Lesson Plan: Gun Laws and Gun Deaths

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Featured resources

KQED's The Lowdown: [Do States With Tough Gun Laws Actually Have Fewer Gun Deaths?](#)

St. Louis Attorney General's Office

Opening quick write prompt:

How many Americans do you estimate die each year from gunshot wounds? What do you think is the primary cause of these deaths? What role, if any, should the government play in controlling access to guns to prevent gun deaths?

A quick write allows students to write down their thoughts before discussing the opening question in order to increase participation and make the discussion more accessible to English Language Learners.

Objective

- Students will analyze data around gun deaths and gun violence in the United States and efforts to curb deaths caused by firearms.

- Students will evaluate and reflect on the arguments for and against gun control and write a response about the issue.

Essential Question and Lesson Context

What is the cause of most gun deaths in America? What, if anything, should the government do to control citizens' access to guns?

While tragic mass shootings like the ones in Las Vegas and Orlando shine a spotlight on our nation's lax gun laws, these horrific events make up a tiny percentage of U.S. gun deaths. Suicide, other types of homicide and accidents play a major role in death by firearm. The United States far outpaces the rest of the world in gun ownership and gun-related deaths. Despite these statistics and public outcry following each mass shooting, federal gun control efforts have stalled, a situation unlikely to change anytime soon. Moreover, data we have on the effectiveness of state gun laws paints a mixed picture. Some states with strict gun laws have more gun deaths than those with lax laws. Gun control advocates are looking at Australia, which passed a series of strict gun laws following the country's worst mass shooting in 1996. Since then, there have been no mass shootings in Australia. Some are hoping this success story can serve as model for the United States.

Key vocabulary

Pre-teach key vocabulary before students do the reading, especially if you have English Language Learners. After going over the simple definition, consider providing a visual aid or having students draw one. More ideas for how to pre-teach vocabulary can be found [here](#).

Word	Simple definition
Derive (v.)	To come from something, to take or get from a certain source *The data **derived** from the survey results show that many Americans own guns.*
Industrialized (adj.)	A place that has developed businesses, factories and industry on a large scale *The United States has more gun deaths than other **industrialized** nation.*
Rampage (n.)	Extremely violent or reckless action or behavior *The mass shooter went on a **rampage**, killing many people.*
Rebuttal (n.)	A reply intended to show a mistake or fault in someone else's argument. *Gun control advocates want stricter gun laws, but opponents are quick with a much-used **rebuttal** that "gun don't kill people; people kill people."*
Unprecedented (adj.)	Not done or experienced before *There have been an **unprecedented** number of mass shootings in the United States.*

Investigate

- Discuss the quick-write prompt. Record the range of gun death estimates. If students don't link suicide to access to guns, don't tell them yet. Gauge student opinion about the best way to control access to guns.

- Show students the interactive graph from FiveThirtyEight on [The Lowdown post](#), which reveals the number of gun deaths in 2015 and the various causes. The data can be sorted by gender, race and age. Ask students: What surprises you about this graph? Does this information change your opinion about how the government should control access to guns?

- As a class or in small groups, students read [The Lowdown post](#). Tell them to read the questions about the map but not to answer any of them yet.

- **Check for understanding after students read:** What are the arguments gun control advocates use to make a case for stricter gun laws by state? What are arguments opponents of gun control

use as a rebuttal to these arguments? What did Australia do following their worse mass shooting in 1996? Were these actions effective?

- **Transition to the Make and Share:** Tell students they will have a chance to explore the map on The Lowdown and respond to the questions in the post in the comments section. The first time they comment, students must sign in to Disqus, a free discussion app embedded in The Lowdown.
    o To sign in to Disqus, click the "Comments" button at the bottom of the post.
    o Click the blue "Get Started" button in the gray "Welcome to Disqus" box.
    o Students will need to enter a username. We recommend first name, last initial.
    o After signing in for the first time, students must verify their email address before commenting. A verification email will appear in their inbox once they sign in to Disqus.

Make and share

- Individually or in small groups, students explore the map and answer the questions included in the post. (They are also listed below.) If you are short on time, assign 1-2 questions to each small group, or have individual students choose one question to answer.
    o Responses should be supported by evidence from the text and map.
    o Encourage students to reply to other comments after posting their response. Remind them to use evidence to support their claims and respectful language when responding.

- These are the questions included in The Lowdown post:
    o Which states have the highest and lowest gun death rates?
    o What are possible factors that might contribute to these high and low rates?
    o The national gun death rate average is 10.54 per 100,000 people. Find three states that fall above and below this average.
    o Are there states that fall below the average national gun death rate but also receive a low gun control grade (below C)? What might account for a low gun death rate despite looser gun laws?
    o What's the gun death rate and total number of gun deaths in your state? Is that higher or lower than you expected? How does it compare to rates in neighboring states?
    o Identify two states with very different gun control grades (i.e.: an A- and an F). Go online to look up and compare both of these states' gun control laws. What are the biggest differences?

Assessment/reflection

- Have students share their findings from the map, especially if students chose different states to investigate.

- Students reflect on what they have learned either through a class discussion or in writing:

o   What are 2-3 memorable facts you have learned about gun deaths and gun violence in the United States? Did your opinion on this issue change or stay the same as you learned more?

o   What was it like to post your responses publically and reply to other posts? What did you learn from other students? What do you hope they learned from you? What will you do the next time you post a comment in response to The Lowdown?

Circle chats, small-group discussions and think-pair-share provide a safer space for students to practice speaking and listening, and also boost participation during whole-class discussions.

Extension/homework

Write/speak locally: Students turn their opinions about gun policy into a letter, short speech or presentation, then research ways to make their voice heard in their community. (Example: Speaking during the public comment section of a city council meeting, posting on an online forum, etc.) For a list of how to contact local officials in your area, check out KQED Learning's Local Election Toolkit.

Common Core standards

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1	Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7	Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W1	Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.