Legalizing Marijuana

In this lesson you will read about the legalization of marijuana. You will consider the health effects of marijuana in comparison to alcohol and other drugs, and debate with your classmates about whether or not recreational marijuana should be legal. Let's start by talking about a thought-provoking quote.

Pre-Reading

“Doesn’t the idea of making nature against the law seem a bit... unnatural?”
—Bill Hicks, comedian

A. Warm-Up Questions

1. Why do you think marijuana is illegal in most countries?
2. What similarities and differences do marijuana, tobacco, coffee, and alcohol have? Which do you think is most harmful to humans?
3. Is it necessary for a government to regulate the consumption of natural products? Who benefits from these regulations?

B. Vocabulary Preview

Match the words on the left with the correct meanings on the right.

1. turn a blind eye
   a) buying and selling illegally
2. banned
   b) the act of owning or having control of something
3. possession
   c) a rule or restriction
4. regulation
   d) to pretend not to notice something that is against the rules, to ignore
5. registry
   e) not allowed, prohibited
6. trafficking
   f) to make something less of a crime (i.e., you may be fined but not jailed)
7. gateway drug
   g) a drug that leads to the use of a more harmful drug
8. recreational
   h) a record of information
9. prohibition
   i) a ban of a substance by law (e.g., alcohol)
10. decriminalize
    j) for the purpose of fun or entertainment
Legalizing Marijuana

1. Many people think marijuana should be a legal substance. Unlike tobacco and alcohol, which are both legal in most countries, marijuana rarely leads to death or serious health problems. In many parts of the world, marijuana is legally used for medicinal purposes. In some countries, it is illegal to buy and sell marijuana, though authorities turn a blind eye to its usage. In much of the world, marijuana is a banned substance, and possession results in fines or jail time. While some people think marijuana is harmless, others fear that legalizing it will send a bad message to young people about drug use in general.

2. In 2013, Uruguay became the first country to legalize the growing, selling, and smoking of marijuana. The government put a few regulations in place. First, tourists are not allowed to buy marijuana in Uruguay. Second, legal marijuana is sold by the government. Next, buyers have to join a special registry. Lastly, Uruguayans are legally allowed to grow six personal marijuana plants each year.

3. Statisticians are watching Uruguay to see what will happen. Will drug trafficking become less of a problem? Will people switch from smoking tobacco to smoking marijuana? If they do, will the population become healthier? And lastly, will marijuana prove to be a gateway drug as many fear, or not?

4. In the US, the War on Drugs is a government effort to prevent recreational drug use. As history has shown, however, prohibition does not prevent drug use. Hundreds of thousands of Americans are charged every year for possession of illegal marijuana, and many face jail time. This is extremely costly for the taxpayer. A high percentage of the American public and some politicians are shifting in favor of decriminalizing marijuana. In 2012, Washington State and Colorado decided to legalize recreational marijuana use. A number of other US states are expected to follow in their footsteps. Time will tell whether consumers are willing to pay high taxes on legal marijuana, or whether they will continue to use illegal sources for their recreational drugs.
Vocabulary Review

A. Complete the Sentences

Complete the sentences using a vocabulary word from page 1.

1. _________________ of alcohol typically results in underground businesses and trafficking.
2. The current government _________________ don't allow tourists to legally buy marijuana.
3. Some who oppose the law think marijuana is a _________________ to cocaine.
4. If authorities _________________ recreational marijuana, fewer Americans would face jail time.
5. Pocket knives are one of many _________________ items in airplane cabins.
6. How much marijuana did she have in her _________________?

B. Circle the Synonyms

1. a) prohibit  b) legalize  c) allow
2. a) possession  b) gateway  c) ownership
3. a) trafficking  b) selling  c) smoking
4. a) ignore  b) turn a blind eye  c) discover
5. a) prohibited  b) banned  c) permitted
6. a) regulation  b) recreational  c) rule
7. a) illegal  b) lawful  c) against the law
8. a) buyers  b) registry  c) records

Comprehension

Discuss these questions in pairs, and write the answers in your notebook.

1. Discuss the subtitle. What is the literal meaning? What is the idiomatic meaning?
2. Why does the reading mention tobacco?
3. What are Uruguayans allowed to do if they don’t want to join a marijuana registry?
4. Why does the reading mention Washington State?
5. What can be inferred from the last line of the reading?

Pronunciation Tip:

“Illegal” and “legal” are antonyms, so be sure to pronounce “illegal” with three distinct syllables so that listeners can clearly hear which word you mean. Most people pronounce the first syllable in “illegal” with a short i ( /ɪ/ ) sound or a schwa, while some use a long e sound ( /iː/ ).
Vocabulary Review

C. Cannabis – Slang and Vocabulary

Did you know that material from the cannabis plant is known as “hemp”? When used as a medicinal drug, it is called “medical marijuana”. As a recreational drug it may be called “pot”, “weed”, “bud”, or other names. The word “pothead” is used to describe someone who smokes marijuana often, and seems to always be in a relaxed state. A “joint” is the term for marijuana rolled up in a piece of paper.

DISCUSS IT

1. If legalized, should marijuana become available in convenience stores and grocery stores?
2. How are taxpayers affected by the legalization of marijuana?
3. In your opinion, what, if anything, is an appropriate punishment for the illegal possession of marijuana?
4. If marijuana is legalized, will other drugs be next?
5. Should people be allowed to grow marijuana plants for their own personal use? Why or why not?

DEBATE IT

Use the useful expressions on page 5 to help you make your points.

Topic 1:
Marijuana should be legalized around the world and regulated by the government.

Topic 2:
Legalizing marijuana will send the wrong message to kids that drug use is acceptable.

WRITE IT

Choose one of the questions above and write a paragraph stating your own opinion.

RESEARCH & CRITICAL THINKING (OPTIONAL)

Many people say that they are against the legalization of marijuana, but for the decriminalization of it. Explain this position and comment on it. You could do a little research about marijuana use in the Netherlands. You may also want to review President Barack Obama’s position on the legalization of marijuana. Share your findings with your classmates.
Useful Expressions and Transitions for Debating

AGREEING AND DISAGREEING

- That doesn't take away from the fact that...
- That's beside the point.
- With all due respect...
- I agree with you there.
- I agree with ---- (name).
- I see your point, but...
- That may be true, but...
- We’re going to have to agree to disagree.
- I get/see where you’re coming from, but...
- I’m afraid I disagree entirely.
- I’m afraid I’d have to disagree.
- I agree to some extent, but...
- I disagree with you there.
- Pardon me for disagreeing, but ...

EXPRESSING AN OPINION

- In my honest opinion...
- It is my belief that...
- From my experience...
- From where I look at it...
- From my point of view...

CLARIFYING / REPHRASING

- Let’s be clear here...
- I think you misunderstood what I said.
- What I said was... (repeat a point that was misunderstood or confused)
- What I meant to say was... (rephrase something in a way that is clearer)
- In other words...
- What I was trying to say before I was interrupted is that...

INTERRUPTING / ASKING TO CONTRIBUTE

- I hate to interrupt, but...
- If I may come in here...
- I’d like to add something.
- Would you like to contribute something?
- I’d like to raise a point.
- If I could speak for a moment...
- I’d like to cut in here.
- You haven’t answered my question.

SUMMARIZING / CONCLUDING

- So let me get this straight, you think...
- To conclude...
- I’d just like to summarize by saying...
- Finally, I’d like to reiterate that...
- It’s time to take stock of what we’ve heard today.
- Both sides have some valid points.
- The stronger argument/team today is...

PERSUADING

- Can you see where I’m coming from?
- I challenge you to give this a try/chance.
- I want you to see it my way.
- Put yourself in my shoes.
- Am I getting through to you?
Legalizing Marijuana
Mini Debates

Answer Key

LESSON DESCRIPTION:
Students read about the legalization of marijuana. The lesson includes vocabulary review exercises, comprehension questions, discussion questions, and debate questions. It also includes useful expressions for debates.

LEVEL: Intermediate–Advanced
TIME: 1.5–2 hours
TAGS: discussion, health, government, drugs, nature, marijuana, law, pot, cigarettes, tobacco, alcohol

Pre-Reading

A. WARM-UP QUESTIONS
Have students work in small groups or as a class. Discuss the quote.

B. VOCABULARY PREVIEW
1. d  3. b  5. h  7. g  9. i
2. e  4. c  6. a  8. j  10. f

Reading

Read individually, in small groups, or as a class. You can also play the listening as your students read along. Help your students with vocabulary and expressions that they are unfamiliar with.

Pronunciation Tip:
The words “illegal” and “legal” are pronounced very closely, especially by native speakers. When pronounced normally, the second syllable of “illegal” is stressed. However, when confusion occurs, speakers often change the placement of the stress in order to clear up a misunderstanding. Invite two of your students to the front of the class to role-play a misunderstanding based on similar-sounding words. Demonstrate how a speaker places emphasis on the syllable that caused the misunderstanding in order to eliminate the confusion.

A: Marijuana is illegal in my country. (said quickly)
B: It’s legal? (surprised)
A: No, illegal. (with emphasis on first syllable /ɪ/)
B: Oh, illegal! (with emphasis on first syllable again)

Comprehension

1. The literal meaning refers to planting a seed for a cannabis plant, while the idiomatic meaning of “planting a seed” is to do something that will catch on or develop in the future. Uruguay planted the seed for legalizing marijuana.
2. The reading mentions tobacco because, unlike marijuana, it is legal in most places. This is a bit strange since it’s bad for one’s health and is a leading cause of death.
3. Uruguayans are allowed to plant their own marijuana plants for personal use.
4. The reading mentions Washington State because the recreational use of marijuana was legalized there.
5. The last line of the reading suggests that if people have to pay high taxes for legal marijuana, they may continue to buy from illegal sources.

Vocabulary Review

A. COMPLETE THE SENTENCES
1. Prohibition  3. gateway drug  5. banned
2. regulations  4. decriminalize  6. possession

B. CIRCLE THE SYNONYMS
1. b) legalize
   c) allow
2. a) possession
   b) ownership
3. a) trafficking
   b) selling
4. a) ignore
   b) turn a blind eye
5. a) prohibited
   b) banned
6. a) regulation
   b) rule
7. a) illegal
   b) against the law
8. a) registry
   b) records

(continued on the next page...)
C. CANNABIS – SLANG AND VOCABULARY

Your students may be looking for additional slang and vocabulary related to drug use. You can decide what you feel comfortable sharing with your students. Here are a few other words or expressions they may ask about.

- **rolling paper**
  *paper used to roll up a joint*

- **fire it up**
  *smoke some marijuana*

- **bong**
  *a pipe used to smoke marijuana*

- **stash**
  *marijuana (or any drug or similar substance) that is hidden or saved up for later use*

- **get or feel “high”**
  *the happy (short-term) feeling one enjoys after consuming something such as drugs or alcohol*

**Other drugs they may ask about:**
*acid (LSD), crack cocaine, heroin, prescription drugs*

### Discuss It / Write It

These questions can be used for discussion and writing topics. They will help prepare your students for a more formal debate.

### Debate It

1. Review language used in debates (see page 5).
2. Divide students so that some argue for and others argue against. Or allow students to make their own opinions. Give students time to practice making statements about their opinions.

Remind students to defend their opinions with real-life examples and details. Remind students to respect the opinions of others. You may also want to practice interrupting politely. *(See our Functional English lesson plan on Interrupting.)*

### Research & Critical Thinking (Optional)

Assign this topic to students who want to learn more. This article may be of use:


**SPELLING NOTE:**
This lesson shows the American spelling of the word *Favor.* Other English-speaking countries spell it this way: *Favour.* Make it a challenge for your students to find this word in the lesson and see if they know the alternate spelling.