

LESSON PLAN

Bearing Witness to Change During the Covid-19 Pandemic

Summary

Grade Level

6–8

Companion Film

[Cocoon](#), by Andrew Hinton

Subjects

English language arts, Health, Social studies

Themes

Bearing witness, Change, Identity, family and community, Perspective, Resilience

What Students Will Uncover

The power of perspective and reflection during the Covid-19 pandemic

Essential Questions

- How has the pandemic impacted your social and emotional well-being?
- Why is social distancing and isolation so difficult?

- In what ways has the pandemic allowed you to see the world in new ways?

Lesson Overview

Students will watch *Cocoon*, a short film by Andrew Hinton, which explores perspectives from elementary, middle, and high school students living in Portland, Oregon, during the global lockdown in the early months of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020. Students will engage in learning activities that prompt them to examine their thoughts and feelings about the pandemic and the ways in which it has impacted their social and emotional lives as well as their learning.

Key Issue

The Covid-19 pandemic has impacted education, learning, and the social and emotional well-being of students due to school closures, distance learning, and isolation.

Lesson Objectives

Students will:

- Analyze the social and emotional impacts the pandemic has on their lives
- Recognize the ways in which people in society are impacted by the pandemic
- Understand the need for community and social interaction

Materials

- Online access to the film [Cocoon](#) by Andrew Hinton
- Poem by Lynn Ungar, [“On the Other Side”](#)
- Note-taking sheet: [Film Analysis Tool](#)

Standards & Frameworks

- [SEL Competencies](#)
- [C3 Framework](#)
- [NCSS Themes](#)

- [CCSS ELA Standards](#)

Background

Putting the Film in Context

This section is intended for the educator and provides information about the film Cocoon and the ways in which Covid-19 has impacted society, education, and learning.

In early 2020, the Covid-19 virus rapidly made its way to the United States and would end up shutting down many businesses and schools for months. The pandemic impacted many aspects of daily life but most significantly disrupted the world economy and the health and well-being of individuals and communities around the world.

Millions of people worldwide contracted Covid-19 and hundreds of thousands died from the virus. As of March 2021, nearly 2.55 million people worldwide, including 500,000 in the U.S. alone, had died from Covid.¹ Covid-19 also directly impacted the mental and physical health of many, leading to anxiety, depression, grief, and teen suicide.^{2,3}

In March of 2020, many schools shut down and students participated in distance learning by virtually joining classes at home.⁴ More than 1.37 billion students worldwide navigated how to learn at home through daily online classes on Zoom or other digital platforms.⁵ As of March 2021, at-home learning had continued for nearly a year, and even longer in some countries and states, forcing educators to reinvent and reimagine how to deliver distance learning to their students. Debates sparked over how meaningful at-home learning was for students, especially when so many struggle to secure stable internet access. Despite the challenges, opportunities have emerged from the pandemic and revealed new ways to think about teaching and learning.

¹ Pien Huang, "[A Loss To The Whole Society': U.S. COVID-19 Death Toll Reaches 500,000](#)." NPR, February 22, 2020.

² "[Adolescent's Wellbeing During COVID-19: Parental Resources](#)." CDC, 2021.

³ Trisha Koriath, "[Study: Suicidal behavior in youths higher during COVID-19 closures than in 2019](#)." American Academy of Pediatrics, December 16, 2020.

⁴ "[Map: Coronavirus and School Closures in 2019-2020](#)." Education Week, updated September 16, 2020.

⁵ "[1.37 billion students now home as COVID-19 school closures expand, ministers scale up multimedia approaches to ensure learning continuity](#)." UNESCO, March 24, 2020.

The pandemic has exposed the limitations of a “one-size-fits-all” education.⁶ Many educators have embraced a creative and customized approach, which has allowed students a greater sense of ownership over their own education. Some schools are using this challenging and unique moment in history as a teaching tool to help connect students to current events happening outside the classroom.⁷ The suddenness in the shift to online education has meant a steep learning curve for both educators and students, and the long term effects of these changes is uncertain. Educational scholars have realized the importance of creating more humanized and individualized educational approaches as opposed to more institutionalized and standardized models.⁸ This more humanistic approach has allowed students who otherwise feel alienated to flourish and engage in learning.

Cocoon, a short documentary by Andrew Hinton, captures reflections of students —ranging in age from 4 to 17— during the early months of the pandemic in Portland, Oregon. The film explores their perspectives and feelings about the pandemic on issues including school changes, isolation, job loss, and the health and well-being of themselves and their families. While students express their fears and insecurities, they also share what they have come to appreciate and what they miss the most—their friends, their teachers, and human connection.

Lesson

Setting the Stage: Lesson Introduction

Engage students with this exercise before introducing the story.

1. Ask students to read Lynn Ungar’s Poem “[On the Other Side](#).”
2. In what ways has the pandemic made you feel that you have fallen “down the rabbit hole” and “into a new story”?
3. Ungar writes, “Everything here is foreign / Nothing quite makes sense.” Describe the ways in which the pandemic has changed your perspective.
4. Read the last line of the poem. How does this make you feel?

⁶ Jal Mehta “[Make Schools More Human](#).” *The New York Times*, December 23, 2020.

⁷ Emma Chiappeta, “[Using the Pandemic as a Teaching Tool in High School](#).” Edutopia, July 21, 2020.

⁸ Jal Mehta, “[Make Schools More Human](#).” *The New York Times*, December 23, 2020.

"Do not confuse the beginning of the story with the end."

—Lynn Ungar

Engaging with the Story

Before watching the film, introduce students to the story and provide specific tasks of observation.

1. Tell students that they will watch a film about K-12 students' experiences during quarantine in April 2020. The film is called *Cocoon*. Why do you think the filmmaker chose this title?
2. Ask students to make predictions. What do you think the individuals in the film are feeling due to isolation during the pandemic?
3. Ask students: Why did you choose those feelings?

Delving Deeper: Discussion Questions

Encourage students to examine the themes and issues raised in the film. (Note for educators: Just as quotes from a book or text are used to prove an analytical thought, students use the film to justify their reasoning.)

1. Give students the note-taking sheet, the [Film Analysis Tool](#). While watching the film, ask students to pay attention to the social, emotional, and physical impacts of quarantine on the students. Ask students to write down their notes, observations, or quotes from the film.
2. Watch the film, [Cocoon](#) (12 minutes).
3. Ask students to share in small groups what stood out to them most while watching the film.
4. Lead a discussion using the following questions:
 - Describe how the filmmaker captured the students in the film. How did this emphasize their feelings of isolation? (*Answer: The filmmaker captured all of the students behind windows.*)
 - Make a list of some of the impacts the pandemic has had on the students' lives and families. (*Some answers include: changes at school, learning online, isolation, job loss, and the health and well-being of their families.*)

- One student in the film said, “I think it’s Wednesday.” During quarantine, did you lose track of time and the day of the week? If so, why do you think that is the case? Were you able to stay on a schedule during quarantine? If not, how did your daily routine change?
- “A lot of people I know are struggling with keeping up with their assignments and actually going to the Google Meets for classes because it just doesn’t feel real.” Describe what you think this person means by “it just doesn’t feel real.” What do you think is the difference between participating in school in person versus using technology like Google Hangouts and Zoom? What do you think we gain from human interaction?
- Share the following quote from the film: “I don’t think we will go back to the way it was. I think we’ll go back to *a normal*, but it won’t look like the one we had ... and I don’t think that is a bad thing.” Ask students: What do you think about this statement? Do you agree? Why or why not? What might a new normal look like for you?
- One student said, “I’m going to give a hug to every teacher and every kid I know.” What are you looking forward to most when the pandemic ends?

Reflecting and Projecting

Challenge students to consider the film’s broader implications and to integrate their knowledge and ideas from various points of view.

1. Using the National Archives website, examine and conduct research to learn more about the [Influenza Epidemic of 1918](#). Choose one of the records. Create a slideshow to compare and contrast the Epidemic of 1918 to the Covid-19 pandemic, documenting similarities and differences from these two time periods.
2. Research and explore a person’s story during the pandemic. (For example, [StoryCorps](#) collected stories from essential workers.) In 2 or 3 paragraphs, describe the person’s life. How has the pandemic impacted his or her daily life, worldview, and perspective?
3. The pandemic has upended education and learning, revealing inequities that were already present. If you were to make recommendations to change or reimagine K–12 learning, what advice would you provide school leaders and teachers? Write a letter to a parent, school leader, or teacher by responding to the following questions: How might you redesign learning experiences to address the social, emotional, and physical well-being of students?

What's Happening Now

Provide students with follow-up activities and resources to explore current events and updates to the story.

1. For current Covid-19 information and data visit the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website](#).
2. Read "[How Nine Covid-19 Vaccines Work](#)," an article in *The New York Times* which explains the science behind each of the leading vaccines.

Take Action

with the UN Sustainable Development Goals

SDG 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

How will you support the well-being of yourself and your community during the pandemic?

Individuals, families, and communities around the world continue to suffer from the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic.

1. Shortly after the stay-at-home order during the global Covid-19 pandemic in April 2020, Rabbi Dr. Ariel Burger wrote a visualization practice to help one of his students struggling with isolation and anxiety. [Access this short visualization](#) and try it a few times within a week. After participating in the visualization, notice how you feel. In what ways do you feel more connected to others, your surroundings, and yourself? Write down your observations in a journal entry.
2. Facing History and Ourselves provides [journaling ideas](#) to reflect on experiences during Covid-19. Choose one of the following journal prompts: Self-Reflection, Reflecting on Media, Reflecting on Daily Life During the Coronavirus, or Reflecting on Acts of Kindness, Community, and Relationships.

[SDG 3](#): *Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages*

Companion Texts

These texts are recommended by teachers who are currently using Cocoon in their classrooms.

- *More Deadly Than War: The Hidden History of the Spanish Flu and the First World War* by Kenneth C. Davis

- *Very, Very, Very Dreadful: The Influenza Pandemic of 1918* by Albert Marrin
- *Fever 1793* by Laurie Halse Anderson
- *An American Plague: The True and Terrifying Story of the Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1793* by Jim Murphy
- *Blue* by Joyce Moyer Hostetter

Resources

- Zucker, Bonnie, "[Unstuck! 10 Things to Do to Stay Safe and Sane During the Pandemic.](#)" Magination Press, an imprint of the American Psychological Association, 2020. (PDF)
- "[Youth Mental Health Test](#)". Mental Health America, 2020.
- Wallach, Amei. "[Fabric of Their Lives.](#)" *Smithsonian Magazine*, October, 2006.
- "[How teenagers can protect their mental health during COVID-19](#)". UNICEF, 2020.
- "[Teen Stress Badge.](#)" XQ Institute, 2020.
- "[The Influenza Epidemic of 1918.](#)" National Archives.
- "[Student Journaling During Coronavirus.](#)" Facing History And Ourselves, November 23, 2020.
- Burger, Ariel, "[Connection Beyond Distance: A Visualization for Humans in Quarantine.](#)" Thrive Global, April 17, 2020.

Connections to National Curriculum Standards and Frameworks

SEL Competencies (CASEL)

- **Self-awareness.** The ability to accurately recognize one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior.
- **Social awareness.** The ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds and cultures, to understand social and ethical norms for behavior.
- **Self-management.** The abilities to manage one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations and to achieve goals and aspirations.

College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework

- **C3.D2.His.1.6-8.** Analyze connections among events and developments in broader historical contexts.
- **C3.D2.His.3.6-8.** Use questions generated about individuals and groups to analyze why they, and the developments they shaped, are seen as historically significant.
- **C3.D2.His.4.6-8.** Analyze multiple factors that influenced the perspectives of people during different historical eras.
- **C3.D2.His.17.6-8.** Compare the central arguments in secondary works of history on related topics in multiple media.

National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies (NCSS) Themes

- **Theme 2: Time, Continuity, and Change.** Knowledge and understanding of the past enable us to analyze the causes and consequences of events and developments, and to place these in the context of the institutions, values, and beliefs of the periods in which they took place.
- **Theme 4: Individual Development and Identity.** Given the nature of individual development in a social and cultural context, students need to be aware of the processes of learning, growth, and interaction at every level of their own school experiences.
- **Theme 5: Individuals, Groups, and Institutions.** Schools, religious institutions, families, government agencies, and the courts all play an integral role in our lives. They are organizational embodiments of the core social values of those who comprise them, and play a variety of important roles in socializing individuals and meeting their needs, as well as in the promotion of societal continuity, the mediation of conflict, and the consideration of public issues.

Common Core State Standards (CCSS)

- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6.4-8.4.** Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.6.1-8.1.** Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 6-8 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.6.5.** Include multimedia components (e.g., graphics, images, music, sound) and visual displays in presentations to clarify information.

- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.7.5.** Include multimedia components and visual displays in presentations to clarify claims and findings and emphasize salient points.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.8.5.** Integrate multimedia and visual displays into presentations to clarify information, strengthen claims and evidence, and add interest.\
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6.7.** Conduct short research projects to answer a question, drawing on several sources and refocusing the inquiry when appropriate.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.7.** Conduct short research projects to answer a question, drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions for further research and investigation.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.7.** Conduct short research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question), drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions that allow for multiple avenues of exploration.

We Want to Hear From You

We'd love to hear how you integrate (or plan to integrate) this lesson into your classroom. What were your favorite takeaways and student responses?

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