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ABSTRACT

This unit on aging was prepared for use in high school sociology, marriage and family classes. The objectives of the course, which can be taught in four classroom sessions, are to help students: (1) become aware of the fact that older people are individuals, differing widely in attitudes and abilities, who do not necessarily conform to the popular stereotype; (2) assess realistically the problems that older people face in the United States; (3) identify local agencies that serve the elderly and learn of the services that they offer; (4) become aware that as life expectancy increases, our society must make adequate provision for an increasing population of older citizens; and (5) develop a relationship with an older person or persons. Teaching strategies include class discussions, viewing of films, rap sessions with senior citizens, and panel discussions. The unit contains an outline of the course objectives, a unit outline describing classroom activities, and the positive results of the course evaluation by pupils, senior citizens, and teachers. A bibliography of books on aging is included. (Author/RM)

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## UNIT ON AGING

Prepared for use in Sociology and Marriage  
and Family classes taught by Mrs. Patricia  
Falconer at Lexington High School.

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SP 007 913

UNIT ON AGING

What is it like to be old? What are older persons like? What are some of the problems that accompany growing older in a modern, industrialized society? Why have so many people suddenly become involved in working with "elderly"? What are the stereotypes used in connection with older people? What are the realities?

This unit on Aging will acquaint you with some of the realities and with some of the problems which face older people. You will meet and talk with some Lexington "senior citizens", hear what the professionals say about the subject, and hear about some of the local agencies and facilities which work with older persons.

## HIGH SCHOOL UNIT ON SOCIAL GERONTOLOGY

## OBJECTIVES

1. To make students aware of the fact that older people are individuals, differing widely in attitudes and abilities, who do not necessarily conform to the popular stereotype.
2. To help students to assess realistically the problems that face older people in the United States.
3. To help students identify local agencies that serve the elderly and learn what services they offer.
4. To make students aware that as life expectancy increases, our society must make adequate provision for an increasing population of older citizens.
5. To encourage students to develop a relationship with an older person or persons.

## SCHEDULE

Monday January 14	Tuesday January 15	Wednesday January 16	Thursday January 17	Friday January 18
<p>A-Block 1 8:00-8:50 A.M.</p> <p>Marriage and Family (EWOW)</p> <p>11 students</p> <p>• Room B 23</p>	<p>A-Block 2 9:50-10:35 A.M.</p>	<p>A-Block 3 11:35-12:25 P.M.</p>	<p>A-Block 4 9:50-10:35 A.M.</p>	
<p>C Block 1 10:05-11:00 AM</p> <p>Socology (College)</p> <p>24 students</p> <p>Room G 115</p>	<p>C Block 2 11:35-12:25 A.M.</p>	<p>C Block 3 1:30-2:25 P.M.</p>		<p>C Block 12:35-1:25</p>
<p><u>January 21</u></p> <p>F Block 4 1:30-2:25 P.M.</p>		<p>F Block 1 8:00-8:50 A.M.</p> <p>Marriage and Family (General)</p> <p>20 students</p> <p>Room G 117</p>	<p>F Block 2 12:45-1:35 P.M.</p>	<p>F Block 11:30-12:25</p>

## UNIT OUTLINE \*\*\* A and C BLOCKS

## CLASS # 1

- A. Preliminary exercise: "Write down at least 5 words or phrases that come to your mind when you think about old people. (5 min.)"
- B. Getting acquainted: Circle. Each person, including leader, identifies himself: Name, family members, grandparents, length of residency in town, interests, activities. (About 10 min.)
- C. Rapping with adult leader about about what it is like to grow old: changes, feelings, fears, etc. (20 min.)
- D. Preparation for meeting with senior citizens.  
Exercise: Write some words or phrases using the hand you do not normally write with. (5 min.)  
Discussion: How did you feel while you were writing? Tie in reactions with feelings of older people as their physical abilities slow down.

Class #2: Rapping with senior citizens.

- A. Introductions: Circle - each person introduces himself briefly, mentioning a fact or two about himself.
- B. Each senior citizen is paired with one, two, or three students to talk about life experiences, feelings, problems of aging, etc.

Pairings change once or twice during the period to allow students to talk with more than one senior, to get more than one point of view.

Class #3: The aging process and its implications.

A talk with question period. Speaker: Sr. Eileen Driscoll, Massachusetts Executive Office of Elder Affairs.

Class #4: Local services for senior citizens. A panel discussion with question period.

- A Block: Mr. William Melbye, Pres., Senior Citizens' Club  
 Asst. Treas. Lexington Housing Authority  
 Mrs. Judith Lane, Supervisor, Lexington Visiting Nurse Assn.  
 Mrs. Elizabeth Ward, Treas., Lexington Chapter, A.A.R.P.
- C Block: Mr. Temple Scanlon, Executive Director, Lexington Housing Authority  
 Mrs. Theresa Hnatio, Lexington Visiting Nurse Association  
 Mrs. Julius Ritter, Pres. Lexington Chapter A.A.R.P.

## UNIT OUTLINE      \*\*\* F BLOCK

Class #1: Follow procedure as      A and C Blocks

Class #2: The aging process and its implications.  
A talk with question period.  
Mrs. Sophie Levin, Psychiatric Social Worker, Case Aide  
Coordinator, Metropolitan State Hospital

Class #3: Films about problems of the elderly  
Trigger films, prepared as a result of the 1971 White  
House Conference on Aging. These short films form a  
basis for discussion about some of the problems faced  
by older people.

Class #4: Panel on local services as for A and C Blocks.  
Mr. Temple Scanlon, Executive Director, Lexington Hous-  
ing Authority  
Mrs. Doris Henry, Lexington Visiting Nurse Association  
Mr. Julius Ritter, V-pres. Lexington Chapter A.A.R.P.

Evaluation:

At the end of the four sessions, the students were given the papers containing the comments they had written down at the opening class and asked to write any reactions they had had to the unit, and particularly to record any way in which their ideas about, or attitudes toward older people had changed as a result of the four meetings.

## EVALUATION -----UNIT ON AGING

PUPIL RESPONSES

Pupils' original responses about elderly people as reflected in Chart 1 showed that of the 172 responses, 123 were definitely negative (items 1 & 2) and that 22 other responses (items 4,5,6) were related to negative aspects of aging.

Of the responses recorded at the end of the unit, 7 dealt with the unit itself, while the 9 responses claiming no change in attitude in most cases came from students who had recorded rather positive feelings at the beginning. Of the remaining 72 responses, 41 involved positive changes in attitude or new insights about older people. The remaining 31 responses dealt with more practical aspects of aging and programs for the elderly..

Pupils' comments indicated that they had found the contact with senior citizens interesting and valuable. When Mrs. Falconer's new classes met in the second semester, the students asked immediately if they would also have a unit on Aging. A very negative student representative to the Lexington School Committee reported the unit as an example of a "good thing" that had happened at the high school.

SENIORS' RESPONSES

All the seniors contacted except one (who could not climb stairs) readily agreed to participate, though some were slightly apprehensive. Afterward, they expressed pleasure at their experience and indicated that some of their attitudes about high school students had been changed in a positive way.

TEACHERS' EVALUATION

Mrs. Falconer and I felt that the unit went very well. The most successful section was the "rap session" with senior citizens, which was used in two of the three classes. In the third class we used films showing some of the problems of the aging and felt that they were not as effective.

Both speakers on gerontology were extremely effective and elicited many questions and comments from the students.

Both students and teachers felt that the major weakness in the unit was the very limited time for discussion and evaluation.

The following revisions have been made in plans for repeating the unit at the end of the spring semester:

- Session 1. Introduction, initial responses to the elderly, showing of films on aging (outgrowth of the 1971 White House Conference on Aging) recording of reactions to the films.
- Session 2. "Rap session" with senior citizens.
- Session 3. Talk and discussion led by an expert in gerontology.
- Session 4. Exploration of local resources for the elderly; oral and written evaluation.



## First Response - Ideas, Feelings about Old People

	A	C	F	Total
1. Responses involving physical deterioration: helplessness, slow-moving - senile - tired sick - nursing homes - outward signs: gray hair, wrinkles, poor sight, hearing - loss of memory, hypochondria, etc.	11	45	17	73
2. Responses involving negative reactions: bored, hopeless, depressed, lonely, boring, crabby, unhappy, resentful, abandoned, forgotten, cold, harsh, rejecting, impatient, prejudiced, reserved, rigid, secretive, insecure	8	18	24	50
3. Responses involving positive reactions: sweet, loving, wise, thoughtful, kind, nice, funny, fun, friendly, considerate of others, appreciating friendship, experienced, interesting, vacationing, aware, perceptive, thrilled with little things, concerned with young people.	9	5	14	28
4. Responses involving attitudes (of the elderly) talk a lot, reminiscent, unexcitable, religious, worry about doing nothing	3	2	2	7
5. Responses involving financial problems: social security, retirement - no job, poor, economic problems		8	2	10
6. Responses involving loss, death: Widowhood, loss of friends, death-centered, worry about death	1	3	1	5
7. Miscellaneous responses: Senior Citizens clubs (3), grandchildren (2), watching TV (1) pleasingly plump grandmothers (1), brittle, small		6	3	9
Total	32	87	63	182

Evaluation Responses	A Block	C Block	F Block	Totals
Responses reflecting change in ideas, opinions:				
a. Ideas have changed	1	3		4
b. Communication between old & young possible; not hard	1			1
c. Enjoy older people more than before	1			1
d. Feel happier at thought of growing older	1	1		2
e. Never used to think of elderly as useful citizens		1		1
	4	5		9
Responses indicating new insights about the elderly				
a. Older people are very capable	1	2	1	4
b. Older people are interesting to talk to	3		1	4
c. Older people are not bored, gloomy	1	1		2
d. Older people may be interested in some things as the young	1			1
e. Older people still want and need to be useful	2	3		5
f. Older people are concerned about helping each other	2			2
g. See elderly as "people" too	1			1
h. Older people anxious and willing to change things in their lives	1	2	1	4
i. Older people are living <u>now</u> , not in the past	1	3		4
j. Older people have energy, get involved		2		2
k. Stereotype applies to only a minority of elderly		1		1
l. Individual grows old on the outside, but not necessarily on the inside		1		1
m. Older people can live with the reality of aging			1	1
	13	15	4	32
Responses reflecting practical considerations				
a. Learned more about what is going on	3	3		6
b. Hope more elderly get involved	1			1
c. Hope more people who care get involved	1			1
d. Many programs for the elderly - helpful	1	7	4	12
e. Programs need help, volunteers	1			1
f. Need to keep people in their homes as long as possible	1			1
g. Elders need help sometimes; deserve it		1		1
	8	11	8	27

## Evaluation Responses (cont)

Responses indicating no change, or little change

- a. Views not changed (already liberal)
- b. Ideas clarified, reinforced, strengthened

Miscellaneous responses

- a. Lots of depression, losses
- b. Glad younger generation has the good wishes of the older
- c. Older people don't have to be isolated - if they try.
- d. Learned some negative aspects of aging

Responses dealing with the unit

- a. Not enough time for discussions
- b. People-to-people learning more fun than book learning
- c. Unit has been interesting, enjoyable
- d. Information should be given to all students

Total number of responses

	A Block	C Block	F Block	Total
		1	4	5
		2	2	4
		3	6	9
		1		1
		1		1
			1	1
			1	1
		2	2	4
	2			2
	1			1
	1	2		3
		1		1
	4	3		7
	29	39	20	88

## FIELD WORK: Report on hours

UNAVAILABLE

1. Planning -----	8 hours
2. Organizing materials, participants, etc. -----	4 hours
3. Preparing bibliography -----	6 hours
4. Teaching hours:	
Session One -----	12 hours
Session Two -----	16 hours
	<u>        </u>
	<i>Total          46 hours</i>

## FIELD WORK: Outcomes other than attitude changes

As a result of the positive reaction to the Unit on Aging, three other teachers at Lexington High School have invited senior citizens to participate in their classes to contribute their experiences during the Depression Era, and also to present their views to a class dealing with death and dying.

Another outcome of the unit is the opening up of summer jobs as homemakers for senior students. They will be trained by, and work through, North Metropolitan Homemakers.

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## Notes on Senior Participants

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The seniors who participated in the unit on aging were personal friends or acquaintances, or people I had met at meetings or courses dealing with problems of the elderly. One or two were recently retired, in their early sixties; most of the participants were in their seventies.

Personalities varied, and in the group was one person who was just coming out of a depression, one with a rather negative personality, several very forceful, outgoing types. Curiously, the students did not pick up these differences. Perhaps the shortness of time, or the stimulation of talking to attentive, receptive listeners made the seniors seem more alike.

Judging from their evaluation comments, the students had very positive reactions to the seniors.

Ideally, I would like them to get a broader view - to see that some older people are rigid, withdrawn, unhappy. However, a good many of the students have had other contacts: with nursing home patients, with rigid or complaining grandparents, so perhaps it is most important for them to get a positive view of age through this unit.



Mystic Valley Mental Health Center  
 186 Bedford Street  
 Lexington, Massachusetts 02173

January 8, 1974

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Thank you for agreeing to take part in our high school program on social gerontology. One aim of this unit is to help young people to see that older people are individuals with differing ideas and different life-styles, and that they do not all fit the stereotype of the poor, isolated, physically handicapped person whose only recourse is to a dreary nursing home. On the other hand, we do want them to understand that aging does produce problems -- physical, economic, social, and spiritual -- with which older people - and society - must cope, and which they, too, will also face eventually.

It is in this area that you can help: by talking frankly with these young people about your lives - what you have done, where you have lived and traveled, what problems you have faced, or expect to face, how you feel about things. Do be straightforward and honest with them. However, if you feel that a question is inappropriate or too personal, reserve the right not to answer.

We shall meet at the high school on Tuesday morning, January 15, at 9:40 A.M. in B Unit, which runs parallel to Park Drive. You will probably find Park Drive the easiest place to park.

The first class begins at 9:50 A.M. and will last about 45 minutes. The second class begins at about 11:25 A.M. and runs until 12:25 P.M. During the time between classes there will be refreshments and an opportunity to see something of the high school activities or to talk informally with some of the students who are not in the sociology classes.

If you have any questions, or need transportation to the high school, please call me at 861-0890 during the day or at 861-7628 in the evening.

Sincerely yours,

Ann G. Paranya  
 VISTA Volunteer  
 Mystic Valley Mental Health Center

AGP:mg