

The Other Drug War: Teacher Guide

About the Film:

In this film, FRONTLINE investigates the battle being waged between major pharmaceutical companies and American consumers fed up with paying the highest drug prices in the world. Through interviews with legislators, scientists, consumers, and industry leaders, FRONTLINE examines how states like Maine and Oregon are attempting to control escalating prescription drug costs in the face of strong opposition from the pharmaceutical industry. The program also examines the growing conflict between Americans' appetite for life-saving medical innovation and society's need to provide affordable drugs for all.

A Note to Teachers:

- For classes in Civics, Economics, Health and Media Literacy; Grade level 9–12
- **Topics:** Affordable prescription drugs, government-mandated price controls, pharmaceutical research and development, advertising, media literacy

"The Other Drug War" documents the ongoing battle between large drug companies and U.S. citizens who are demanding lower prices. The purpose of this guide is to help teachers use the film with their students to consider the debate over prescription drug pricing; the role of government in regulating drug prices; concepts of media literacy; and the role of these concepts as they relate to prescription drug advertising.

Though this FRONTLINE program, which first aired on June 19, 2003, concentrates on senior citizens, it is easy to make connections of relevance to high school students. Many will have aging relatives dealing with problems similar to those expressed in this program, and many will themselves take prescription drugs. Most will be familiar with vague television advertisements for prescription drugs that leave them wondering, "But what is the drug's purpose? Who should take it? Why should I ask my doctor about it?"

CAUTION: Drug use, both legal and illegal, can be a sensitive topic in the lives of your students. To minimize discomfort and strong emotions, we suggest that teachers carefully consider which examples of illnesses and drugs will be used in class discussions. Drugs used to treat arthritis, cholesterol, or allergies may be a potential focus.

Lesson Plans

PRE-VIEWING LESSON PLAN:

Media Messages

Students will learn key concepts of media literacy and consider how these concepts apply to prescription drug advertising.

VIEWING LESSON PLAN:

Student Viewing Guide

Students will complete a worksheet while viewing the film.

POST-VIEWING LESSON PLAN:

The Rest of the Story

Students will look at drug advertisements and construct their own ads for fictitious prescription drugs.

Great Debates

Students will develop critical thinking skills as they construct arguments for one of the three debates described in this lesson.

SUPPLEMENTARY ACTIVITIES:

- In a writing assignment, students will explore the high cost of prescription drugs.
- Students will research a medical condition for which prescription drugs are used.
- Students will consider the meaning of the title, "The Other Drug War."

Purchasing the Video

"The Other Drug War" can be purchased from **ShopPBS for Teachers**

[<http://www.shoppbs.org/product/index.jsp?productId=1403864>]. Also please note: FRONTLINE is streaming the entire film online on the "**The Other Drug War**" **Web site** [<http://www.pbs.org/frontline/shows/other>].

Credits

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PREVIEWING LESSON PLAN:

Media Messages

Lesson Objectives:

Students will learn key concepts of media literacy and consider how these concepts apply to prescription drug advertising.

Materials Needed:

- Student handout, **Key Concepts in Media Literacy**
- Student handout, **Prescription Drug Advertising**
- Prescription drug advertisements from magazines
- Video of 3-6 television drug advertisements (for both prescription and over-the-counter medications)

Time Needed:

One class period

Background:

Though consumers complain about the high costs of prescription drugs, the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America (PhRMA), a trade association representing pharmaceutical and biotech companies, argues that high prices are necessary to fund the expensive process of researching and developing new drugs. Industry analyst Richard Evans, however, tells FRONTLINE that 16 cents of every dollar spent on prescriptions goes into *advertising* -- more than the drug companies spend on research and development.

Prescription drug advertising is one of the main issues presented in "The Other Drug War." Drug companies spend millions of dollars on marketing. Their efforts include direct-to-consumer radio and television commercials, as well as practices that target doctors, such as giving them free samples given to increase the likelihood that name brands handed out to patients will become the drugs of choice.

Procedure:

1. Prior to showing "The Other Drug War" in class, direct your students to analyze some direct-to-consumer drug advertising. If possible, make a short video of drug advertisements from television, including ads for both prescription and over-the-counter drugs that treat ailments such as arthritis, gas, and the common cold. (You could also ask student volunteers to make the tapes.) Show the video in class.
2. Hand out the assignment sheet **Prescription Drug Advertising** and ask students to answer the questions independently. You may want to bring in some drug advertisements from magazines. Students can also bring in magazines from home or from the school's library or learning center. They can examine these ads as they answer the worksheet questions.

3. Either create small groups for discussion or bring the class together to discuss their worksheet answers.
4. Give your students the handout, **Concepts in Media Literacy**. Discuss the principles of media literacy with your class, and ask how each concept applies to the ads they have discussed.

Note: The principles of media literacy provided on the handout are concepts that are generally accepted by U.S. media educators. You can find more information about these concepts at the California Newsreel Web page

[<http://www.newsreel.org/articles/aufderhe.htm>] and an Appalachian State Web page created by media literacy Professor David Considine

[<http://www.ci.appstate.edu/programs/edmedia/medialit/article4.html>]

Method of Assessment

1. Collect student assignment sheets.
2. Evaluate student participation in class discussion.

STUDENT HANDOUT

Key Concepts in Media Literacy

Review these concepts and consider how they apply to ads for prescription and over-the-counter drugs.

- All media are constructions. Media are created for a particular purpose. Media makers carefully choose and edit information to fit their purpose. What is the purpose of the ads? What information is included in the ad to contribute to its purpose? What information is excluded?

- Media messages are representations of reality. Media messages represent themselves as reality. Sometimes the "reality" depicted is idealistic. For example, some automobile commercials contain scenes associating the vehicles with sophistication, beautiful models, and exclusive neighborhoods. How is reality represented in the drug advertisements? How close is the media reality to reality as you know it?

- Individuals construct meaning from media messages. We interpret the meaning of media messages by comparing them to our own beliefs, needs, and experiences. Often advertisements are designed to tap a need or desire on the part of the audience. For example, a commercial might associate a product with beauty, health, happiness, or economic success. As a result, people longing for these goals might believe that purchasing the product will bring them closer to their desire. What meaning do you associate with the drug advertisements? What meanings do you think people with various health problems will derive from the ads?

- Media messages may have social consequences. The purposes of drug advertising and the meaning an audience attributes to the ads are likely to bring about effects in people's behavior. What are some of the social and economic effects that are likely results of prescription drug advertising?

STUDENT HANDOUT

Prescription Drug Advertising

After examining drug advertisements in magazines or from television, answer the following questions:

1. Describe one or two of the ads you examined. What visual images are used with the TV or magazine ads? What background words (or, in the case of television, music and sound effects) are used?

2. What is the emotional appeal of the ads? How has the advertiser created this appeal?

3. Who do you think is the advertisements' main audience? Why?

4. What product information do the ads provide about the drugs? What information is not given? Why do you think any missing information is left out?

5. In what ways do the ads make the drug's purpose clear? In what ways do they obscure the purpose of the drug?

VIEWING LESSON PLAN

Student Viewing Guide: "The Other Drug War"

Lesson Objectives:

In this lesson, students will:

- Watch the documentary "The Other Drug War" and answer questions about its content.
- Practice critical thinking skills as they view the film.

Materials Needed:

- The video "The Other Drug War" [Note: This video can be purchased online at **ShopPBS for Teachers**. The film is also streamed in full on "**The Other Drug War**" **Web site**. See the URLs on the front page of this guide.]
- Student Handout: Questions for Viewing
- Student Handout: Key Terms and Definitions

Time Needed:

Allow 50-60 minutes for your class to view the film.

Procedure:

"The Other Drug War" illuminates four central debates in the battle over prescription drug pricing:

1. Federal government interventions that could reduce consumer costs;
2. Individual states (Maine and Oregon) that have created their own policies for making prescription drugs more affordable;
3. The pharmaceutical industry's argument that high prices are necessary to fund expensive research and development of new drugs; and
4. Marketing of prescription drugs.

To encourage active viewing, hand out the worksheet **Questions for Viewing** and ask your students to answer the questions as they watch the film. Discuss their answers as a class after students have viewed the film.

Along with questions, give students the handout **Key Terms and Definitions**. After viewing the film, you can discuss the meanings in more depth or have students research the terms.

STUDENT HANDOUT
Questions for Viewing

As you watch "The Other Drug War," answer the following questions:

1. Why are prescription drugs so expensive for seniors in the United States? Why do they cost less in other countries?

2. What legislation did Maine politicians pass to lower the prices of prescription drugs? Describe the legal battles that evolved between Maine and drug companies as a result of the legislation. Do you believe the final outcome was justified? Why or why not?

3. What policies has the state of Oregon enacted to reduce the costs of prescription drugs? What have been the results?

4. What is Congress considering to reduce the price of drugs for seniors nationwide?

5. What is the principle argument that drug companies use to justify high prices? What is the counter argument against the need for high prices?

6. Why does one physician on the film say he writes prescriptions for the brand name drugs requested by his patients? How do you evaluate his reason?

STUDENT HANDOUT

Key Terms and Definitions

Review the following terms before viewing "The Other Drug War."

Clinical Trials -- Research studies involving human patients; used to test new therapies or drugs

Generic Drugs -- Drugs not protected by a trademark; drugs that are not brand names

Medicare -- A government-sponsored program of medical care, especially for senior citizens

Medicaid -- A program of medical aid, financed by state and federal governments, for those unable to afford regular medical care

Price Controls -- Maximum price limits that are established and maintained by the government

PhRMA -- The Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America; a trade organization that represents and lobbies on behalf of pharmaceutical and biotech companies

Research and Development -- Basic and applied research in the sciences to design, develop, or test new products

POST-VIEWING LESSON PLAN:

The Rest of the Story

Lesson Objective:

Students will examine current drug advertisements and construct their own ads for fictitious prescription drugs that include information that may be left out or glossed over by drug company marketing.

Time Needed:

One class period (two if you allow students to create and act out commercials they design for television and share them in class)

Materials List:

- White construction paper, pens and pencils, markers, magazines, scissors for cutting out images in magazines.
- FRONTLINE "The Other Drug War" Web pages:
 - **FAQs:**
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/other/etc/faqs.html>
 - **Pros and Cons of Drug Advertising and Marketing:**
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/other/themes/marketing.html>

Procedures:

1. Review information covered in the Pre-Viewing Lesson Plan about media messages, particularly the principles of media literacy explained on the "**Key Concepts in Media Literacy**" handout. Ask students to carefully consider information that may be left out of prescription drug advertisements. (Example: Frequently the purpose of the medication is not included, and drug prices are not disclosed.)
2. Ask students what parody and satire are, and what their purpose is. Discuss the use of parody and satire to expose problems and misleading information. (NOTE: Adbusters is a Web site that uses parody to expose misleading ads (<http://www.adbusters.org/home>). You may want to look at it for examples. Not all examples, however, are appropriate for high school students.)
3. Ask students to create ad parodies for a fictitious prescription drug. Possibilities for the fictitious drug are the *Fountain of Youth* drug, the *Instant Beauty* drug, or *Taller by Tomorrow* drug. Details should include what the drug is for, possible side effects, and, if possible, the recommended U.S. price. (Students might also include a cost comparison chart for the drug in other countries.) You can ask students to create their own magazine ads using drawings and words or including some images cut from magazines. You could also have them form groups to script and act out a commercial for television.

Ask students to consider the following questions as they construct their ads:

- a. If you were the drug advertiser, what would you want to get across to consumers?
- b. If you were the consumer, what information would you want to know about the drug?
- c. How is the information in the previous two answers the same and different?

Method of Assessment:

Evaluate students' advertising parodies. (They may need to complete them at home for homework. If you choose to assign the role-playing option for a television commercial, have the groups perform their ad for the class and include student critiques.)

POST-VIEWING LESSON PLAN

Great Debates

Lesson Objective:

Students will develop critical thinking skills as they construct arguments for one of the three debates described in this lesson.

Time Needed:

Two class periods (one class for development and one for the debates)

Materials List:

- Rules for Debate (you may want to consult simplified debate rules for high school at: <http://www.lalc.k12.ca.us/uclasp/ISSUES/landfills/debate.htm>)
- Access to FRONTLINE Web pages:
- **The Battlefield in the States:**
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/other/etc/states.html>
- **Will Controlling the Prices of Prescription Drugs Hinder Innovation?**
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/other/themes/controlling.html>
- **Pros and Cons of Drug Advertising and Marketing**
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/other/themes/marketing.html>
- Access to Internet sites listed on the **Internet Resources page**

Procedure:

1. Discuss the tactics of debate and presentation of evidence as they are used in political and legal forums. Explain the rules for debate.
2. Depending on the size of your class, divide your class into two or three groups of approximately 8-10 students each.
3. Assign or let each group choose one of the following topics:
 - a. Which plan is more effective for helping consumers defeat high drug prices, Maine's or Oregon's?
 - b. Should the U.S. government press for changes in Medicare?
 - c. Would price controls hinder drug research and development?
 - d. Should direct-to-consumer drug advertising and marketing be barred or controlled, or should it continue as it is?
4. Divide each group in half, with one half of each group taking one side of their assigned debate, and the other half taking the remaining side. Give students time to research and prepare their debate information.
5. Conduct the debates in class, allowing for class critiques following each debate.

Assessment:

Evaluate students' use of information in the debate and their participation.

SUPPLEMENTARY ACTIVITIES

1. When discussing the high cost of prescription drugs in "The Other Drug War," senior Carleen Simpson asked: "Why invent [a medication] if the common person can't afford it?" Have students consider her question and write a response.

2. The film makes mention of several medical conditions for which popular prescription drugs are commonly prescribed. Students can choose one of the conditions to research, including the drugs frequently prescribed to control the conditions and alternative medical recommendations for controlling the illness.

Students may want to refer to the transcript of "The Other Drug War" to find which drugs are often prescribed for the conditions at:

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/other/etc/script.html>

Medical conditions referred to in the film are the following:

- High cholesterol
- Arthritis
- Osteoporosis
- Schizophrenia
- Asthma
- Alzheimer's disease

3. Conduct a classroom discussion on the title of the FRONTLINE film. What does the term "drug war" usually refer to? How does FRONTLINE use the term for this film? Explain whether or not you feel the title is appropriate. Consider the potential uses and misuses of illegal, prescription, and over-the-counter drugs.

Note: The FRONTLINE series "Drug Wars," which aired in 2000, provides a comprehensive examination of the U.S. government's policies to fight illegal drugs over the last 30 years. Teachers may want to consult the Teacher's Guide for that program prior to leading this discussion at:

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/teach/american/drugs/>

INTERNET RESOURCES

Evaluating sources: As with all issues, especially political and economic conflicts, students must learn to be savvy and discriminating readers. No Web site can provide all the information a student needs to know. Encourage your students to "interrogate" Web sites even as they are reading. Guiding questions as they work through these activities should include: What did you learn from this source? What is left out from this source? Who sponsors this source? What bias might the sponsor have?

The Other Drug War

<http://www.pbs.org/frontline/shows/other>

The companion Web site to "The Other Drug War" features extended transcripts of interviews from the program, more information on the battle in the states to control prescription drug prices and FAQs on drug pricing and marketing.

Understanding the Effects of Direct-to-Consumer Prescription Drug Advertising

<http://www.kff.org/content/2001/20011129a/Prescription%20Drugs%20Topline%20Report--%20to%20DC%2011.14.01.pdf>

This report, sponsored by the Kaiser Family Foundation, presents the results of a survey given to viewers and non-viewers of three prescription drug advertisements in which the respondents were asked to assess the information presented in the ads. [Note: This is a PDF file; Adobe Acrobat is required to view it and the file may take some time to load.]

Television Prescription Ads

http://www.fda.gov/fdac/features/1998/198_ads.html

This article on the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's Web site explains the history behind direct-to-consumer prescription drug ads.

Managing Prescription Drug Costs

<http://www.npr.org/programs/morning/features/2002/apr/rxcards/>

A report from National Public Radio's *Morning Edition* discusses the struggles and options seniors have as they face high drug costs. This site also has links to other useful Web sites that present various options being considered, both by individuals and by the nation, to address the cost of prescription drugs.

Medicare Watch: Prescription Drugs

http://www.medicarewatch.org/research_development/Prescription_Drugs.html

This Century Foundation Web site offers links to prescription drug costs and government proposals to reduce costs.

Prescription Drugs

http://www.aoa.gov/prof/notes/Docs/Prescription_Drugs.doc

This document, from the U.S. government's Administration on Aging, catalogues numerous Web sites sponsored by the government, consumer agencies and other reputable sources that present information about prescription drug costs, use, safety and effectiveness. [Note: This file requires Microsoft Word to view; may take some time to load.]

Drug Pricing Reform

<http://bernie.house.gov/prescriptions/profits.asp>

This site, sponsored by Congressman Bernie Sanders (I-VT), shows profits reaped by pharmaceutical companies as compared to other major industries. Links show price comparisons by countries and options being considered by Congress.

The Drug Industry

http://www.citizen.org/congress/reform/drug_industry/

Public Citizen sponsors this Web site that questions drug pricing, the pharmaceutical industry's argument for research and development costs, and its lobbying effort.

PhRMA

<http://www.phrma.org>

The Web site of Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America (PhRMA) offers the drug companies' case for drug costs, direct-to-consumer advertising, and research and development.

Merchants of Cool

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/cool/>

For more about the effects of advertising on teens, visit the FRONTLINE Web site for this program, which aired in 2001. The teachers guide for "Merchants of Cool" can be found at: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/teach/cool/>