

## Countdown to Zero - Middle School Exhibit Interpretation Activity

### Guinea Worm: Empathy and Eradication (30 min)

The guinea worm video will encourage students to think critically about the way media sources display information about diseases. This video and the discussion can be used as a launch pad to talk about how the history of a place shapes the present in many ways, including the types of diseases that people might experience. Infectious diseases, like those discussed in Countdown to Zero, impact both individual people and their communities in many different ways.

- Introduce Guinea worm with the video [Guinea Worm Disease Eradication](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oCB1A2gFvuU) (2:20 minutes)
  - Carter Center. "Guinea Worm Disease Eradication: Countdown to Zero (Carter Center)." Youtube, 24 Oct. 2013.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oCB1A2gFvuU>
- If the video is not available, the activity can be done in response to walking through the Countdown to Zero exhibit and be framed around reactions to images rather than to video.
- Ask students to share responses to the video. This should be an open sharing of how the video make them feel.
- Use the following questions to generate a discussion of how the video emphasizes the painfulness of Guinea worm disease to push forward its main argument—eradication:
  - *How do you feel when you look at images of people who have an infectious disease, such as the patients with guinea worm in the video? There is no such thing as an inappropriate feeling or response, but if you felt fear or disgust by seeing these images, this is a good opportunity to talk about **empathy** and why empathy is an important aspect of public health efforts.*
  - *Empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of another. Do you think having a sense of empathy for people who experience infectious diseases, like guinea worm, is important? If so, why?*
  - *Who do you think should be responsible for trying to stop the cycle of infectious disease spread in a community? What about in a whole country? Or across the whole world? Does that responsibility change when a country or community does not have the resources it needs to heal people and prevent new cases of a disease in their community?*
  - *If you had guinea worm, how would you want to be treated? What type of medical or social support would you need to get better?*

#### Instructor Note:

This activity is designed to let students examine a piece of media using some critical analysis skills, perhaps for the first time. Students in this age range might vary widely in terms of their personal histories and experiences as well as how much world history they might have learned and it is difficult to get them all on the same page in a short amount of time. This activity aims to help students assess their own feelings about experiencing images that might confuse or even scare them because it exposes them to types of pain or suffering that are likely very different than they might encounter in their own communities.

In the above conversation, you can introduce the concept of empathy, and how responsible public health practitioners should treat people and communities with the same level of respect, empathy, compassion and dignity that they would hope for and expect from others. Depending on the students, some might be prepared for a conversation about resource disparity and why some diseases are closely associated with cycles of poverty in tropical/postcolonial regions of the world. If you have access to the map in the Countdown to Zero exhibition, you can facilitate this discussion with the map and the student's own knowledge about global history, particularly colonialism and slavery.

### **Supplement: Why are some diseases neglected?**

You can underscore in the conversation prompts above that this exhibit is about Neglected Tropical Diseases, which are a diverse group of communicable diseases that in tropical and subtropical conditions in 149 countries and affect more than one billion people, costing developing economies billions of dollars every year. They mainly affect populations living in poverty, without adequate sanitation and in close contact with infectious vectors (such as mosquitoes or parasitic larvae) and domestic animals and livestock. The exhibit explains several examples of Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs), the efforts to eradicate them and how they are treated and prevented. If students have some exposure to global history curriculum, you can include the following question in the discussion:

- What do you know about the history of some of the countries in this exhibition and on the Countdown to Zero map that might help explain why some of these diseases have been neglected by the global community?

### Instructor Note:

If students talk about poverty but without mention factors that have led to chronic underdevelopment, such as colonialism and the legacy of the transatlantic slave trade, you can prompt them by asking them what they have learned in school about how land has been controlled in different ways throughout history. Most will have had an introduction to the history of slavery in the Americas by this age, and you can use your discretion to connect this history to an explanation of "empire." Without going into a depth that is overwhelming for the students, you can explain how the history of a place impacts its present and future by explaining that countries that were under the control of empires continue to face economic, medical and political problems that are closely related to these histories of exploitation.

You can talk with students about the obligation of international agencies promoting and protecting human health to provide the resources necessary to communities and countries to provide care to people who have contracted or are at risk of contracting an infectious disease. You can also discuss accumulated impacts of individuals experiencing disease on a community or country by asking students:

- How do you think neglected tropical diseases, like guinea worm, impact the ability of people to complete their education or find work? How do you think these impacts might affect a community over a long period of time?