

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.

Pre-Reading

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?

“Doesn’t the idea of making nature against the law seem a bit... unnatural?”

—Bill Hicks, comedian

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 |

Reading

LEGALIZING MARIJUANA

Planting the Seed

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. On April 13, 2017, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau unveiled a plan to legalize marijuana for Canadians 18 and over. One of the Canadian government's goals is to change the fact that teens are the heaviest marijuana users. Can this goal be accomplished by legalizing the drug for personal use for adults and putting harsher penalties into place for selling drugs to minors?
5. 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 favour 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.

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 (/i:/).

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?

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. Synonyms

Circle the synonyms in each group of words.

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

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

Work with a partner or in small groups.
Discuss the following questions.

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?
6. Do you think that harsher penalties, such as increased jail time, will stop people from selling drugs to minors?

Research & Critical Thinking

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 or Canada. Share your findings with your classmates.

Debate

Below are two topics to debate in small groups or pairs. Your teacher will tell you if you will be debating for or against the idea. You will have ten minutes to prepare your arguments.

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

Choose one of the questions from the Discuss section above. Then write a paragraph in your notebook stating your own opinion.

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...

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.

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?

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...

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...