Educational Curriculum on the Death Penalty
Classroom Resource Manual

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Introduction

I just discovered your site and I find it to be excellent. I have been teaching this topic for many years, and I usually have to pull together information from many sources. I am really impressed at how much information you have gathered on this site. My students are currently working with the site, and it is stimulating a lot of class discussion.

Deborah Hoeflinger
Butler High School, New Jersey

The death penalty in the United States is often a topic of debate, and recent developments concerning capital punishment have enlivened this discussion. The Death Penalty Information Center's Educational Curriculum on the Death Penalty offers high school and college educators the opportunity to encourage civic participation, critical thinking, and the development of research skills among students by utilizing a topic of current interest. The materials and activities outlined in this Classroom Resource Manual are designed to supplement the online version of this award-winning curriculum, which may be viewed at http://deathpenaltycurriculum.org/teacher/index.html. The materials aim to assist educators and students in an exploration of capital punishment, the arguments for and against its use, as well as the issues of ethics and justice that surround it. Teachers are also encouraged to use in-classroom experts to address a variety of topics related to capital punishment.

Since the curriculum's inception, it has been used by thousands of students in classrooms across the United States, and it has served as the basis for academic programs such as the American Bar Association's National Online Summit on Capital Punishment and the Capital Punishment Education Project, which is jointly sponsored by the ACLU's Capital Punishment Program, Street Law, Inc., and the Death Penalty Information Center. Washington, D.C.'s annual Teen Summit on Capital Punishment, a Capitol Hill event that features students from D.C. high schools participating in activities such as debates or mock legislative forums about the death penalty, also finds its roots in this online curriculum. Among the special guest speakers who have participated in the Summit are Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton, D.C. Superior Court Judge Russell Canan, murder victims' family members, and death penalty experts representing both pro and con positions.
Classroom Resource Manual: An Overview

The purpose of this curriculum is to encourage civic participation, critical thinking and the development of research skills among students utilizing a topic of current interest. The Curriculum on the Death Penalty Web site and its accompanying materials are designed to assist teachers and students in an exploration of capital punishment, arguments for and against its use, as well as issues of ethics and justice that surround it.

In this Classroom Resource Manual, teachers will find two classroom icebreaker activities and an outlined lesson plan for a five-day unit on the death penalty. In addition to these activities, teachers are encouraged to explore the lessons and develop strategies of their own. Supplementary research materials and Internet links to a wide array of resources are provided. The curriculum is designed for upper middle, high school and undergraduate college students in such courses as social studies, history, civics, U.S. Government, ethics, public speaking, and current events.

The curriculum encourages on-line student involvement in activities that closely resemble the experiences of ordinary citizens encountering this issue. The simulations are designed so students can actively participate in democratic decision-making. For example, they can take part in a mock legislative hearing, do research using the site, and then engage in a role-play offering testimony on the death penalty from multiple points of view.

The authors of the curriculum have made every effort to ensure that the educational approach is balanced, respecting the views of all sides in this often-spirited debate. The curriculum is available on two Web sites, one for teachers and one for students. The teacher site, http://deathpenaltycurriculum.org/teacher/index.html, contains teacher overviews and unit plans. The student site, http://deathpenaltycurriculum.org/student/index.html, omits teacher information. We hope that you will enjoy sharing these lessons with your students, and we ask that you provide us with feedback about your experience so that we may continue to improve this program. All feedback may be sent to the Death Penalty Information Center at curriculum@deathpenaltyinfo.org.
**Classroom Icebreaker Games**

**GAME 1: Each One Teach One**

On index cards, write a brief death penalty fact for each of your students. For example, "There are more than 3,300 people on death row in the United States." As class begins, give each student one of the cards and ask him or her to memorize the fact. Next, ask students to walk around the room and greet each other as they share their fact. When students have had some time to exchange facts, lead a brief classroom discussion asking students to share the fact that they had, as well as at least one other fact that they learned during the exercise. As students share their information, ask if any facts were surprising to learn or if they had heard the statistics before.

**Sample Facts for "Each One Teach One" (Facts as of January 17, 2007)**

- There have been 1070 executions in the United States since 1976.
- Over 120 people have been exonerated and released from death row since states resumed using the death penalty in 1976.
- The murder rate in states with the death penalty has been 48% to 101% higher than in states without the death penalty.
- 1% of police chiefs believe that the death penalty helps to fight crime, whereas 31% believe that reducing drug abuse actually helps to fight crime.
- 11 women have been executed since 1976.
- In 2002, the Supreme Court ruled that it is cruel and unusual punishment to execute individuals with mental retardation.
- In 2005, the Supreme Court ruled that it is cruel and unusual to execute individuals who were juveniles at the time of their crime.
- There are more than 3,300 people on death row in the United States.
- Five of the states that have the death penalty have not held an execution since the death penalty's reinstatement in 1976.
- 22 defendants have been executed for crimes committed while under the age of 18.
- The United States is one of 69 nations in the world that has the death penalty. 128 have abandoned it in law or in practice.
- The first established death penalty laws date as far back as the Eighteenth Century BC to the Code of King Hammurabi of Babylon.
- In 1972, *Furman v. Georgia*, the U.S. Supreme Court effectively voided 40 death penalty statutes and suspended the death penalty.
- In its 1976 *Gregg v. Georgia* ruling, the U.S. Supreme Court reinstated the death penalty when it upheld revised state death penalty statutes.
GAME 2: The Spectrum of Opinion

Use one wall of the classroom to create a "spectrum of opinion" that represents every point of view from "strongly agree" (left side) to "undecided" (middle) to "strongly disagree" (right side). Ask students to come to the front of the room. Ask students to position themselves along the spectrum based on their opinions about each of the statements you are about to read regarding the death penalty. After each statement and response, pick a couple of students and ask them the reasons they have for falling where they do along the spectrum.

Sample Points of View for "Spectrum of Opinion"

- The death penalty is morally wrong.
- The use of the death penalty deters murders.
- The risk of executing the innocent precludes the use of the death penalty.
- The death penalty is a human rights violation.
- The death penalty is applied unfairly and should not be used.
- Juvenile offenders are less culpable and should not be subjected to the death penalty.
- States with higher numbers of people on death row have lower crime rates.
- You are more likely to get the death penalty if you are a man.
- You are more likely to get the death penalty if you murder a white person.
- Persons with mental disabilities should be eligible for the death penalty.
- Life without parole is an acceptable alternative to a death sentence.
- Execution is the only way to bring closure to victims’ families and loved ones.
- I have faith in our legal system to send only those who are guilty to death row.
- I believe that if we do not execute those who have committed especially terrible crimes, then we are saying that we as a society do not respect the right to live.
Sample Lesson Plan: 
Death Penalty State Comparison & Analysis

DAY 1

I. GETTING STARTED - Introduction of Lesson and "Each One Teach One" Icebreaker

II. STUDENT STATE RESEARCH

A. Divide students into small groups

B. Assign each group a state to research - these states should represent different regions of the nation and should include the state in which the lesson is taught

C. In a computer lab*, provide students with time to answer all or some of the following death penalty questions for their assigned states (teachers should provide the questions on a "fill in the blank" sheet and completion of this task will likely take up the remaining balance of your time):

- When was the death penalty reinstated?
- How many people are on death row?
- How many men are on death row?
- How many women are on death row?
- How many executions have occurred in the state during the past ten years?
- What is the total number of executions that have occurred in the state since the death penalty was reinstated?
- What is the racial breakdown for those currently on the state's death row?
- What is the racial breakdown for those who have been executed?
- What is(are) the state's method(s) of execution?
- Does your state have the sentencing option of "life without parole"?
- What is the population of your assigned state?
- What was the state's murder rate in each year from 1995 - 2003?
- Has the state exonerated any individuals from death row?

*If your students do not have access to a computer lab with Internet capabilities, teachers may consider providing information packets for students to mine for data.
III. CLASS CONCLUSION

A. Collect the questionnaires from each group at the conclusion of the class. Inform the students that during the next class, they will merge their research.

DAY 2

I. COMPARISON OF STUDENT RESEARCH FINDINGS

A. On a chalkboard or other surface, create a chart with a column for each of the questions students were assigned to research. The chart below is an example of how this chart may look, but it does not contain all research fields. Ask the students to get back into their small groups and prepare to fill in the chart using their research. Teachers can have students write in their information, or groups can tell the teacher the appropriate data for each slot and the teacher can fill in the chart.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STATE</th>
<th>State Population</th>
<th>Number on Death Row</th>
<th>Number of Executions Since Death Penalty was Reinstated</th>
<th>Number of Exonerations</th>
<th>State Murder Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>State 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>State 2</td>
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<td>State 3</td>
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<td>State 4</td>
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<tr>
<td>State 5</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

B. As the chart is completed, ask students to look for any possible patterns that emerge. Lead students in a classroom discussion as each column is filled in. Possible questions include:

- How does the size of your state's death row compare to the size of other states' death rows?
- Are more men or women on death row?
- Are there differences in the number of executions based on race, gender, or region?
• What is the most common method of execution?
• Does an active death penalty impact a state's murder rate?

C. Ask students to look at the chart as a whole and write down a few questions about the death penalty or about the information contained within the chart. These questions will be posed during the next class, when the students will have the chance to meet an expert on the death penalty.

DAY 3

I. GUEST SPEAKER

A. Teachers should invite a guest speaker (see Resources list) from the community who can discuss the death penalty in your home state and in other states around the nation. This person should be invited to present a 20 minute discussion on "the death penalty in our state and our nation," and then he or she should spend the remaining classroom time answering the students' questions from the end of Day 2.

DAY 4

I. PREPARING FOR A STUDENT DEBATE ON THE DEATH PENALTY

A. Divide the students into two groups. Each of these groups is assigned to a position on the death penalty, and it should be clear that students in the group do not have to agree with the position they are assigned.

B. Using the information that they have collected during Day 1 and Day 2, and the data that was presented to them during Day 3, ask each group to spend Day 4 preparing for a classroom debate on the death penalty. Since each student will have an opportunity to sit on a "debate panel" during Day 5, they must work collectively to form their side's opinions and back those opinions up with facts.

C. Using the curriculum's "Arguments For and Against the Death Penalty" sample debate positions, or creating new arguments of their own, teachers should provide students with some direction as to what they should be prepared to address during the student debate. Sample debate questions include the following:

• Should there be a moratorium on executions in our state?
• Should our state reinstate the death penalty? (For states that currently do not have capital punishment)
• Should our state abolish the death penalty?

DAY 5

I. STUDENT DEBATE

A. Students should begin the class in their assigned groups. Teachers should set up a
debate area consisting of three chairs/desks on each side of a podium or other place for
the moderator to stand.

B. For each debate question, the "pro" and "anti" groups should send up three members
to argue their side's main points. Each student may only participate in one round
unless there is an uneven number of students. Teachers will moderate the debate so
that each side is given equal time to make an opening statement about their position
and ask follow-up questions to rebut their opponent's main points. It is the teacher's
option to invite other teachers or community members to judge or moderate the
debate.

C. At the conclusion of the class, teachers should ask students to think back to the first
day of class and the spectrum exercise. Teachers should ask the students questions
that will require them to reflect on the past five days, such as whether their opinions
have become more informed since the first class or whether any of their opinions have
become stronger or changed over the course of the classes?

HELPFUL DEATH PENALTY CURRICULUM WEB PAGES

Interactive U.S. Map:
student link - http://deathpenaltycurriculum.org/student/index.html

State by State Summaries:

State by State Comparison:

Arguments For and Against the Death Penalty:
teacher link - http://deathpenaltycurriculum.org/teacher/c/about/arguments/contents.htm
student link - http://deathpenaltycurriculum.org/student/c/about/arguments/contents.htm
ADDITIONAL RESEARCH WEB RESOURCES

DPIC State Information Page:  
http://www.deathpenaltyinfo.org/state/

DPIC Execution Page:  
http://www.deathpenaltyinfo.org/article.php?did=414&scid=8

DPIC Murder Rates by State Page:  

DPIC Recent Legislative Developments Page:  
http://www.deathpenaltyinfo.org/article.php?did=236&scid=40

DPIC Related Resources Page:  
http://www.deathpenaltyinfo.org/article.php?did=547&scid=37

DPIC’s Student Resource Page:  
http://www.deathpenaltyinfo.org/article.php?did=1917

Students may also find useful information on Web sites maintained by newspapers within the state they are researching, their state's Department of Corrections homepage, and federal death penalty reports that contain death row information.
PLANNING A TEEN SUMMIT

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF A TEEN SUMMIT?

For school districts that are using the curriculum in multiple schools or classrooms, hosting a Teen Summit is a great culminating event. While Summits may take several forms—from film screenings with discussions that follow, to debates or panel discussions—these gatherings provide an opportunity for students to take the knowledge they gained in the classroom and apply it to a real world setting. In addition, a Teen Summit is an excellent opportunity for students to interact with experts in their community and be more involved in civic activities.

WHOM SHOULD WE INVITE TO OUR TEEN SUMMIT?

All students and teachers who have participated in the program should receive invitations to your Teen Summit. You may also want to invite members of the media (see sample press release), local community leaders, and other schools you would like to include in the coming year's program.

WHERE SHOULD WE HAVE OUR TEEN SUMMIT PROGRAM?

Depending on the types of events you plan for students, a variety of locations may be appropriate. One suggestion is to contact a local legislative leader and try to reserve a state legislature committee room where students can gather. This is an excellent spot to host a mock legislative hearing or a debate. Other possible locations may include a school auditorium or gymnasium.

WHAT SHOULD BE ON THE TEEN SUMMIT AGENDA?

We have included a sample Teen Summit agenda in this section of your manual. Typically, a Teen Summit should include an opening keynote speech, a student participation event such as a mock legislative hearing or student debate, a town hall forum with local death penalty experts on each side of the issue, and closing remarks from program coordinators.
MEDIA ADVISORY  
EVENT: Friday, May 30, 2003, 10:00 a.m.

CONTACT: Brenda Bowser  
202-293-6970  
bbowser@deathpenaltyinfo.org

DC-AREA TEEN SUMMIT ON CAPITAL PUNISHMENT  
TO FEATURE LOCAL HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS,  
CONGRESSWOMAN ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON,  
AND WASHINGTON WIZARDS' ETAN THOMAS

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- The Capital Punishment Education Project (CPEP) will host its second annual teen summit on the death penalty for DC-area high school students on May 30th, 2003. The event will feature Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC), Washington Wizards' Forward Etan Thomas, student debaters and educators from DC-area high schools, Kevin Watson of the Law Enforcement Alliance of America, and Brian Roberts of the National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty. CPEP is a high school education program sponsored by the Death Penalty Information Center, Street Law, Inc., the American Civil Liberties Union's (ACLU) Capital Punishment Project, and the ACLU of the National Capital Area.

The teen summit marks the conclusion of a year-long program rooted in an innovative Web-based curriculum designed by the Death Penalty Information Center and the Michigan State Communications Technology Laboratory. The Capitol Hill summit will feature remarks by Holmes and Thomas, a student debate, and a "town hall meeting," during which students will ask questions of capital punishment experts representing a variety of viewpoints.

WHAT: TEEN SUMMIT ON CAPITAL PUNISHMENT  
WHO: Washington, DC High School Students & Teachers  
Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton, District of Columbia  
Etan Thomas, Washington Wizards' Forward  
Kevin Watson, Legislative Director, Law Enforcement Alliance of America  
Brian Roberts, Legislative Director, National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty

WHEN: Friday, May 30, 2003 from 10:00 to 12:00 Noon  
WHERE: Dirksen Senate Office Building, Room SD562, Washington, DC

Members of the media are invited to attend this event. Participants are available for interviews both before and after the event. To schedule interviews, or for more information about the event, please contact Brenda Bowser by calling (202) 293-6970 or via email at bbowser@deathpenaltyinfo.org.

# # #
TEEN SUMMIT - AGENDA
Friday, May 17, 2002
10:00 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.

WELCOME REMARKS
10:00 a.m. to 10:10 a.m.
SHAWN ARMBRUST
FORMER NORTHWESTERN JOURNALISM STUDENT WHO HELPED EXONERATE DEATH ROW INMATE ANTHONY PORTER

KEYNOTE ADDRESSSES and STUDENT QUESTIONS
10:10 a.m. to 10:40 a.m.
SHABAKA WAGLINI
FORMER FLORIDA DEATH ROW INMATE, EXONERATED IN 1987
RICARDO WIGGS
FAMILY MEMBER OF A MURDER VICTIM

TOWN HALL MEETING WITH DEATH PENALTY EXPERTS
10:40 a.m. to 11:25 a.m.
Moderator
THE HONORABLE JUDGE RUSSELL CANAN
SUPERIOR COURT JUDGE, DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
Panelists
KEVIN WATSON
LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR, LAW ENFORCEMENT ALLIANCE OF AMERICA
JANE HENDERSON
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, EQUAL JUSTICE USA

CLOSING REMARKS FROM CPEP
11:25 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.
Additional Resources

Curriculum Web sites:

- Teacher’s Curriculum Web site: http://deathpenaltycurriculum.org/teacher/index.html
- Student Curriculum Web site: http://deathpenaltycurriculum.org/student/index.html

Informational Organizations:

- Criminal Justice Reform Education Fund / The Justice Project
  1025 Vermont Avenue, NW
  Third Floor
  Washington, DC 20005
  Phone: (202) 638-5855
  Fax: (202) 638-6056
  Web: http://www.justiceproject.org

- Death Penalty Information Center
  1015 18th St NW, Suite 704
  Washington, DC 20036
  Phone: (202) 289-2275
  Web: http://www.deathpenaltyinfo.org
  E-mail: dpic@deathpenaltyinfo.org

- The Innocence Project
  100 Fifth Avenue, 3rd Floor
  New York, NY 10011
  Web: www.innocenceproject.org
Pro-death penalty Activists

- **Justice For All**
  Phone: (713) 935-9300
  E-mail: info@jfa.net

Anti-death penalty Activists

- **National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty**
  1717 K St. NW, Suite 510
  Washington, D.C. 20036
  Phone: (202) 331-4090
  Fax: (202) 543-7798
  Web: [www.ncadp.org](http://www.ncadp.org)
  E-mail: info@ncadp.org

BOOKS

- "Dead Man Walking" by Sister Helen Prejean
- “The Death of Innocents: An Eyewitness Account of Wrongful Executions” by Sister Helen Prejean
- "Actual Innocence" by Barry Scheck, Peter Neufeld and Jim Dwyer
- "Ultimate Punishment: A Lawyer's Reflections on Dealing with the Death Penalty" by Scott Turow
- "Death Penalty In a Nutshell" by Professor Victor Streib
- "The Death Penalty: An American History” by Stuart Banner
- “America’s Experiment with Capital Punishment” edited by James Acker
MOVIES

- Deadline
  http://www.deadlinethemovie.com/

- The Execution of Wanda Jean Allen by HBO
  http://www.hbo.com/docs/programs/wanda/

- 14 Days in May

- The Green Mile

- Dead Man Walking

For more information on books, movies and other aspects of popular culture and its connection to the death penalty: http://justice.policy.net/cjedfund/pop/
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Curriculum Resource Manual
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