



A Park or a Cage?

The “Rat Park” story

“Drugs cause addiction.” This was the conclusion drawn from repeated rat experiments in numerous university research centres in the 1950s and 60s. These studies had involved the use of tiny cages with contraptions that allowed isolated animals to drink drug-laced sugar water or inject drugs by pressing a lever. The rats consumed large amounts of heroin, morphine, amphetamine, cocaine and other drugs, sometimes not eating and dying through neglect. This led scientists to conclude that the drugs had innate powers that made them irresistible to rats and humans alike.

In the late 1970s, Professor Bruce Alexander and his colleagues at Simon Fraser University set out to test this theory. They wanted to know if it was true that drugs themselves caused addiction or if environmental factors might be involved. For their p r-2.39irm(p) Alexander’s team observed that the rats living in Rat Park acted differently than rats



2. Watch [Everything You Think You Know about Addiction Is Wrong | Johann Hari | TED Talks](#) together and, as a class, discuss the implications of the ideas Hari presents.
3. Watch the You Tube video, [Addiction and the Rat Park Experiments](#), together and have students discuss the implications of the Rat Park experiments in small groups. Then debrief as a class.
4. After reviewing the Rat Park cartoon (or the student handout or either of the videos), have students develop a cartoon story board that illustrates how someone might become “addicted” and then recover from their addiction. Discuss the factors that might lead to both the addiction and the recovery.

Drug Literacy

Big ideas

- Drugs can be tremendously helpful and also very harmful
- As humans, both individually and as communities, we need to learn how to manage the drugs in our lives

Competencies

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