Buying and selling alcohol was prohibited in the U.S. from 1920 to 1933. Alcohol was sold illegally during those years. Violent crime increased as sellers fought with each other. Now, however, selling alcohol to adults is not a violation of the law, and selling alcohol is no longer a source of violent crime. Some people have proposed that drugs such as marijuana, cocaine, and heroin also be legalized. Advocates of drug legalization suggest that the world of drugs would be safer if the criminal element were removed from selling them. They also argue that if drugs were legal, police could focus on more serious crimes. Furthermore, they point out that the government’s limited resources could then be used for improving schools and providing better health care rather than funding more jails for drug dealers.

In the last three decades, more than 80% of the prison population increase resulted from drug convictions. Most of those prisoners were minorities. African American Congressman Charles Rangel feels strongly that illegal drugs should not be legalized. He says that legalizing dangerous drugs like cocaine and heroin would kill even more young black men. He is outraged that the U.S. government has not made the drug problem a higher priority. Rangel thinks everyone should work together to unify and strengthen efforts to fight drug abuse and related crime. He believes that legalizing drugs is incompatible with initiatives aimed at improving the lives of urban youth.

Should we temporarily legalize drugs and see if crime levels go down? Or is the risk too great that more young people will become addicted to harmful substances?
USE THE FOCUS WORDS

decade  (noun) ten years

Sample Sentence: In the decade from 1985 to 1995, more than 80% of the prison population increase resulted from drug convictions.

Turn and Talk: In your opinion, what was the highlight of the last decade?

incompatible  (adjective) inconsistent; unable to exist together

Sample Sentence: Rangel believes that legalizing drugs is incompatible with efforts to improve the lives of urban youth.

Turn and Talk: Can everybody get along, or are some people incompatible with each other?

temporarily  (adverb) for a while; not permanently

Sample Sentence: Some suggest temporarily legalizing drugs to see if crime levels go down.

Turn and Talk: Would you be able to temporarily give up sugary drinks like soda and juice?

unify  (verb) to bring together

Sample Sentence: Rangel thinks everyone should work together to unify efforts to fight drug abuse.

Turn and Talk: What is an issue that unifies students at your school?

violation  (noun) breaking of a rule; offense against something such as privacy or trust

Sample Sentence: Today, selling alcohol to adults is not a violation of the law.

Turn and Talk: What behaviors are considered a violation of your school’s rules?
Between 1998 and 2007, the number of juveniles (people under the age of 18) arrested for drug violations each year was around 200,000 (note that the baseline of the graph above is 180,000). Americans have unified in their desire to keep kids out of trouble, but are divided about the best way to do that. Should we fight harder to get rid of illegal drugs? Or should we legalize them, removing the criminal element? Is drug legalization incompatible with a functioning society?

**Option 1:** In what year(s) did the number of arrests exceed 202,000?

B. 2000 and 2003  
C. 2000 and 2001  
D. 2000

**Option 2:** In 1995, 39.9% of drug arrests were for marijuana. By 2007, the percentage of arrests for marijuana had risen to 47.4% of total drug arrests. While 5.3% of all drug arrests were for marijuana trafficking and sale, 42.1% were for marijuana possession. Are law enforcement officials temporarily focusing their efforts on marijuana possession? Or is this a trend that will continue? If 42.1% of all drug arrests were for marijuana possession, how many of the juveniles arrested in 2007 would you expect to have been arrested on this charge?

**Discussion Question:** In 1971, President Nixon declared drug abuse “public enemy number one.” In that year, 108,100 juveniles were arrested for drug violations. Decades later, almost twice that many juveniles are being arrested each year for drug violations, and some are saying the “war on drugs” has been lost. What is our best strategy? Should we permit marijuana, and focus on policing more serious drugs? Without unifying drug laws nationwide, there could be problems. For example, California’s medical marijuana laws were incompatible with federal anti-drug laws. Medical marijuana stores were permitted by state law, but were still being raided by federal agents. If you were temporarily in charge of the nation’s drug policies, what strategy would you follow?
After a class discussion about drugs in Mr. Seemy’s class, Kyra and Victor look into the history of drinking laws and find out that decades ago, in the 1970s and 1980s, each state in the U.S. decided on its own drinking age. The drinking age was 18 in some states and 19, 20, or 21 in others. However, the National Minimum Drinking Age Act of 1984 created a unified law for the whole country that made the drinking age 21.

Kyra and Victor report that some scientists think that 18-, 19-, and 20-year-olds started to drink even more alcohol after this law was passed, a result that is *incompatible* with the law’s goal. Perhaps these lawbreakers wanted to violate the rule because it seemed too strict to them, or because they found breaking the rule exciting. Victor wonders if laws against drugs might have the same effect: Would legalizing drugs make the number of users go down? Kyra thinks not.

Mr. Seemy told Ms. Kahn about Kyra and Victor’s question about the unintended effect of rules. Mr. Seemy and Ms. Kahn decided to test the idea in the classroom by temporarily “legalizing” a behavior that is against the rules: For five weeks Mr. Seemy allowed cursing in the classroom and Ms. Kahn prohibited it. They kept track of how many incidents of cursing there were in each class over time.

### Number of “Cursing in Class” Incidents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Week 1</th>
<th>Week 2</th>
<th>Week 3</th>
<th>Week 4</th>
<th>Week 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Seemy’s Class</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Kahn’s Class</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
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Did Mr. Seemy and Ms. Kahn’s experiment show any differences between the two classes? Explain.

The data above are not strong enough to prove anything, but which of these claims do these data support more? Explain.

### Claim 1:
Prohibiting a behavior causes it to happen more.

### Claim 2:
Prohibiting a behavior causes it to happen less.

Students often complain that school rules are *incompatible* with how they like to behave. Given the chance, would you rather attend a school with no rules?
SHOULD DRUGS BE LEGALIZED?

DEBATE THE ISSUE
Pick one of these positions (or create your own).

A  □  Drugs should be legalized.

OR

B  □  Drugs should not be legalized.

OR

CREATE YOUR OWN  □

Jot down a few notes on how to support your position during a discussion or debate.

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Be a strong participant by using phrases like these:

"Can you show me evidence in the text that..."

"I believe that..."

"You make a good point, but have you considered..."

"I agree with you, but..."
TAKE A STAND

Support your position with clear reasons and specific examples. Try to use relevant words from the Word Generation list in your response.

decade | incompatible | temporarily | unify | violation

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