

KAT Talk ©
Issue 15 2006

KAT Lessons Address:

“What’s Public About Your Health?”©

We’ve all heard – and perhaps even expressed – the sentiment, “If he wants to die from smoking (or drinking, or motorcycling, or....), that’s his right.” The idea is that private behaviors should not be regulated by the heavy hand of government. Pursuit of happiness is supposed to be a protected right. The Declaration of Independence tells us that.

But rarely is the issue ever so simple!

Increasingly in this world, the behaviors and decisions of individuals are not isolated. They impact other people in their communities.

For instance, consider how Jane Doe’s careless hygiene spread germs to her classmates and their families, creating great misery, inconvenience, loss of work/income and hardship. Or think about how Joe Smith’s decision to drink resulted in his forgetting to look in on his two-year-old, who climbed out of her crib and into a large chest of toys, where the lid fell closed and she suffocated. Additional examples include how our taxes and health insurance premiums go up because of the violence and disability associated with drug abuse. Air and water pollution accumulate to hurt our environment, and erode our health.

Private decisions constantly exert public consequences. Harm and expense often burden innocent people because of poor private health choices of other individuals.

Should society be protected from harmful health decisions of others? When? Is there a legitimate public interest in constraining behaviors that compromise the health of others? But isn’t there also some danger when government gets to tell us how to live?

Such vital questions punctuate our democracy. They tap into the essence of policy debates, challenging our free citizenry to resolve in a peaceful, fair way.

KAT encourages students to tackle these complex issues.

This issue of *KAT Talk* develops lessons around such issues in public health policy. *KAT Talk #15* highlights topics of smoking prevention and second-hand smoke. Some of the work is drawn from the actual KAT study on smoking by Wilson Middle School students in the School District of Philadelphia during the 2005-6 school year.

KAT Study on Public Health Promotes Healthy Citizenship!

Through Kids Around Town, improved public health also translates into improved citizenship, as well!

Out of numerous possible illustrations, we focus on the example set by Wilson Middle School in Philadelphia, 2006. When considering how they could improve their community, Wilson students decided to focus on public health, and more specifically, smoking cessation and prevention.

They knew that before they could begin to fix a problem, they had to study it in depth. Part of their study involved building partnerships with organizations in the community that had expertise in the issue.

One of Philadelphia's eight public health centers was located within a short walk of the school. Students set up an appointment to meet with the director of that health center. There they learned about the goals and budgets of the regional health centers. They began to connect individual behaviors with their individual future, with personal responsibilities and public health. They learned about some of the expenses – in terms of direct and indirect health, and in terms of cigarette purchases – that smoking costs society. And they could visually absorb how resources were being devoted to rectify a preventable drain on their community.

Several speakers were invited to the school over the next few weeks. One represented the Tobacco Control and Prevention Program of the Health Promotion Council. She taught the students about the laws governing youth access to tobacco products, some facts about addiction and the chemical components in cigarette smoke.

City Councilman Michael Nutter also visited the students. He explained why he had introduced a bill in City Council calling for tighter restrictions against smoking in public places, and discussed the political realities that had been blocking that bill's passage.

Students obtained vast amounts of reading materials about smoking – some produced by the Youth Smoking Prevention department of Philip Morris, some from the Philadelphia and Pennsylvania Departments of Health, among other sources. Students studied additional information from newspapers and online. Through surveys, they tapped family and friends.

The students became so concerned about the impact of second-hand smoke and youth addiction that they wrote Mayor Street and attended City Council hearings on the smoking ban bill. Over a dozen students testified at the Council meeting on March 27, sharing their research. Others wore signs depicting a harmful chemical they protested or the smoking-related disease from which they wanted protection.

Some students were impressed by the arguments of speakers opposing the smoking ban. Students who had reservations about the proposed legislation or the government's role in regulation were also encouraged to speak up and to express themselves in letters.

Making a Difference

Healthier citizenship is one powerful outcome from the Wilson Middle School KAT study on public health.

- The students were honored at a School District "Exhibition of Learning" for exemplifying service learning and character education.
- Wilson students from mentally gifted classes collaborated with students from learning support classes in their public health efforts.
- Students wrote persuasive letters to family and friends who smoke, urging them to seek assistance to control their dangerous, morbid addiction.
- Students wrote Mayor Street about their research and urging action.
- T-shirts bearing student artwork and a smoking-cessation hotline number were designed and worn as part of the students' health campaign.
- The smoking ban passed Philadelphia City Council in June, 2006.

Student Reflections & Comments

"I think we made a difference in the government's opinion on the law."

"The effect we have on the government is that when we bother them a lot about it, they'll listen to us."

"I was surprised by how much support we had, the amount of people there, and the amount of time the process took."

"Take action Mayor Street. Protect your citizens, workers, students and families! You can't make everyone happy, but you can try to make them healthier."

"I believe we had a great impact on the government. I came to this conclusion because we had many claps, and (Councilwoman) Marian Tasco seemed very interested and willing to help at the sight of children there to speak."

"We could have done better if we made solutions to any concerns the opposition had."

Adding to Your Resource Base

Before forming opinions on any issue, you need to RESEARCH a variety of perspectives and considerations, including economic, health, social and historical background. Good students – and good citizens – consult diverse sources, primary and secondary.

www.medlineplus.gov Type in “smoking” under “search”, and you’ll be able to link to dozens of informative, reliable resources on many aspects of the topic.

www.surgeongeneral.gov/tobacco Another website packed with rich links, from smoking cessation tips to the US Surgeon General’s discussion of the 1964 report definitively linking cancers and other diseases to smoking, and his 2006 report on the public health hazards from “involuntary exposure” .

Prevention and quit information, and useful, easy-to-read pamphlets are available (some free of charge) from the Tobacco Control Program of the Philadelphia Department of Public Health (215-683-5483) and the Pennsylvania Department of Public Health 1-877-724-1090. Paid orders may be placed directly through Journeyworks Publishing www.journeyworks.com .

Philip Morris offers independently-prepared parent and youth smoking prevention information: www.philipmorrisusa.com/en/home.asp, and click on the **Parent Resource Center or 1-800-768-7297**. Free, comprehensive and user-friendly booklets and links, created by a national panel of psychologists and physicians, help parents deal with the challenges, contradictions and dilemmas of helping their kids deal with this conflict-laced topic.

Other extremely informative sources are:

The Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids, based in Washington, DC:
www.tobaccofreekids.org ; 202-296-5469

www.jeffreywigand.com ; 989-772-4063

www.cdc.gov/tobacco ; 1-800-CDC-info or 770-488-5493

www.channing-bete.com; 1-800-477-4776 (esp. “Quitting Smoking—while you’re still a teen.”)

Transcript of the March 27, 2006 Public Hearings before the Public Health and Human Services Committee of City Council of Philadelphia, on Bill No. 060050: **Chief Clerk’s Office: 215-686-3410** (or contact KAT through this site).

CenterFold KAT LESSON: A Smoking Scenario

READ THE FOLLOWING SCENARIO and then ADDRESS THE QUESTIONS POSED BELOW.

As Mr. Adams waited for the bus, he wondered where he could go to get a breath of fresh air. His chest felt tight, and his eyes began to burn. Here he was outdoors, but the whole street corner was clouded by smokers waiting for the same bus.

Ms. Bonner was one of them, and she inhaled deeply, knowing she wasn't allowed to smoke on the bus or at work, and had to satisfy her nicotine addiction while she could. "What happened to the idea that this is a free country?" she wondered to herself. "If I want to die of lung cancer, isn't that my right?"

- *What should a good citizen do about this dilemma? How would you decide what is a fair smoking policy in your community?*
- *What information should you get before you form your opinions or make any decisions?*

* * * * *

Teachers' Guide to CenterFold Lesson

An important objective of such a lesson is to teach - and give students practice in - a PROCESS of effective problem solving. The solution here is less the point than the METHOD by which students APPROACH the complex and controversial situation. Here are some KEY POINTS for students to learn in that approach:

- *Good citizens RESEARCH and STUDY an issue BEFORE taking a stand or voicing opinions or taking action.* Explain to students that it's premature to try to solve this dilemma without first getting some basic information.
- *WHAT SPECIFIC INFORMATION do you need to know about the situation above?* Make sure students know to gather cross-disciplinary background for such a study, including:

History of Smoking
Legal and Regulatory Facts about Smoking
Health & Biological Impact, Environmental Factors
Economic Aspects: Costs, Taxes, Business, Advertising etc.
Social and Demographic Factors
Constitutional and Judicial Relevance

- ***Good citizens tap MANY DIFFERENT reliable SOURCES and understand legitimate, DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES on any given issue.*** Help students learn WHERE to get such information and what EXPERTS to consult. Many reliable resources are suggested in the section “Adding to Your Resource Base.” (Click to) Students should definitely read the most recent report by the US Surgeon General on second-hand smoke (attached – click to). It would also be valuable to read the many conflicting perspectives found in the public transcripts of the March 27, 2006 testimony before Philadelphia City Council on its proposed bill extending the smoke-free public space (attached lengthy PDF file – click to).
- ***Consider who are all the various “stakeholders” in this issue. Have you heard/read their voices?***
- ***As you examine possible policies and approaches to the scenario’s primary conflict, remember to look at how COSTS & BENEFITS (include economic, environmental, health, choice, etc.) are distributed across the population.***
 - Who benefits and who loses?
 - What would happen with certain changes in the current policies? Then who would gain and who would suffer?
 - Consider BOTH LONG-TERM and SHORT-TERM IMPACT.
- ***Study the Constitutional questions in this dilemma.*** What happens when two or more Constitutional rights collide? Help students examine examples where Constitutional rights have not been “absolute”, but instead, depend on the context and other criteria, principles and precedents.
- ***What is the PUBLIC interest in smoking? Identify why some COMMUNITIES believe they have a stake in this that makes it different from merely a PRIVATE or PERSONAL decision? Is there evidence that supports this belief?***
- ***Examine your PERSPECTIVE ...***
 - ***What are your GOALS?***
 - ***What ASSUMPTIONS are people making?***
 - ***What CRITERIA are people using ?***
 - ***What strategies make sense? Why?***
- ***OTHER ?***

Lesson Planning Notes to Teachers for

KAT Talk #15 Break-Out Lessons

Suggested Objectives:

Students will identify news issues and articles about public health. They will research these issues, and practice inquiry skills to analyze the information. Students will apply vocabulary and concepts from their research to actual situations in their own community and school. Students develop deeper civic awareness and citizenship skills.

Curriculum Standards:

These lessons support numerous curriculum standards in the areas of language arts (reading comprehension, vocabulary, research, writing and/or oral expression), and history, civics, economics and other social studies, and health. Depending on specific research actually performed, we expect applied science, statistics and mathematics in society.

Skills:

- Reading for Meaning
- Identifying & Distinguishing Different Types of Policies, Laws, Strategies
- Inquiry-based Research
- Citing Evidence
- Critical, Deliberative Thinking
- Writing
- Deeper Understanding of U.S. Constitution
- Cost/Benefit Analysis
- Explanation of Reasoning
- Deliberative Discussion
- Increase Awareness of Multiple Factors/Perspectives
- Problem Solving
- Conflict Resolution
- Creative applications

Materials:

Don't limit yourself to the materials presented on this website. You can begin with the [Resources \(link to Adding to Your Resource Base\)](#) and suggestions cited throughout this *KAT Talk*, but then move into others provided by your own regional and technical experts. Remember to consult newspapers; relevant professional and a variety of advocacy organizations (such as the American Cancer Society) and their newsletters; professional journals; universities; and government documents and agencies.

#2 Another PUBLIC HEALTH KAT Lesson: (Also: See Notes for Lesson Planning)

“Government Power & Public Health” ©

→ Engage & Explain:

Governments use a variety of policies to encourage and discourage certain activities by the people. Sometimes governments use force, and sometimes they use economics, and there are many other methods. Citizens who believe in liberty and democratic self-governance have a high stake in monitoring the kinds of strategies and policies used by their government to make sure the goals and methods are appropriate.

Here’s one familiar example of a public health policy structured to discourage certain public behaviors: Drivers caught driving too fast, over the speed limit, are often penalized by having to pay a fine. Sometimes, in addition, their offense is recorded as a strike against their driving license privilege, and a certain number of these offenses will result in revoking that privilege altogether.

→ Student Exploration:

- **What other policies can you find or think of that governments use to try to SHAPE BEHAVIOR of citizens toward others?**
- **Give an example involving an aspect of public health.**

→ Helpful Hintful Guidelines:

***A) Governments OUTLAW some behaviors...**

(for instance?) _____

An example of a health-related behavior that your government *outlaws* is....?

WHY do you think this health behavior is *outlawed*? _____

Do you agree? Can you think of a better policy with respect to that health issue?

***B) Governments TAX some behaviors ...**

(for instance ?) _____

An example of a health-related behavior that your government *taxes* is....?

WHY do you think this health behavior is *taxed*? _____

Do you agree? Can you think of a better policy with respect to that health issue?

***C) Governments REQUIRE certain behaviors ...**

(for example?) _____

An example of a health-related behavior that your government *requires* is ...?

WHY do you think this health behavior is *required*? _____

Do you agree? Can you think of a better policy with respect to that health issue?

***D) Governments SUBSIDIZE certain behaviors...**

(for example?) _____

An example of a health-related behavior that your government *subsidizes* is ...?

WHY do you think this health behavior is *subsidized*? _____

Do you agree? Can you think of a better policy with respect to that health issue?

E) Governments CELEBRATE/ENCOURAGE certain behaviors...

(for example?) _____

An example of a health-related behavior that your government *celebrates* is ...?

WHY do you think this health behavior is *celebrated*? _____

Do you agree? Can you think of a better policy with respect to that health issue?

F) Governments REGULATE certain behaviors...

(for example?) _____

An example of a health-related behavior that your government *regulates* is ...?

WHY do you think this health behavior is *regulated*? _____

Do you agree? Can you think of a better policy with respect to that health issue?

*** More help:**

For A) Consider laws prohibiting sale of liquor to minors or laws banning smoking in public building.

B) Consider cigarette taxes, taxes on lotteries, taxes on liquor.

C) What vaccinations did you need prior to starting school? Do day care providers, hair salons, restaurants or tattoo parlors in your community require licenses?

D) How about senior centers; flu shots; health insurance for children from families with low income; food stamps?

E) Of what public health value is an Arbor Day? Does your county sponsor Health Fairs with free health screenings and health promotion information?

F) What role do the Clean Air Act, wastewater ordinances and pet licenses serve for public health?

Lesson # 3

MORE CONSIDERATIONS... (Also: See Notes for Lesson Planning)

“What’s Public About My Health?” ©

→ Engage & Explain:

Most of us grow up thinking our bodies are private. But in the real world, we find that there are “public claims” on certain behaviors of our bodies.

When your health is concerned, where is the line between protection and intrusion?

How do you define when is it appropriate for governmental authority to intervene on behalf of the public’s health and when excessive power over-reaches legitimate role of government to invade your privacy?

Maybe you appreciate government checks, certifying the commercial processing of your meat. But what about laws prohibiting Aunt Corrie from medical use of marijuana to treat the nausea she gets from her cancer therapy?

Maybe you value government intervention on abortion, but feel it’s an intrusion to make you wear a seat belt or bike helmet.

On any given day, your personal health is being affected by others. And your personal conduct impacts on the personal health of others as well.

When a kid thoughtlessly throws a snowball at a moving car, that act jars a driver and puts many innocent people at needless risk. When parents send a sick child to school because they have no child care alternatives and can’t afford to miss work, they unfairly expose countless other children and their families to the same lousy circumstances.

→ Guided Student Exploration:

Consider some real public health examples that are very controversial.

- Opponents of abortion hold sacred the life of a fetus over other considerations. Pro-choice advocates counter that for a number of weeks, the right of the woman to decide - on her body, her pregnancy and the prospects for bringing a new child into the world - is the prevailing consideration.

Is life an absolute right under all circumstances?

- If the mother is alcoholic or addicted to drugs, is government justified in requiring that mother to bring her fetus to term? Should the mother be held legally accountable for harm to the fetus because of her behavior during that pregnancy? If so, how does society monitor and enforce such rules?
 - If the mother does not have a caring partner or parent or adequate income/means to help her care for the child, is it responsible to add to the number of neglected children in society? Is it ethical for government to gamble with the lives of that mother and fetus in hopes that a loving, safe adoption placement can be found? Who should pay for/supervise a pregnancy and birth by a mother who would have rejected the pregnancy?
 - Is protecting the life of a fetus a legitimate public health cause to justify government enforcing upon a woman the completion of an unwanted pregnancy?
- Consider some public – private health issues associated with smoking. Earlier in this *KAT Talk*, you may have explored and begun research on the many dangers to public health from involuntary – or secondhand – smoking. The June 2006 Report by the US Surgeon General indicates that “The scientific evidence is now indisputable: secondhand smoke is not a mere annoyance...there is no risk-free level of exposure to secondhand smoke.” Even brief exposure to secondhand smoke has immediate adverse effects, and the CDC reports estimates that in 2005, secondhand smoke killed over 3000 adult NONsmoking Americans from lung cancer, about 46,000 from coronary heart disease and 430 newborns from sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS). Smoking also costs millions of dollars in health care costs that are borne by non-smokers as well as smokers.

Is there a private, inalienable right to smoke?

- Shouldn't you be allowed to smoke in your own home? To set your own rules for your household and children? But what about the rights of your children to a smoke-free home? Does a public health responsibility to protect your children override your right as a parent to raise them as you see fit?
- If you want to establish a shop or a club for smoking and smokers, shouldn't that right be protected?
- Should the public be required to pay taxes that are used in your healthcare, if you engage in known high-risk health behaviors?
- How is smoking like, and unlike, unhealthy eating and obesity?
- If smoking is so unhealthy to smokers and non-smokers, why is it still legal at all?

Addressing Your Concerns

Many educators resist controversial topics. And lots of aspects of public health - from smoking, to reproductive education, to vaccinations - are extremely controversial.

But public health is relevant to both public and private education. Indeed, schools are regulated by policies and laws dealing with public health. It would be inappropriate NOT to give students the tools they need to research, analyze and deliberate on important matters that directly concern them, their environment and their future.

There are positive ways to treat controversial public issues to accomplish legitimate educational goals, while maintaining non-partisan professionalism. Here are a few key points to help you:

- ☉ Explicitly **explain the essential educational objectives in the lesson(s)** to the students, and possibly to the families. Clarify how your lesson meets the academic standards and expectations of your classroom.
 - ✓ For example, each of the three lessons here build reading and research skills.
 - ✓ Each lesson here supports citizenship by clarifying why controversy exists and what role government plays in the controversy.

- ☉ Explicitly **acknowledge that people disagree on these issues**. Link the controversy to democratic traditions, citing Constitutional safeguards, laws and court cases as **examples of how our governmental system handles controversy**. Freedom of thought, expression and assembly – even on matters offensive to others - are among the most highly prized rights of our nation. Counter-examples from totalitarian regimes are also instructive.

- ☉ Explicitly reassure your students that you are **NOT attempting to change their beliefs or argue in favor or against a particular opinion, and then make sure your behavior** (from subtle expressions like eye rolling to words you use and the way you respond to student comments) **confirms that**. Clarify – even repeatedly - that the purpose of the sorts of pointed inquiry and research being conducted in class is to deepen student understanding of the complexity of these problems and to reveal aspects and perspectives with which students may not already be familiar.

- ☉ Explain that part of participation in a civil society is the ability to **engage in sincere, informed discourse and problem-solving**. This means that instead of ignoring or segregating yourself from significant disagreements on the one hand, or hostilely battling your opponent on the other, you bring reasoned arguments and persuasive evidence to the table. In civil society, rules try to protect a peaceful process of conflict management. Frequently, you'll discover areas where contentious parties find themselves in agreement.

- ☉ Make sure your classroom models the civil society you're teaching. Respect, responsibility, reason, research and reflection are among the keys for handling controversy.