“Faster than a speeding bullet, more powerful than a locomotive, able to reach the top of the chalkboard in a single bound; it’s a scientist; it’s a teacher; it’s Ms. Langford!” -Me

When I’m not ridding the world of evil villains, I am taking courses to become a middle school science teacher. But rest assured, my life path hasn’t always been this straightforward. I started my college career by obtaining a B.S. in Kinesiology from Truman State University. After receiving my degree I began the career I always thought I wanted; personal training. Months into being a personal trainer I felt as if something was missing from my career choice. During this time my Mom’s co-teacher got the flu and I took over her position for a few days. It was while I was helping my Mom with her kindergarteners that I realized what was missing from my job; working with children. The next day I signed up for education courses, called up the Justice League to tell them I’d have to go on a brief hiatus, and re-sharpened my school pencils. It was time to take steps toward my future career; becoming a teacher.

“It’s not about the ending. It’s about the journey.” - Lex Luthor
As I scan the depressing room I cannot help but notice the looks on the faces of my family members. Grief seems to have enveloped their faces; it has even become etched into the corners of their eyes. Their grief-ridden state makes sense since my grandmother has just passed away. But, when I scan the room again, I notice that there is another, different look fighting to be masked in their faces, something else that I can’t quite understand. I look closely at my Mother’s face, searching to find out what this mysterious look means, and then I see it; my Mother is absolutely terrified. Suddenly, I know why she is so scared: she is afraid that he is going to show up at the funeral.

Growing up, I thought my Uncle Charlie was a terrific man. We would do entertaining things like go to the pond to feed ducks, catch bunnies, and play rousing games of wiffleball in my backyard. He was my fun uncle, and I loved being around him. What I did not know when I was younger was that my uncle was bipolar, and to make matters worse, he was addicted to cocaine. Over the years, I began to notice how irrational my Uncle could be. My uncle would have wild mood swings and lash out at those around him. Eventually I found out he had been stealing money from my grandparents, and crawling into my Grandma’s nursing home window to spend the night. Then, one day, my mom got a call that my uncle had wrecked my Grandpa’s car. That was the last straw for my Mom, and she severed communications with him. It was during this time that my grandma passed away.
After the funeral I asked my Mom why she was worried Charlie would show up; after all, she was his mother too. My mom said that he was threatening to steal my grandmother’s ashes. He was going to take them, and make my family pay for them to get them back. That was the day I decided I would never speak to my uncle again. I was 15, and I have stuck to that promise.

Having this experience so early on in my life has made me interested in the topic of addiction. Some questions about addiction that I have are: how can it change someone’s demeanor so dramatically? What reasons do people have for starting drug use? Are people with mental health issues prior to drug use more vulnerable to addiction? What is the rate of relapse with people, specifically those who are addicted to cocaine?

I have seen firsthand how addiction can affect a family. Another aspect about addiction that I already know is that once someone is addicted, their brains become wired differently, making their body think they need this substance to survive, treating the urge to use like the urge for food, or water. I also know once the pathways are changed they cannot become normal again, which is why it is so easy to relapse.

My focus on this I-search paper will be to learn how addiction affects the mental health of the addict, as well as the effects on the family. I plan to interview a family member with bipolar disorder as well as addiction to hear more about their personal experiences. I also plan to research statistics on the percent of people with mental health problems to see if there is a correlation to drug use or addiction.
It is sad to think that this disease has taken someone away who was once so dear to me. I am engaged, and recently I made the guest list for the wedding. It was depressing to think back on that day and realize that my uncle’s name didn’t even cross my mind.

In order to understand how drug addiction affects a person’s mental health as well as their family, I decided to start my research by interviewing my Mom. Deciding whether or not I would interview my Mom was extremely hard since my Uncle is a subject that is rarely touched upon in my household. I am nervous that I will toe over some unknown boundary line and actually make my mom upset, but I really want to understand how having a drug addicted brother has affected her and her life.

To start the interview, I sit my Mom down on our couch. As I look at my Mom’s face, I keep wavering in my head if I really want to know the answers to the questions I’m about to ask. But she seems willing, so I forge ahead, despite the recent appearance of the 20-pound stone in my stomach. My heartbeat seems to have leapt from my chest into my ears, but I clear my throat and begin by asking, “How has having a brother with addiction problems affected your life?”

I was never good at beating around the bush, so my first question gets straight to the point. My Mom takes a minute to consider the question, sighs, and answers, “It’s a very frustrating feeling when it’s your younger brother because you’ve been brought up to take care of him. I was the one who helped him with homework, taught him to read, searched the neighborhood to find him for dinner. You want to help, to be there for him, but at some point you need to help yourself. Generally I am frustrated because I’m a person who wants to help people and I can’t help my own brother because he needs to help himself.”
Thoughts start swirling around in my head, I couldn’t imagine having someone I helped raise flounder, and not be able to do anything about it myself. I never thought of my Uncle as a younger sibling, probably because he was an adult when I was a child, but the stories my Mom told me of taking care of him, finding him in a tree and telling him it was dinner time, come back to the forefront of my mind. How horrible that must feel for my Mom, the woman who always fixes problems, who helps people she barely even knows, to not be able to help her little brother.

I set my thoughts aside and ask the next question, “Mentally, how do you think his drug addiction changed him?”

“Mentally, it made him crazy. He can’t have a conversation, when you talk to him he doesn’t make any sense. And he can’t ever seem to tell the truth. I think it stunted his emotional growth completely. He never feels like any of it is his fault, never takes responsibility for his actions.”

Again stories of my Uncle’s behavior come rushing into my thoughts. Stealing money from my grandparents so that my grandpa had to go to the veteran nursing home an hour away, “lending” my grandpa’s car to another drug addict and never returning it; these memories show how irresponsible my Uncle really was.

I continue on to the next question, “Do you think his bipolar disorder played a role in his addiction? If so, in what way?”

“Yes I do believe that his bipolar played a major role. He was chemically unbalanced anyway, and the drugs exasperated it. The drugs made his bipolar look more like schizophrenia; it mimicked the symptoms, like hearing voices. If you have the symptoms, isn’t it really like having the disorder?”
I had always thought my Uncle was bipolar and schizophrenic, but to hear that he basically became schizophrenic because of the drugs blew my mind. How could someone continue using a drug that actually made them feel as if they had schizophrenia? As I ponder this new information, I notice that tears are welling in my Mom’s eyes, so I wrap up the interview with one last question; “Do you want me to know anything else about having an addict in the family?”

She dries her eyes and continues on, “It’s hard to forgive him for tearing my family apart, especially as my parents got older. It’s exhausting to have an addict person in the family. But if I were to talk to him again I would tell him that I don’t wish him any harm, and I want him to live a happy and fulfilling life. After all he is still my baby brother.”

With that, I drop my pen and paper and give my Mom the longest hug of my life. Tears cascade down our cheeks, but it feels like along with those tears I am letting go of those feelings of hatred and pain that I have been holding on to. As a weird sense of relief comes over me from talking about this, I think to myself, “I should have done this a long time ago.”

After interviewing my Mother, I decide to find out the symptoms of schizophrenia to see whether or not any of them fit my Uncle’s behavior. The number of books on the topic surprised me, considering schizophrenia only affects about 1% of the population (Brinkenhorf 5). I eventually sat down with one of the books and I started reading the list of the symptoms. Quite a few of the symptoms seem to match up to my uncle’s unusual behavior. The first symptom that stood out to me was about having problems thinking and expressing ideas clearly (Brinkenhorf 9). My Mom described in the interview how it
was hard to hold a conversation with him because his thoughts were scattered. As I continued reading I noticed that the next symptom correlated with my Uncle’s behavior as well, which was showing childlike behavior (Brinkenhorf 9). He often acted selfishly like when he took his parents money for his own personal use. Another symptom my Uncle had was hearing things that are not there. And finally, he often had thoughts that were not based on reality (Brinkenhorf 9). The example that sprang to mind was when he believed he was not responsible for wasting my grandparents’ savings.

Another topic I wanted to broach was to see the relationship of bipolar disorder with the risk of substance abuse. The statistics I found were astounding; between 40-60% of people with bipolar disorder had an associated drug use disorder. In fact “Symptoms of mood instability are among the most common psychiatric symptoms seen in addicted individuals.”(Verdiun).

After seeing the startling statistics I can’t help but ask myself “But why such a high incidence?” Scanning the page, I find a hint of an answer; the gist is that it is complicated, but there are some theories as to why drug abuse is so common in people with bipolar disorder.

The first theory is that those with bipolar disorder use drugs to self medicate. People with bipolar want to cure their own symptoms like the violent mood swings or depression. They use drugs to try to suppress their symptoms. The only flaw in the theory is that self-medicating ends up exasperating the symptoms they were trying to suppress (Bizarri 215).

The second theory and the one which I feel is a better explanation, is that those with bipolar disorder have characteristics, such as being impulsive, poor judgment skills,
and the need to be involved in activities that bring them pleasure, that tend to lead them
toward the path of drug abuse. (Verdiun)

After researching bipolar disorder and its relation to drug addiction I feel I have a
better understanding of what reasons my uncle could have had for using drugs. The
interview with my Mom gave me insight on how having an addicted family member can
affect one’s life. The interview also gave me something I was not expecting from this
process, it was something I did not even realize I was missing until I had it, a sense of
closure.

Throughout the process of writing my I-search paper I discovered a large amount
about the emotional issues of addiction in general, as well as how it has personally
affected my family. I learned that it is rather common for people with bipolar disorder to
get addicted to drugs or alcohol but not for the reasons I had originally thought. I thought
that people with bipolar disorder used substances to try to self medicate but the research
shows that those substances can actually make a person’s symptoms worse. I feel that the
theory that people with bipolar disorder are attracted to drug use because of certain
characteristics they possess such as seeking pleasurable activities and being impulsive
makes a lot of sense.

An original belief that I had which has been confirmed from this process is how
emotionally exhausting it can be to have a relative who is addicted. The interview with
my Mom surprised me in that she felt slightly guilty that she could not help my Uncle
conquer his addiction. I was surprised by this because I know my Mom went through
family therapy sessions with my uncle, tried to have an intervention, and did everything
she could to help him, short of tying him to a bed until he promised he would stop using cocaine.

Most of the knowledge I gained from this process was important to me on a personal level. I had always wanted to know more about my Uncle and his addiction but did not have a way to open up a conversation about it with my family. The I-search paper allowed me to ask my Mom questions and finally gain some insight into how she felt about having a sibling who was an addict, as well as what really happened during my childhood.

This I-search paper will show the reader how interrelated bipolar disorder and drug addiction can be as well as the signs and symptoms one can have that is addicted to an illegal substance. Something else a reader could take away from the paper is how addicts not only hurt themselves but can negatively affect those around them as well.

Bibliography


Verdiun, M; Tolliver, B; Brady, K. Substance Abuse and Bipolar Disorder. Medscape.com, 2005.
Not more BORING science careers!!

I realize that many of you often wonder why you go to your Science class, day in and day out. Some of you may even think, “What’s the use of this class to me? I’m not going to use this stuff, I’m not going to be a scientist!”

What most students don’t realize is that there are a momentous amount of interesting careers out there for those with a strong science background. There are careers such as volcanologists who study ACTIVE volcanoes, fire archaeologists, or even engineers who design rollercoasters!!!

In class, you are going to explore careers that lie in your fields of interests. Whether your interests lie in exploring space, the environment, engineering, or you like anatomy, there are jobs for you to discover. Today, you will Browse the list of websites and decide on at least two careers that sound interesting to you. Once you have decided, jot your job choices down under “Investigating The Future.”

Investigating The Future...

1. ____________________________

2. ____________________________

3. ____________________________
Overview

- **The Rationale:** The purpose of the lesson plan is to introduce students to the careers that exist in the field of science. Another purpose of the lesson plan is to reintroduce students to science by using the lesson plan as an “ice breaker” activity at the beginning of the year.
- **The Summary:** Students will be introduced to many different fields of science by viewing websites from a predetermined list. They will then choose two or more careers they wish to further investigate. After they have decided on the careers, they will research the educational background needed to obtain such a job, the job description, and where the jobs could be located. Next, the students will prepare a poster, or other artifact, comparing and contrasting the two jobs. Then, they will present what they found to the class. While the students are presenting the rest of the class will choose two careers that were presented of which they will write a brief summary.
- **Objectives:** Have students evaluate the vast amount of science careers available to them by researching two or more careers of their choice by creating a poster that compares and contrasts them.

- **Length of Curriculum:** One Week

- **Materials and Resources:**
  - A) School- access to computers with internet capability, poster board, colored pencils
  - B) Teacher- list of career websites, career handout, rubric, poster example
  - C) Student- pencil, paper, and a positive attitude!

- **Means of Assessment:**
  - Presentation – 60 points
  - Research and peer evaluation– 10 points per day
  - Total Points – 90 points

Teacher Calendar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Lesson Plan 1

Teacher: Ms. Langford  
Class: 8th grade science

Name of lesson: Scintillating Science Careers  
Day: 2

Objective(s): After being presented with a handout and a list of career websites, students will peruse and find two or more careers that they wish to investigate further.

Instructional: Initiating, Constructing

Format: Student Centered

Grouping: Individual

Materials Needed:

a). School- computers with internet access

b). Teacher- career handout, website list

c). Student- pencil, paper, can do attitude!

Introduction: Clarify goals and establish set.

-Ask student about what types of careers they think about when they hear the word “science”.

-Pass out career handout and list of websites.

-Acknowledge this lesson is to help students discover careers in science they did not know about before.

Phase 2: Supervise computer use.
- Walk throughout the room and help students narrow down their choices of careers.
- Have students show you their choices then allow them to continue onto the next phase of the project: gathering information.

**Lesson Plan 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scintillating Science Careers 8th grade Ms. Langford Spring/2011</th>
<th>Class: 8th grade Science Your Name: Ms. Langford Name of Lesson: Scintillating Science Careers Day <em><strong>3</strong></em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Objective</td>
<td>Students will continue searching for two or more exciting science careers they wish to research further. Once they have found the careers they will be asked to find the educational background needed for the careers, what the jobs entail, and where the jobs would be located and why. They will also compare and contrast the two careers using a Venn Diagram.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional Framework</td>
<td>Constructing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson Plan Format</td>
<td>Student Centered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student Centered: Problem Solving- Students are searching for and researching careers in the science field that they find interesting. This involves being able to research with the use of a computer, and being able to compare and contrast the good and bad aspects of careers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grouping</td>
<td>Individuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Materials &amp; Resources</td>
<td>School – Computers with internet access, poster board Teacher – Markers, books about science careers Student – Pencil, notebook, and a can-do attitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies</td>
<td>1. Venn Diagram p.121 2. I Wonder Why p.113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review Previous Lessons</td>
<td>This lesson will be given at the beginning of the year to ease students back into school. With that in mind, the review of previous information will mainly be about how students use a venn diagram, and how they should conduct themselves when using the internet at school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Material</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guided Practice</td>
<td>After finding the information about both careers, students will compare and contrast the new information by using a venn diagram.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Closure to Lesson</td>
<td>The students will be at various places in the lesson so the closure activity will involve me seeing how far everyone has gotten on the assignment, then telling them the next step for them in the process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignment</td>
<td>Student will be asked to bring pictures or anything extra they would like to include on their poster board for the next day in class. If some students have not narrowed down their career choices to two or three, that will be their homework.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>