

Social Studies lesson plan

Our Challenge—A Look at the Obesity Epidemic in America

Quick summary: Students will research the obesity epidemic in America, examine the potential impact (present and future) of the issue and prepare a short report on their findings.

How long will it take: 45 minutes

What do I need: newspapers/magazines or computers with internet access.

How does it work:

Begin by asking students why they think obesity is more of a problem in the U.S. today than ever before. How have our lives and habits changed that may have contributed to the problem?

Potential discussion points include:

- We're less active than ever before (we drive cars, have jobs that don't require us to be up and moving, technological advances require us to do less, advent of TV/computer/video games).
- We eat out more than ever before (cost of food, schedules, working parents).
- What we're eating is different (serving sizes are bigger than ever, less nutritious foods).
- Poll the class to ask students how widespread they think the obesity epidemic is in the U.S. How many Americans do they think are overweight? How many kids?
- Using newspapers, magazines or internet news service have students research current event articles about the obesity epidemic. (This could also be given as a homework assignment to have students bring in one article on the obesity epidemic.) Students should prepare a paragraph on their research findings.

FOR A TWIST: Have students prepare an oral report to present to the class or the next PTA meeting or meeting of your School Wellness Council.

Give students the following questions to guide their research. Encourage students to answer some or all of these questions with their report:

- 1.** What is the definition of obesity?
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- 2.** How many obese Americans are there today compared to 10 years ago? 20 years? 30 years?
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- 3.** What is the trend projected to do in the future (increase, decrease, stay the same)?
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- 4.** Will the high rates of obesity have any impact on our healthcare system?
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- 5.** What are people saying is the solution to the obesity problem?
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- 6.** Are certain people more likely to be obese than others?
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- 7.** How many kids are obese?
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- 8.** How did the rates of obesity they found in their research compare with the poll that was taken at the beginning of the lesson?

Discussion questions:

- 1.** Based on what you learned, do you think the obesity epidemic is important? Why?
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- 2.** How does the obesity epidemic impact individuals and the country as a whole?
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- 3.** Compare the obesity epidemic to other health epidemics in U.S. history. Are there similarities or differences to polio, Spanish influenza (flu), malaria or the increase in cancers?
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- 4.** What can students do to help?

Lesson Extension:

Have students write a one-page paper about:

- 1.** What they learned from the discussion
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- 2.** What they can do now to stay fit and healthy
.....
- 3.** What they can do in the future to live a stronger, longer life