

Sick Around the World Teacher's Guide

www.pbs.org/frontline/sickaroundtheworld

ABOUT THE FILM

In *Sick Around the World*, FRONTLINE teams up with veteran *Washington Post* foreign correspondent T.R. Reid to find out how (www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/sickaroundtheworld/countries/) five other capitalist democracies — the United Kingdom, Japan, Germany, Taiwan and Switzerland — deliver health care, and (www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/sickaroundtheworld/themes/lessons.html) what the United States might learn from their successes and their failures.

A NOTE TO TEACHERS

This guide is intended for 9th to 12th grade classes in social studies, civics and government, current events, history, and language arts. As it examines how health care is delivered in five capitalist democracies in Europe and Asia, *Sick Around the World* explores potential answers to the crisis surrounding access to affordable health care in the United States. The guide invites teachers to use any or all of its activities. The featured lesson is based on a video clip from *Sick Around the World*.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The guide includes a list of questions for students to discuss after viewing *Sick Around the World*.

FEATURED LESSON PLAN

■ **An Urgent Choice For The United States: How To Reform Health Care**

After comparing the five health care plans presented in the film, students will propose a plan for health care reform for the United States.

ADDITIONAL LESSON IDEAS

■ **U.S. Presidential Candidates' Plans To Reform Health Care**

■ **Basic Models For Providing Health Care**

■ **How Do The Veterans' Administration And Medicare Administer Health Care?**

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

An annotated list of relevant articles and Web sites.

PURCHASING THE FILM

DVDs of *Sick Around the World* are available for purchase from www.shoppbs.org/. Also, teachers and students can watch the film streamed in its entirety on FRONTLINE's Web site: www.pbs.org/frontline/sickaroundtheworld.

CREDITS

This teacher's guide was developed by Simone Bloom Nathan of Media Education Consultants. It was written by Ellen Greenblatt of The Bay School, San Francisco. Advisers were Debra Plafker Gutt of Stuyvesant High School, New York and Greg Timmons, curriculum writer and educational consultant.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

After viewing the entire program, discuss the following questions with students.

- 1 What does “universal health care” mean? Which countries in the film have universal health care?
- 2 In the United States, insurance companies can deny coverage to people who are sick or who have “pre-existing conditions,” and they can make a profit. How do these two factors impact American health care?
- 3 How do the British pay for their National Health Service? What, according to the film, might Americans not like about the British system?
- 4 Japanese citizens visit doctors three times as often as Americans, and have longer life spans and lower infant mortality than Americans. How do the Japanese pay for their health care system?
- 5 In Germany, the rich pay for the poor, the ill are covered by the healthy, health insurance continues with or without employment, and doctors, who are private entrepreneurs, make less money than they did before reform.
 - Why will doctors in Germany accept less money?
 - Should the rich pay for the poor when it comes to health insurance?
- 6 Taiwan designed its health care system in 1995, after looking at health care in 10-15 other countries.
 - What do you think works well in the Taiwanese system?
 - How is Taiwan struggling to balance the hopes of patients, the needs of doctors and the cost of treatment?
- 7 Until 1994, Switzerland linked health insurance to employment; if you lost your job, you lost your insurance. But after the Swiss voted in a new system called LAMal, everyone had to buy health insurance, and insurance companies could not make a profit. Why were the Swiss willing to make this change? Why have people become more supportive of LAMal as time has progressed?
- 8 At present, between 40 and 50 million Americans are without health insurance. After watching the film, do you believe that providing universal health care should be the policy of the United States? Why or why not?

FEATURED LESSON PLAN

An Urgent Choice For The United States: How To Reform Health Care

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Become familiar with and understand the five health insurance and health care systems featured in *Sick Around the World*;
- Explore in greater depth one of the systems in the film;
- Participate in discussions to explore possibilities for reforming the health insurance and health care system in the United States; and
- Write a position paper recommending a plan for reforming health insurance and care in the United States.

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Internet access
- FRONTLINE documentary *Sick Around the World*
- Copies of student handouts

TIME NEEDED

- Background and Context – 3-4 minutes
- Watching video segment – 10 minutes
- Lesson – 75 minutes

PROCEDURE

Step One: Background and Context

- 1 Before viewing the video clip, provide background and context to students. Explain that, unlike access to education, access to health care is not guaranteed in the United States.
- 2 Point out that in the United States senior citizens and veterans receive government sponsored health care through Medicare and the Veterans Administration. Most other Americans, however, receive health care insurance either through their employers (with employees sharing the cost) or through insurance that they pay for by themselves.
- 3 If Americans do not get health insurance through employment and cannot afford to buy it themselves, they often go without insurance and then, sometimes, without care. According to the documentary, more than 700,000 Americans go bankrupt each year as a result of medical expenses, and some of those who go bankrupt are covered, but not completely, by health insurance.

Step Two: Focus on An Urgent Choice for the United States: How to Reform Health Care

- 1 Briefly review with students the organization of the film: examining health insurance and care through the examples of systems in Great Britain, Japan, Germany, Taiwan and Switzerland.
- 2 Distribute the **VIEWING QUESTIONS: Student Handout #1** to students, and instruct them to answer the questions on the handout after they view the film clip.

- 3 Show Chapter 5, "Switzerland," from the FRONTLINE program at www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/sickaroundtheworld/view/main.html. Show to the end of the excerpt, to the image of the United States Capitol.
- 4 After viewing the clip and allowing students to complete their handouts, discuss the questions as a full class.
- 5 Divide the class into four groups and assign the groups as follows:
 - GROUP ONE: United Kingdom ■ GROUP TWO: Japan
 - GROUP THREE: Germany ■ GROUP FOUR: Taiwan
- 6 Distribute **COMPARING HEALTH CARE: Student Handout #2** to all students. Briefly go over the information already on the handout for Switzerland and for the United States. Explain to students that the information on the chart for the United States is for purposes of comparison.
- 7 Instruct students to work together to fill in the section of the handout for the country to which they have been assigned. The *Sick Around the World* Web site, starting with www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/sickaroundtheworld/countries/ will provide some of the needed information. If time and Internet access permit, students can also watch the segment about their country online at www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/sickaroundtheworld/view/main.html
- 8 When all four groups have finished, meet as a whole class to compare findings. (The teacher should either draw the chart on the board or prepare an overhead transparency of the chart as students are working in groups and then should fill in the chart as students speak.)
- 9 Ask each country group to reassemble for a few minutes to assess its country's health insurance and health care program in comparison to the other countries.
- 10 A whole-class debriefing will follow, with spokespersons for each country group sharing what they see as the strengths and weaknesses of their system.
- 11 As a culminating exercise, each student will write an individual, one-page proposal to her or his Congressperson, advocating a specific set of recommendations to improve health insurance and care in the United States. This exercise can be done in class or as homework.
- 12 The teacher can invite a few students to read their papers to the class as a spur to whole-class discussion about potential U.S. solutions to health care reform.
- 13 Students may submit their one-page proposals to the teacher for assessment.

ASSESSMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 Assess students' involvement in the discussion questions and activities.
- 2 Evaluate students' participation in their small group discussions and in the whole-class discussions at the conclusion of the lesson.
- 3 Evaluate each student's one-page recommendation for how to reform health care in the United States.

VIEWING QUESTIONS/Student Handout I

After viewing the film clip about Switzerland, respond to the following questions:

- 1 Why do you think *Sick Around the World* ends with the example of Switzerland? What do the Swiss have in common with Americans?
- 2 How was health care insurance provided in Switzerland in 1994 before reform?
 - What was the margin of victory for the new plan, LAMal, in 1994?
 - Is the support level for LAMal higher now? Why or why not?
- 3 What health care can people covered by the Swiss system take for granted?
 - Can insurance companies in Switzerland deny coverage to the old, the sick or the poor?
 - If people are unable to pay the \$750 monthly family premium, who pays it?
- 4 If insurance companies in Switzerland cannot profit on basic care, how can they make a profit?
- 5 What is the main challenge Swiss insurance companies face today?
- 6 The administration costs for health insurance in the United States are 22% of total amount spent on health care. What is the comparable percentage at one insurance company in Switzerland?
- 7 Pascal Couchepin, the conservative president of the Swiss Federation, concludes that a 100 percent free-market system (the model in the United States) cannot work for health care because it means “losing solidarity and equal access,” which he calls “a basic value of living in [Swiss] society.” Do you think Americans see “solidarity and equal access” as basic values? Why or why not?
- 8 “Everyone has the right to health care,” asserts Pascal Couchepin, the president of the Swiss Federation. Do you agree?

COMPARING HEALTH CARE/Student Handout 2

NATION	Is there universal coverage?	Who manages health insurance and care? (Insurance companies? Government? Individuals?)	Can insurers profit from basic services?	Who pays for services? (taxes, individuals, blend)	Average amount each family pays?	% of GDP (Gross Domestic Product) on health care?	Average life expectancy?	Rate of infant mortality per 1000 births?	How are doctors paid?	Best points of system?	Problems of system?
United Kingdom											
Japan											
Germany											
Taiwan											
Switzerland	Yes	Private non-profit insurance. Doctors and Hospitals agree to set fees.	No	Individuals; government subsidies for low-income	\$750 per month. Poor are subsidized	11.6%	81.3	4.2	Doctors and hospitals accept set fees	Everyone is covered; no medical bankruptcy; people can choose insurer.	Second highest cost in the world (after USA)
USA	No; 40-50 million with no insurance	Employers/employees; Private insurance for those who can pay; Medicare for over 65; VA for veterans	Yes	Individuals and employers; government programs for elderly (with some payment) and veterans	\$1200-\$1300 per month	15-3%	77	6.8	Doctors and hospitals charge fees paid for by insurance and individuals	Excellent care for those who can pay	Insurance companies can refuse "high risk" and elderly patients; many people uninsured; Variable levels and cost of care; Most expensive system in the world.

ADDITIONAL LESSON PLANS

■ **What Are U.S. Presidential Candidates' Plans To Reform Health Care?**

www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/sickaroundtheworld/etc/links.html#1

Consulting the Sick Around the World Web site, students will read and analyze the policies of the major 2008 Presidential candidates.

■ **What Are The Basic Models For Providing Health Care?**

www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/sickaroundtheworld/countries/models.html

Using the excerpt from reporter T.R. Reid's upcoming book on international health care, titled *We're Number 37!*, referring to the U.S.'s ranking in the World Health Organization 2000 World Health Report, students will learn about four basic plans from which all other plans seem to stem.

■ **How Does The Veterans' Administration Administer Health Care? How Does Medicare Administer Health Care?**

Students will research and examine how two American programs already in place provide health care for veterans and for those over 65. Using the model on the *Sick Around the World* Web site, they will develop their own "Themes and Analysis" of these programs,

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

A Note about Internet Resources

Students should be aware that Web sites sometimes present only one view of an issue. Encourage students to think about Web sites even as they are reading, asking themselves: What did you learn from this site? What didn't you learn from this site? Who sponsors this site? What bias might the sponsor have? How current is the site?

■ FRONTLINE: Sick Around the World

www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/sickaroundtheworld/

The companion Web site to the documentary features extended interviews, on-demand video streaming of the full program, themes and analysis and annotated links. Students might be interested in the articles from think tanks and those **opposed** to universal coverage (www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/sickaroundtheworld/etc/links.html#3)

■ U.S. Census Bureau Health Insurance Coverage Highlights

www.census.gov/hhes/www/hlthins/hlthino6/hltho6asc.html

This one-page document gives statistics for the percentage and numbers of people covered by health insurance in the United States in 2006.

■ “Health Care Horror Stories”

www.nytimes.com/2008/04/11/opinion/11krugman.html

This editorial by New York Times columnist Paul Krugman includes anecdotes about the effects in America of denying health care to people who cannot pay for it.

■ “Voodoo Health Economics”

www.nytimes.com/2008/04/11/opinion/04krugman.html

“Elizabeth Edwards has cancer. John McCain has had cancer in the past. Last weekend, Mrs. Edwards bluntly pointed out that neither of them would be able to get insurance under Mr. McCain’s health care plan.”

■ “The Short End of a Longer Life”

www.nytimes.com/2008/04/27/weekinreview/27sack.html

Kevin Sack writes: “A pair of reports out this month affirm that the rising tide of American health is not lifting all boats, and that there are widening gaps in life expectancy based on the interwoven variables of income, race, sex, education and geography.”