

Lesson 1: Cannabis: dangerous or beneficial?

Teachers' notes

Starter: Video clips of three people with interests in the use of cannabis:

1. Multiple Sclerosis sufferer
2. Politician
3. Doctor

Scripts for video presentation

1. Multiple Sclerosis patient - young female

"I really feel that the government should not only make cannabis legal for people like me to use, but should provide it free on prescription. I have heard about other people with MS that when they smoke cannabis, or use it to bake cakes, they get some relief from their symptoms. MS is a miserable disease. I'm only 25, but I feel like I'm 45. It was such a shock when I was first diagnosed. I had been feeling tired all the time, and then I started to get problems with my balance. Sometimes my muscles would twitch on their own. When they told me that I would have this disease for the rest of my life I was devastated. Some of the medicines I take help me, but I still have difficulty walking and have pains in my muscles. I am slowly getting worse. Other people say that cannabis can help with the pain and muscle spasms. There have been some trials going on, looking at the chemicals inside cannabis which might help, but they didn't really prove anything, they said it was "difficult to assess". I don't understand these things; I just know that if something can help me I should be able to use it." **(About 2min 15s)**

2. Politician

"The government made a big mistake when they downgraded cannabis from a Class B drug to a Class C drug in 2004. It is a dangerous drug and is the first step on the slippery slope to the use of heroin and drug addiction. Young people today can get hold of these vile drugs too easily, you see them out on Saturday nights drunk and drugged, getting sick in the street and generally behaving disgracefully. They seem to have no respect for the older generation. In my day, we knew our place. I think that anyone in possession of cannabis and other so called "recreational" drugs should be put in prison, preferably for a long time. Cannabis is addictive, and addicts soon crave something stronger. They go on to harder and harder drugs, stealing and cheating to get the money to buy them. They drop out of work and live on the state, using benefits paid for by the hardworking tax payer." **(About 1 min)**

3. Doctor

"I think we need to keep calm and take a balanced look at all the evidence before we make up our minds about cannabis. There have been lots of scientific investigations into the effect of the active ingredient in cannabis. Some evidence points to cannabis use leading to memory problems and even mental health problems. Other work shows that there may be some beneficial effects for people with multiple sclerosis. At the moment there is a lot of conflicting evidence. I do worry about my young patients who regularly smoke cannabis. They seem to lose their edge and take less interest in work or schooling. There does seem to be a link

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between cannabis use and harder drugs, but this could just be because users are mixing with drug dealers to get their supplies. I look forward to more definite scientific conclusions about this. I do know that I would advise my own children to steer clear of and drug use at all" (**About 1 min**)

Main Activity

Card sort. Cards have quotations from various resources. (Cards are numbered so that results can be collated on board).

Students work in groups of up to four, reading and sorting into:

- Scientific evidence **for**
- Scientific evidence **against**
- **Non-scientific** evidence.

Groups give three minute feedback on their findings to class.

The suggested answers to the card sort are:

For	Against	Non
4	1	6
3	8	13
10	5	
	9	
	11	
	7	
	2	
	12	

Plenary: Teacher led discussion on

- Is there a link between smoking cannabis and memory loss?
- Has cannabis been proved useful for relief of Multiple sclerosis symptoms?
- Should cannabis be more readily available?

Extension/homework: Design a leaflet with balanced information about cannabis for the school nurse to use

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References for Cannabis documents

1. Cannabis – too much too young
Lawton G., New Scientist 26/03/05
2. Cannabis can effect users memory and concentration
Anon, New Scientist
3. Cannabis drugs pass milestone
Young E., New Scientist 5/11/02
4. Cannabis drug truly helps MS sufferers
Gosline A., New Scientist 10/9/04
5. Cannabis linked to psychotic experiences
Anon, New Scientist 04/12/04
6. Cannabis is legal
K Swinson
7. Cannabis may double mental illness
Anon, New Scientist 01/03/05
8. Cannabis link to mental illness strengthened
Young E., New Scientist 21/11/02
9. I forget
Anon, New Scientist 17/04/99 citing Rodgers & Sanders 1999
10. UK drug regulator to consider cannabis for patients with MS
Ashraf H., Lancet 2002; **359**:684
11. Marijuana in pregnancy damages learning
Bhattacharya S., New Scientist 25/03/03
12. Can smoking pot make you potty
Anon, New Scientist 25/03/04
13. California introduced ...
Unknown, 1996