



Dear Principal, Teacher, or School Administrator,

With many students planning walkouts next week related to gun violence in America, we know that educators are wondering how to address this topic with students.

In response, we are providing this discussion guide to gun violence in America. We have grounded this guide in facts which are neutral and nonpartisan. It offers an overview on the legal framework for gun sales in America, facts on gun violence in America, and policy initiatives currently being considered by legislators. Grouped into four main discussion areas, this backgrounder is intended to support your classroom discussions about gun violence prevention and to encourage students' thinking and debate on the issue. It does not propose particular policy solutions.

We hope this will be helpful to you as you consider how to address the walkouts on March 14, the marches around the country on March 24, and various other activities planned for April 20. We built this guide around a 40-minute classroom discussion, either in a high school or middle school history or civics class. We hope you can adapt it for your own classroom purposes, based on student age and time available to devote to the topic. Some teachers might also use the guide as a handout to those participating in a walkout, or as the foundation for a school-wide assembly. You may also find it helpful to assign related homework assignments to students to prompt further reflection and academic inquiry, whether or not students opt to participate in a walkout. A short essay on student protests, or on the history of guns and gun use in America is one example of such an assignment. Organizing an in-school debate could be another approach.

Thanks for your participation, and for supporting your students in their expression and exploration of these issues.

Sincerely,

Kris Brown
Co-President

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Co-President

Student Walkout/Teach-In: Protests, Change, and Gun Violence in America

Students across America are participating in a walkout today, as well as in marches around the country on March 24 and another series of activities on April 20, because of their concerns about gun violence. The recent school shooting in Parkland, Florida has increased interest, especially among young people, about this issue.

These events are the latest in a series of protests throughout American history that have played an important role in driving social change. For example, young people conducted walkouts, strikes, and marches in the 1930s over concerns about the long hours children labored at dangerous jobs in factories, which was part of the reason Congress passed the Fair Labor Standards Act. The Act decreed that kids under 16 can't work during school hours, and minors can't perform certain hazardous jobs.

1. Gun Violence in America

Fast Facts

Every year in the US: (5-year averages)

- 36,000 people die from gunshots
- 17,102 children and teens are shot every year
- 2,737 children and teens die every year from gunshots

Every day in the US:

- 318 people are shot
- 96 people die from gunshots
- 46 children and teens are shot
- 7 children and teens die from gunshots¹

**These numbers are from the Centers for Disease Control*

To put that in perspective, in 2016...

- 38,748 Americans died from motor vehicle and traffic-related injuries
 - This accounts for 16.7% of all fatal injuries in the year 2016
- 38,658 Americans died from firearm-related injuries
 - This accounts for another 16.7% of all fatal injuries in the year 2016
- Firearm injuries were nearly tied with motor vehicles injuries as the second largest cause of fatal injury in 2016, second only to drug poisoning (63,622 fatalities in 2016, 27.4% of all fatal injuries)

Guns, Safety, and Security

- **How many Americans are gun owners?** A 2013 Gallup poll found 37% of Americans are gun owners. There are an estimated 270 million to 310 million guns in the US.
- **How do people feel about guns and safety?** Perceptions around guns and safety vary.
- For many, guns are associated with safety. A 2014 poll showed that 63% of Americans felt owning a gun made them feel safer. ²
- For others, the presence of a gun does not convey safety. A different poll showed that 60% people of living in households without a gun said they would be uncomfortable having one. ³
- **What do people feel about guns?** There are a range of different concepts Americans associate with guns. A 2017 survey found gun owners said that guns made America "free" (61%), "strong" (55%), and "safe" (59%). Non-gun owners said that guns make America "dangerous" (55%) and "scary" (38%). ⁴
- Efforts to make neighborhoods and communities safer include a variety of levels of engagement. These can range from increased levels of law enforcement presence and patrols to an increased focus on police engagement which stresses interpersonal relationships with community members. Another commonly-adopted approach is to build or adapt a community to be intentionally safer by design. These designs include well-lit areas, strategically-placed landscape features, and shrubbery meant to deter people from breaking the law through enhanced scrutiny -- for instance, designing bike trails that wind through the community in full view of the side windows and doors of surrounding housing. A broad study of such efforts, known as CPTED, found they deterred break-ins from 30 to 80 percent. ⁵

Youth and Guns in America

- American children and teenagers are 4 times more likely to be killed with a gun than Canadian kids, and 65 times more likely to die from gun violence than children and teenagers in the United Kingdom. In Japan, just 6 people were killed by guns in 2014. The likelihood of being killed by a gun in Japan is the same as the likelihood of dying by lightning strike in America, around one in 10 million. ⁶

Gun Deaths and Communities of Color

- While the majority of those who die from gun violence in America are white, gun violence affects communities of color in disproportionate numbers. For example, while only 13 percent of Americans are black, 65 percent of gun murder victims in 2010 between ages 15 and 24 were black. Young black men between age 15 and 24 are 4.5 times more likely to die from gun violence than their white counterparts of the same age.⁷
- The homicide rate for Latinx is nearly twice as high as the murder rate for white people. In the overall population, 67% or more than two-thirds of homicides are committed with a gun.
- Homicide is the second leading cause of death for young Latinx (age 15-24).

Guns and Domestic Violence

- Guns also intersect with the issue of domestic violence. According to an analysis by the Associated Press, a woman is shot and killed by a current or former partner every sixteen hours.⁹
- If a gun is present in the home when a domestic violence incident takes place, the risk of homicide increases by 500 percent.¹⁰
- Women in the United States are 11 times more likely to be murdered with a gun compared to those living in other high-income nations.¹¹

Suicide and Guns in America

- About 60% of gun deaths each day in America are suicide deaths¹²
- Nine out of 10 suicide attempts with a gun result in death, compared to just 3 percent for other common methods.

2. Legal background: How guns are sold in America

A few years after President John F. Kennedy was shot and killed in 1963, Congress enacted the Gun Control Act of 1968. This law established categories of who isn't allowed to have guns, including:

- People convicted of violent or gun-related crimes
- Fugitives from justice
- Those dishonorably discharged from the military, and, among others,
- People judged legally insane in court.

This law did not, however, establish a way to check whether a prospective gun purchaser fits one of those categories. In 1981, President Ronald Reagan's press secretary, Jim Brady, was shot in the head during an assassination attempt that also injured President Reagan. This brought new attention to the question of how to stop people barred from having guns from buying them.

Afterward, Jim and his wife Sarah lobbied Congress and raised public awareness to pass a law for a nationwide system that would allow gun sellers to predetermine whether a prospective gun buyer is cleared to buy a gun from them. It took six votes over seven years until Congress voted to implement a background check system.

The Brady Law, which requires a background check for anyone seeking to buy a gun from licensed gun sellers, has kept an estimated 3 million guns out of the hands of those ineligible to buy guns under the 1968 Gun Control Act.

In America today, most guns are sold by licensed gun sellers. A customer fills out a background check form, and the federally licensed gun seller contacts the FBI by phone or online, so that an FBI official can run the customer's name through the National Instant Criminal Background Check System ("NICS"). Most of the time, the background check is approved within minutes. In 2017, the FBI processed over 25 million background checks.¹³

While the background check system is a powerful tool for keeping guns out of the hands of dangerous people, it only applies to licensed gun sellers. Unlicensed gun sellers, often called private sellers, are not required to conduct background checks. Researchers estimate that one in five guns sold in America does not go through a background check because of the private seller gap. Many of those private sales occur online or at gun shows.¹⁴

Special issues related to assault weapons. In 1994, Congress passed a ban on assault weapons. The law defined an assault weapon as a gun that can fire multiple times without being manually reloaded, compatible with a detachable magazine and at least two additional special features, such as a grenade launcher and a flash suppressor. That ban expired in 2004.

Currently, seven states and the District of Columbia ban assault weapons, and two more regulate elements of their possession or purchase. Assault weapons are commonly used in high profile mass shootings. They are also used by some hunters and sport shooting enthusiasts.

3. The Second Amendment

The Second Amendment to the Constitution guarantees the right to bear arms. It states that “A well-regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.” Over the years, this amendment has been interpreted by the courts.

A 2008 Supreme Court ruling on the Second Amendment, *District of Columbia v. Heller*, established an individual’s right to own a gun in the home for self-protection, rather than as part of militia service. As part of the court opinion, Justice Antonin Scalia noted the Second Amendment protected weapons “in common use at the time” of its inception and that it was not without limits. The Supreme Court has not yet addressed what other limits might apply to the Second Amendment.

The *Heller* decision applied to handguns in homes. It did not address guns outside of the home or other types of guns. In other court cases, assessing state restrictions on assault weapons, judges have upheld assault weapons restrictions as constitutional in all four courts that have addressed the issue.

4. Policy initiatives under consideration

Politicians and the public have been debating gun issues over the last few weeks. Lawmakers have proposed many legislative solutions, including:

- **Arming Teachers:** President Donald Trump has proposed arming teachers who are military veterans or trained with firearms.
- **Expanded Background Check System:** Two bills introduced in the House (HR 4240) and the Senate (S 2009) would close gaps in the existing background check system, so that every gun sold would be subject to a background check, including those sold over the internet and at gun shows.

- Assault Weapons Ban: legislation introduced by Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) in October 2017 would ban the sale, manufacture, transfer, and importation of over 200 military-style assault weapons by name, as well as outlaw any assault weapon that can accept a detachable magazine and one or more military characteristics. This is similar to the 1994 assault weapon ban.

Extreme Risk, or “ERPO” law: An extreme risk law allows family members and law enforcement to seek court permission to temporarily remove guns from a person in crisis, to keep guns out of the hands of those who are at risk of injuring themselves or others. This would prohibit someone in crisis from harming themselves or others while their behavior can be evaluated.

Discussion Questions & Activities

- What do you think are the best ways to reduce gun violence in America?
- Under current law, only licensed gun dealers are required to perform background checks. What do you think about that?
- How can we address the special problem of guns in schools?
- Most gun owners favor gun safety. If you or your family members own guns, how can you help address issues of gun safety?
- Activity: What are the arguments for and against different proposals to reduce gun violence? Form teams of two and conduct a timed debate on each.
- Activity: Create a video expressing your opinion about how our country can reduce gun violence.
- Activity: Research and write an essay about a protest movement, such as civil rights, pro-life or pro-choice movements, the Vietnam war, or the environment.

Resources

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6. "Young Guns: How Gun Violence is Devastating the Millennial Generation." Parsons, Chelsea and Johnson, Anne. 21 Feb 2014.
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11. Everytown for Gun Safety, "Guns and Violence Against Women," <https://everytownresearch.org/reports/guns-and-violence-againstwomen/>.
12. Centers for Disease Control and Pre-vention. 2017. National Centers for Injury Prevention and Control, Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System (WISQARS). Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisquars/index.html>
13. FBI Month/Year report: https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/nics_firearm_checks_-_month_year.pdf/view
14. Matthew Miller, Lisa Hepburn, and Deborah Azrael, "Firearm Acquisition Without Background Checks: Results of a National Survey," *Annals of Internal Medicine* 166, no. 4 (2017), accessed February 1, 2018, available at <http://annals.org/aim/fullarticle/2595892/firearm-acquisition-without-background-checks-results-national-survey>.

THERE ARE TOO MANY VICTIMS OF GUN VIOLENCE. AS A NATION, WE HAVE HAD #ENOUGH

EVERY YEAR ON AVERAGE

everyone (all ages)

116,255

people are shot every year

Fatalities

35,141
people die from
gun violence

12,246
murdered

21,637
die from suicide

500
killed
unintentionally

479
killed by legal
intervention

279
die but intent
was unknown

Gun Injuries

81,114
people survive
gun injuries

60,041
injured
in an attack

3,700
survive a
suicide attempt

16,428
shot
unintentionally

945
shot by legal
intervention

children and teens (ages 0-19)

17,102

children and teens are shot every year

Fatalities

2,737
kids & teens die
from gun violence

1,606
murdered

958
die from suicide

110
killed
unintentionally

26
killed by legal
intervention

36
die but intent
was unknown

Gun Injuries

14,365
kids and teens
survive gun injuries

11,321
injured
in an attack

232
survive a
suicide attempt

2,747
shot
unintentionally

65
shot by legal
intervention

The Brady Center averaged the most recent five years of complete data from death certificates (2012-2016) available via CDC's National Center for Injury Prevention and Control's Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System, www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/index.html. Data retrieved 1.22.18 and 4.24.17 respectively. For each column total, the sum is based on rounding of CDC averages for each category of fatality and/or gun injury.



THERE ARE TOO MANY VICTIMS OF GUN VIOLENCE. AS A NATION, WE HAVE HAD #ENOUGH

EVERY DAY ON AVERAGE

everyone (all ages)

318

people are shot every day

Fatalities

96*

people die from
gun violence

34

murdered

59

die from suicide

1

killed
unintentionally

1

killed by legal
intervention

1

died but intent
was unknown

Gun Injuries

222

people survive
gun injuries

164

injured
in an attack

10

survive a
suicide attempt

45

shot
unintentionally

3

shot by legal
intervention

children and teens (ages 0-19)

46

children and teens are shot every day

Fatalities

7

kids and teens die
from gun violence

4

murdered

3

die from suicide

Gun Injuries

40

kids and teens
survive gun injuries

31

injured
in an attack

<1

survived a
suicide attempt

8

shot
unintentionally

The Brady Center averaged the most recent five years of complete data from death certificates (2012-2016) available via CDC's National Center for Injury Prevention and Control's Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System, www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/index.html. Data retrieved 1.22.18 and 4.24.17 respectively. For each column total, the sum is based on rounding of CDC averages for each category of fatality and/or gun injury.