

Rat Park refers to a scientific experiment in the late 1970s that called into question the common understanding of addictive drugs. Professor Bruce Alexander and his students at Simon Fraser University showed that living conditions, not drugs, were the issue. Our environment greatly influences whether or not we use drugs, how much we use, how often, and where.

This instructional example provides two alternative stimuli through which to introduce this material to Grade 6/7 students and a variety of instructional strategies appropriate for different learning styles and curricular subjects.

The point of this learning activity is not to focus on drugs or addiction. Those issues are the backdrop, but the point is to re-focus attention to those factors that provide the foundation for wellness (including dealing with drugs).

Freedom

- a. Which rats were more free?
- b. Do you think freedom is important? What does freedom mean to you?
- c. Was freedom related to why some rats were healthy and others killed themselves? Explain.
- d. Can we ever be completely free? Explain.
- e. When is a lack of freedom a problem? Could freedom ever be a problem? Explain

Connection

- a. Why did the rats in isolation use so much of the drug?
- b. Do you think rat behaviour is similar or different than human behaviour? Explain.
- c. Is being able to do things with friends important? Why or why not?
- d. What are some things in our community that might make people feel isolated or caged?
- e. Can humans ever get into trouble using alcohol or other drugs with friends? Give examples. How can friends help each other?



Support

- a. Why do you think the rats in cages behaved differently from those in Rat Park?
 - b. Do you think a similar experiment done with humans would have had similar results? Why or why not?
 - c. How can we help each other live healthy lives?
 - d. Do the results of the Rat Park experiment help us know what to do? Explain.
2. Have students write a paragraph or short essay on the topic: What I learned from Rat Park, and what I can do about it.
 3. Use an art project to encourage understanding and empathy. Invite students to imagine how the rats were feeling when caged and when in their park. Then have students express those feelings in side by side images of what they imagine the rat in the cage might produce versus a rat in the park. You might extend the exercise by having students display their art work and encourage students to look for new meaning or see something important that they would not have understood without comparing. Allow time to discuss their observations.



- x Drugs can be tremendously helpful and also very harmful
 - x As humans, both individually and as communities, we need to learn how to manage the drugs in our lives
 - x We can learn how to control drugs by examining human thinking through time, exploring stories from various cultures and listening to each other
-
- x Assess the complex ways in which drugs impact the health and wellbeing of individuals, communities and societies
 - x Explore and appreciate diversity related to the reasons people use drugs, the impact of drug use and the social attitudes toward various drugs
 - x Recognize binary constructs (e.g., good vs bad) and assess their limitation in addressing complex social issues like drug use
 - x Develop social and communication skills in addressing discourse and behaviour related to drugs
 - x Develop personal and social strategies to manage the risks and harms related to drugs

For a complete look at the drug literacy competencies, as defined by the Centre for Addictions Research of BC, see:

