introducing the issues](#) (length: 13:16)

The clip begins just after the film's title at 4:50 with the shot of the bridge with text, "St. Louis, Missouri, December 12, 2005." The clip ends at 18:06 with "...there's next year."

BACKGROUND:

The film, *Standing Silent Nation*, chronicles the efforts of Alex White Plume and his family to develop a sustainable economy on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. Because the land is unsuitable for most crops, they put their hopes in industrial hemp, a hardy fiber crop with a booming worldwide demand for its many products.

Commonly confused with marijuana, hemp is an easy-to-grow plant whose stalks, seeds and oil can be used to produce a range of goods including food, body-care products, clothing, rope, paper and bio-fuel.

Grown by the United States' "founding fathers", hemp cultivation in the U.S. was first complicated by tax and licensing regulations imposed by the 1937 Marijuana Tax Act. During World War II when foreign hemp supply lines were blocked, the federal government launched a "Hemp for Victory" campaign that encouraged farmers to cultivate the crop once again. About a million acres of hemp were grown across the Midwest, but the processing plants were quietly shut down after the war and the industry faded away.

Hemp growing continues in much of the rest of the world, but it is restricted in the United States because, like marijuana, it is in the *Cannabis sativa* plant family. However, while marijuana contains as much as 20% Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), the plant's chief intoxicant, hemp can be bred to contain as little as 0.3 percent — not enough to produce a psychoactive effect.

There are currently more than 25,000 identified uses for industrial hemp and importation of the plant (the stalk, stem and roots of the plant) and hemp products is legal. The United States imports over \$1.3 million worth of hemp products from other nations that regulate hemp production. U.S. retail sales of these goods are now estimated to be between \$250 and \$300 million annually.

ACTIVITY:

1. Do an Internet search for images of hemp products. (Alternatively, bring to class examples of hemp lotions, string, paper, clothing, etc.) Show students the variety of products and explain that they are all made with a form of *Cannabis sativa*, called "hemp." Unlike marijuana though, this form of *Cannabis sativa* contains very small levels of THC, the chemical in marijuana that makes people "high." Point out that while hemp products are legal in the United States, growing hemp is illegal because it is a form of *Cannabis sativa* and U.S. law does not distinguish it from marijuana.
2. Pass out the Viewing Guide and tell students that you are going to show them a brief video clip (length: 13:16) that will introduce them to an American Indian family who wants to grow hemp on their reservation. Then, show the clip.
3. After watching the video, explain that the class is going to debate the question, "Should the White Plumes be allowed to grow industrial hemp?" Put students in groups of four or five and determine which side of the question each group will argue (for example, agricultural and economic sustainability, tribal sovereignty, the war on drugs, etc.)
4. Each group will then research its position and prepare a three-minute presentation that presents the group's viewpoint, clearly identifies and describes its principal argument, and provides examples that support the argument. To assist with research, students can use their notes from the video clip, extended interviews from *Standing Silent Nation* on the P.O.V. Web site, sites from the Resources section below, and other information sources.

5. Explain that after each group presentation, you will ask a question challenging their position, and they will have one minute to respond. Point out that students will need to be well-prepared so that they can mount a rebuttal. Groups should also consider what fair question a person from the opposite viewpoint might legitimately ask.

6. Allow an appropriate amount of research and preparation time for your students, and then have each group give its presentation and respond to your challenge question in class.

ASSESSMENT SUGGESTIONS:

Students can be assessed on:

- Completing the Viewing Guide.
- Contributions made to their teams during the debate activity.
- How well they used persuasive techniques to present and support their positions in the debate.

EXTENSIONS & ADAPTATIONS:

- Study the Industrial Hemp Farming Act (HR 3037), a bill introduced in Congress that would remove restrictions on cultivating non-psychoactive industrial hemp on United States farms. Then have students share their views on this bill with their members of Congress. In their letters, students should include research points from the lesson activity to support their perspectives.
- Conduct research to gather information for a timeline of hemp production and restriction in the United States. Have students begin with the United States' founding fathers who grew hemp (e.g., George Washington, Thomas Jefferson) and continue their timeline up to the present day. Be sure they include the "Hemp for Victory" program and legislation that later restricted growing hemp in the U.S.
- Host a film festival that features American Indian issues. In addition to *Standing Silent Nation*, the festival could include the P.O.V. films *In the Light of Reverence*, *Arctic Son* and *Boomtown*.
- Learn more about Native American cultures by visiting a museum or culture center in your state. Find out what is available in your area from the "Native America Near You" feature on the P.O.V. Web site (www.pbs.org/pov/pov2002/boomtown/discovermore.html).
- Create definitions of "tribal sovereignty" from the perspectives of the U.S. government and the Oglala Lakota. In their research, have students find out what treaties and government leaders have said related to tribal sovereignty, and identify what limitations there have been on such independent governance. To help with research, students could watch *Standing Silent Nation* in its entirety, tap the related resources on the P.O.V. Web site, access the sites in the Resources list below, and track down other related materials. Then, discuss as a class how sovereign indigenous people should be, using research data to support conclusions.
- Design and display a comic strip or political cartoon that speaks to the growing of industrial hemp in the U.S. or issues related to the U.S. government's relationship with indigenous groups.

- Produce a brochure, slide presentation, podcast, or other media message that educates people at school and in the community about the issues addressed in this lesson.

RESOURCES:

Department of Justice's Drug Enforcement Agency

www.usdoj.gov/dea/index.htm

The Web site of the Department of Justice's Drug Enforcement Agency includes the text of the Controlled Substance Act. Search for "hemp" to find relevant news reports and policy statements relevant to the White Plume case.

The Hemp Industries Association

<http://thehia.org/>

The Hemp Industries Association is a non-profit trade association representing hemp companies, researchers and supporters. Resources include a country-by-country summary of hemp policies around the world and information on pending legislation, the Industrial Hemp Farming Act of 2007 (H.R. 1009).

Natives Unite: Hemp at Pine Ridge

<http://nativesunite.org/hemp/>

This part of the Natives Unite Web site focuses on the White Plume legal case and includes a downloadable copy of the final judgment explaining the court's position.

Vote Hemp

www.votehemp.com/

Vote Hemp is a non-profit organization dedicated to changing U.S. law to allow for the growth and sale of industrial hemp. The Web site includes basic information about industrial hemp, as well as a timeline of the White Plume Case and links to corresponding legal documents and news coverage.

STANDARDS:

These standards are drawn from "Content Knowledge," a compilation of content standards and benchmarks for K-12 curriculum by McRel (Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning) at <http://www.mcrel.org/standards-benchmarks/>.

Civics

Standard 1: Understands ideas about civic life, politics, and government.

Level III, Benchmark 3: Knows institutions that have the authority to direct or control the behavior of members of a society (e.g., a school board, state legislature, courts, Congress).

Level IV, Benchmark 2: Knows formal institutions that have the authority to make and implement binding decisions (e.g., tribal councils, courts, monarchies, democratic legislatures).

Standard 11: Understands the role of diversity in American life and the importance of shared values, political beliefs, and civic beliefs in an increasingly diverse American society.

Level III, Benchmark 3: Knows major conflicts in American society that have arisen from diversity.

Level IV, Benchmark 3: Knows examples of conflicts stemming from diversity, and understands how some conflicts have been managed and why some of them have not yet been successfully resolved.

Standard 14: Understands issues concerning the disparities between ideals and reality in American political and social life.

Geography

Standard 10: Understands the nature and complexity of Earth's cultural mosaics.

Standard 13: Understands the forces of cooperation and conflict that shape the divisions of Earth's surface.

U.S. History

Standard 9: Understands the United States territorial expansion between 1801 and 1861, and how it affected relations with external powers and Native Americans.

Standard 29: Understands the struggle for racial and gender equality and for the extension of civil liberties.

Standard 31: Understands economic, social, and cultural developments in the contemporary United States.

Language Arts

Standard 4: Gathers and uses information for research purposes.

Standard 8: Uses listening and speaking strategies for different purposes.

Standard 9: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Cari Ladd, M.Ed., is an educational writer with a background in broadcast journalism, secondary education, and media development. Previously, she served as PBS Interactive's Director of Education, overseeing the development of curricular resources tied to PBS programs, the PBS TeacherSource Web site (now PBS Teachers), and online teacher professional development services. She has also taught in Maryland and Northern Virginia.

Background Sources:

"Bird Food Is a Casualty of the War on Drugs." Wren, Christopher S. *The New York Times*, October 3, 1999.

"Hemp and Marijuana: Myths and Realities." West, David P., Ph.D. North American Industrial Hemp Council.

"Hemp is Hip, Hot, and Happening, So Why Are American Farmers Being Left Out?" Special advertising section in *Utne Reader*, September–October 2004. Sponsored by hempindustries.org: www.thehia.org

"Industrial Hemp: Global Markets and Prices." Vantreese, Valerie. University of Kentucky, Department of Agricultural Economics, 1997. <http://www.votehemp.com/PDF/hemp97.pdf>
Introduction of the Industrial Hemp Farming Act of 2007:
<http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/z?r110:E13FE7-0027>:
"The Hemp Vote." Leibovich, Mark. *The New York Times*, February 20, 2007.
VoteHemp.org