



From Minnesota Public Radio's Sound Learning (www.soundlearning.org)

Sound Learning Feature for January 2004

From MPR News (news.mpr.org)

Americans are eating themselves to death. Obesity is on the rise. More people eat too much, get too little exercise, and suffer a variety of health problems as a result. We've seen virtually a doubling in the number of obese persons over the past two decades, and an alarming increase in the number of obese children.

Many people wage a lifelong fight against fat. Some are successful, but many are not. American society seems to be stacking the deck against them, with the prevalence of "super sized" fast-food meals, sedentary lifestyles, quick-fix weight loss plans, and confusing—sometimes conflicting—information about exercise and nutrition.

The stories in this month's feature are of particular interest to teachers and students of English/Language Arts, History/social studies, and Health/Wellness. There are also stories that may be useful in Biology, Economics, or Current Issues classes.

In the following pages, find instructional ideas and study guides intended to aid in the teaching of:

- Listening comprehension.
- Reading comprehension.
- Critical thinking.
- Research challenges.
- Key terms.



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Questions are based on articles from a Minnesota Public Radio special report, "The Fight Against Fat," available at <http://news.mpr.org/projects/2003/06/obesity/>. Sound Learning is a production of Minnesota Public Radio.



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Reading Comprehension Questions

The following questions are based on the article "[Obesity on the reservation.](http://news.mpr.org/features/2003/06/02_postt_obesitynative/)"

- 1) Native Americans are _____ times more likely to develop diabetes than the country's white population.

- 2) Besides genetics, what are three other factors mentioned by Dr. Ness that play a role in the higher rate of diabetes among Native Americans?

- 3) According to this article, diabetes is the cause of many serious health problems in the U.S. List three.

- 4) Early health education relied on _____ tactics to motivate Native Americans to change their behaviors. Because this strategy was ineffective, more recent efforts have focused on promoting pride and acceptance of themselves as Indians. Two effective approaches are _____ and _____.

- 5) What two indicators are given in the article that diabetes education on the Leech Lake reservation is working?

Other articles that lend themselves well to reading comprehension activities:

- **Spotty insurance coverage**
http://news.mpr.org/features/2003/06/02_horwichj_obesityinsurance/
- **Obesity and the brain** (particularly for older students)
http://news.mpr.org/features/2003/06/02_horwichj_obesityinsurance/



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Listening Comprehension Questions

The following questions are based on the article "Surgery was a life-changing experience."

http://news.mpr.org/features/2003/06/02_postt_obesitynative/

- 1) About what percentage of gastric bypass surgeries result in complications?

- 2) How did being morbidly obese change the way Heather functioned in her everyday life? List some examples.

- 3) Heather discovered that she wasn't eating for nutritional reasons, but to meet other needs. What were some of these needs?

- 4) Following her surgery, many things changed in Heather's life besides her weight. Describe some of these changes.

- 5) What were some of the reasons that Heather mentioned that ultimately led to her decision to have gastric bypass surgery?

Other articles that lend themselves well to listening comprehension activities:

- **Can you be fat and still be healthy?**
http://news.mpr.org/features/2003/06/02_horwichj_obesityinsurance/
- **The last resort?**
http://news.mpr.org/features/2003/06/02_horwichj_obesityinsurance/



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Critical Thinking Questions

The following questions are based on the article "Spotty insurance coverage."
http://news.mpr.org/features/2003/06/02_horwichj_obesityinsurance/

Discussion questions:

- 1) What are the key issues raised in the article?
- 2) According to the article, why do insurance companies cover the cost of some weight loss treatments and not others?
- 3) What strategies could insurance companies employ to encourage healthy lifestyle changes that result in weight loss or improved fitness?
- 4) Running an insurance company is a business. How could you convince insurance companies that it is advantageous to provide comprehensive coverage for obesity, including weight loss programs and FDA-approved obesity medications?
- 5) What is a fair way for individuals and insurance companies to share the responsibility and costs associated with managing weight?

Opposing viewpoints:

To explore the issues raised in the article, conduct an informal debate in response to the following statement by dividing the students into supporters and opponents.

STATEMENT: In order to effectively fight the obesity epidemic, insurance companies should be expected to pay for reputable weight loss programs.



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Research Challenges

- 1) What is the definition of morbid obesity?
- 2) When was bariatric surgery first introduced?
- 3) What five states had the greatest increase in rates of obesity from 1991 to 2001?
- 4) See if you can find obesity rates for the following countries: U.S., Japan, Germany, Mexico, India, and Kenya.
- 5) Find out what the Commonsense Consumption Act is.
- 6) Identify any states that currently ban or are considering a ban on the sale of "junk foods" at school.
- 7) According to the School Lunch Report Card, which schools in the study received unsatisfactory grades? What were the grades based on?
- 8) Where can you get nutritional information about your favorite fast food restaurant?
- 9) How much P.E. time is provided weekly to Middle Schoolers in your district? High Schoolers?
- 10) How do other countries deal with health issues like obesity and type 2 diabetes?
- 11) What other preventative health measures are covered by insurance companies?
- 12) Survey the other members of your class. How many feel they are physically fit? How many feel they get enough exercise? For those that don't, is it because they don't have time, they feel it's not important, or some other reason?



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Key Terms

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The following vocabulary words are taken from the nine main articles in The Fight Against Fat.

From "The obesity epidemic"

http://news.mpr.org/features/2003/06/02_sommerrm_obesityoverview/

- Body Mass Index (BMI)
- Diabetes

From "The weight of our kids"

http://news.mpr.org/features/2003/06/02_kelleherb_obesitykids/

- Pedometers
- Commodities
- Chronic
- Epidemic
- Debilitating

From "Obesity and the brain"

http://news.mpr.org/features/2003/06/02_schmitzr_obesitypsych/

- Addiction
- Neuroscience
- Endorphins
- Neurotransmitters
- Endogenous opioids
- Palatable
- Depression
- Tryptophan
- Serotonin
- Electroshock therapy

From "Can you be fat, and still be healthy?"

http://news.mpr.org/features/2003/06/02_hetlandc_obesityfitness/

- Correlations
- Bariatrics
- Controversy
- Mortality rate
- Deconditioned
- Ludicrous
- Motivation

From "Small towns face a fitness gap"

http://news.mpr.org/features/2003/06/02_gundersond_obesitytown/

- Initiatives
- Moderate
- Referendum



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From "Obesity on the reservation"

http://news.mpr.org/features/2003/06/02_postt_obesitynative/

- Type 2 diabetes
- Non-traumatic stroke

From "The last resort"

http://news.mpr.org/features/2003/06/02_robertsont_obesitysurgery/

- Gastric bypass surgery
- Controversial
- Recuperate
- Psychological
- Chronic arthritis
- Incision

From "Surgery was a life-changing experience"

http://news.mpr.org/features/2003/06/02_sommererm_obesitypostsurg/

- Solace
- Laparoscopic
- Morbidly obese
- Symbolic

From "Spotty insurance coverage"

http://news.mpr.org/features/2003/06/02_horwichj_obesityinsurance/

- Graft
- Angioplasty
- Stigma
- Exacerbated
- Advocates
- Emphasis
- Endocrinologist
- Undeniable
- Sedentary lifestyle



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