



TERRY FOX

Lesson plan

Lesson: Talking to Students About Cancer

Learning Goal: To learn about and discuss cancer in a developmentally appropriate way, thereby increasing understanding of the importance of fundraising for cancer research.

Materials/Media:

- **Appendix A:** Cancer Overview (teacher information)
- **Appendix B:** What we have Achieved through Fundraising for Cancer Research (teacher information)
- **Appendix C:** When a Student or Class is Directly Impacted by Cancer (teacher information)
- **Appendix D:** Discussing Death and Dying with Students
- Chart paper
- Markers

Instructions:

Note: Please review Appendix A, B and C to ensure your comfort with the material before proceeding with these educational activities. Use your judgment of your class and students and adjust the activities as necessary.

Cancer Word Cloud

1. Using chart paper and markers, write the word cancer in the centre of the paper; this will be the centre of your word cloud.
2. Ask your class if they have heard of the word cancer, or if they know what cancer is.
3. Select one colour marker and write down the students' answers around the word cancer, even if they are incorrect.
4. Using a different colour marker, circle or underline the correct answers/comments that students gave, making sure to add the word sickness to the word cloud if not already listed.
5. Provide them with a simple answer, cancer is a type of sickness.
6. Encourage the class (in small groups if needed) to discuss what they know about cancer and share with the class, adding all correct responses or comments to the word cloud as well, using the second marker colour.

Cancer Education

Note: If you are completing this activity with older grades (Junior and older) you may prefer to invite students to use their own paper/markers to complete the activity, following along as you complete the steps. Use your judgment to determine if this option is appropriate for your class.

1. Following class discussion above, draw a large body outline on a new piece of chart paper.
2. Ask students to select three colours of markers.
3. Using the information in **Appendix A.i**, explain to students what cells are.



TERRY FOX

Lesson plan

4. Using one colour marker, draw dots on the body outline. This represents healthy cells in our bodies.
5. Continue using information from **Appendix A.i**, explaining what happens when cells get broken.
6. Using a different colour marker, draw dots in one part of the body, explaining that these are cancer cells.
7. Using information from **Appendix A.ii**, explain the medicine that is used to treat cancer, called chemotherapy.
8. Using the third colour of marker, place X's over the cancer cells drawn on the body outline, explaining to students that chemotherapy's job is to get rid of the cancer cells.

Additional Discussion

Using information from **Appendix A.ii** as support, invite discussion with students. Consider using prompts such as:

- *Is there anything you wonder about cancer?*
- *Are there things that we talked about that make you feel confused?*

Students may wonder why Terry Fox's leg was amputated (removed with surgery). Referring to the body outline drawing above, you can explain that because Terry Fox's cancer cells were in his leg, his doctors decided that he needed more than just the chemotherapy to get rid of the cancer. Sometimes, the part of the body that has cancer can be amputated, which is what happened to Terry Fox.

Review the mission and goal of the Terry Fox Run using **Appendix D** as a guide. Consider explaining:

- *The reason our school participates in the Terry Fox Run is because the Terry Fox Foundation's job is to give money to doctors and scientists who are working very hard to find a cure for cancer, ie a way for cancer to go away forever.*

If your class is directly impacted by cancer (i.e., a student with cancer, a student's family member or friend has cancer, or someone has died from cancer in a student's life), please utilize the information in **Appendix B** as a guide to support ongoing discussion.

Discussing Death and Dying with your Class

Use information provided in **Appendix C** to guide class discussion on this topic.

To further emphasize the importance of raising money for the Terry Fox Foundation, share with your class that unfortunately, Terry Fox's cancer spread to other areas of his body, causing him to die. You can share that his family started the Terry Fox Foundation so they could continue raising money to find a cure for cancer.



TERRY FOX

Lesson plan

Curriculum Expectations

Science and Technology - Life Systems

- Identify the location and the function of various parts of the human body

Language – Comprehension

- Activate prior knowledge, including knowledge gained from personal and text experiences, that they can use to understand topics

Appendix A: Cancer Education

A. i) What is Cancer?

- Cancer is a **sickness** that some people get in their body.
- All living things – human bodies, plants and animals – are made up of tiny things called **cells**.
- Cells all have important jobs to do – we have cells in our eyes, blood, hair, skin, heart, stomach, brain ... everywhere!
- Cells make copies of themselves to make sure there are enough to do their jobs.
- Sometimes, a cell gets **broken**.
- When this happens, the broken cell makes copies of more broken cells.
- These broken cells can't do their job properly which can make a person very sick.
- This sickness is called **cancer**.

A. ii) Common Questions Kids have About Cancer

- How is cancer fixed/treated?
 - There are three common types of treatment for cancer:
 - **Chemotherapy** – often called chemo – is a special type of medicine used to treat cancer.
 - **Radiation** is like a laser beam that can shoot the cancer cells in a person's body.
 - **Surgery** is used when the cancer can be cut out of a person's body.
 - The reason Terry Fox walked with a prosthetic (fake) leg is because his cancer was in his leg. His doctor decided that it would be best to remove his whole leg to try to get rid of his cancer.
- Can people die from cancer?
 - While most people get better from their cancer, there are some people who do not get better. When a person's cancer cannot be cured, this can cause their body to die.
 - Terry Fox's cancer spread to other parts of his body, which caused him to die.



TERRY FOX

Lesson plan

- The money collected from the Terry Fox Run helps scientists and doctors find new treatments so more people get better from cancer.
- How does a person get cancer?
 - Most of the time, no one knows why someone gets cancer.
 - Cancer cannot be caused by another person's thoughts, actions, wishes, or beliefs.
 - There are some things people can do to prevent certain cancers like eating healthy, exercising, wearing sunscreen, and choosing not to smoke.
- Can kids get cancer?
 - Cancer is more common in adults, but sometimes kids do get cancer.

Appendix B: What we have Achieved Through Fundraising for Cancer Research

- Terry Fox's cancer was in the bone in his leg, so part of his treatment included his doctors amputating (removed) his leg using surgery.
- Because of the money that the Terry Fox Foundation has raised for cancer research, many people who have the same kind of cancer as Terry Fox today, don't have to have an amputation.
- To date, over \$800 million has been raised for cancer research in Terry Fox's name.
- Today, more and more people get better from their cancer and live a long life because of the fundraising accomplished by the Terry Fox Foundation.
- As Terry said, "If you've given a dollar, you are part of the Marathon of Hope."

Appendix C: When a Student or Class is Directly Impacted by Cancer

These are some additional talking points to guide teachers in response to any questions from students if their class is impacted by cancer directly. This could be a student having cancer themselves, a student whose family member or friend has cancer, or a student who knows someone that died from cancer and is questioning their teacher about it.

The 6 C's Approach is an easy way to ensure important topics are covered. Consider the following responses you can share with students:

- What is it **called**?
 - Cancer is a serious/big sickness that some people get in their body.
 - There are many kinds of cancer.
- Can I **catch** it?
 - No. Cancer is not contagious and cannot be caught by someone.
 - This means you can still spend time with and be near people who have cancer.
 - Consider comparing cancer to more familiar illnesses like the common cold, the flu, COVID-19, which are contagious. These are little sicknesses, while cancer is a big/serious sickness.



TERRY FOX

Lesson plan

- Can it be **cured**?
 - Many cancers can be cured with treatment.
 - Scientists and doctors around the world are always looking for new medicines and treatments for cancer.
 - This is why the Terry Fox Run is so important – because it gives us all an opportunity to contribute to cancer research.
- Did I/Can I **cause** it?
 - No. Cancer cannot be caused by something you did or didn't say, do, or think.
- Who will take **care** of me? (for students whose family member has cancer)
 - No matter what happens, there will always be people to love and look after you.
 - If this is a worry expressed by a student, inform caregivers so they can also have these conversations.
- How can I stay **connected**?
 - Student with cancer:
 - Class can send letters, take photos and videos, draw pictures to send to the student when they are absent, etc...
 - Student whose family member or friend has cancer:
 - Talking on the phone/video chat, writing letters, drawing pictures, matching stuffed animals, etc...
 - Student who is missing someone who died from cancer:
 - Watching videos or looking at photos, talking about the person and sharing stories, making a memory box, drawing pictures, writing letters, etc...

Appendix D: Discussing Death and Dying with Students

Terry Fox's dream was a world without cancer. However, two in five Canadians will have cancer in their lifetime with 90% of new diagnoses being people under the age of 50 (Canadian Cancer Society).

Unfortunately, Terry Fox's journey with cancer did not end in survivorship. This is an important part of his story and one that should not be shied away from with your students.

We know that speaking to children about death and dying can feel very overwhelming. Despite how big of a topic death and dying can feel to adults, children - especially young children - think and process this topic in a very matter of fact way.

We have created this resource sheet to support and guide you in answering questions, addressing comments, and facilitating discussion in an age-appropriate way.

What is dying?

- All living things will eventually die – plants, animals, and humans.
- Dying is what happens when our bodies can no longer work at all.
- When a person has died, they cannot see, smell, hear, think, or feel.



TERRY FOX

Lesson plan

Why do people die?

- Most people live very long lives, until they are very old.
- Some people die because their body has gotten so hurt or sick that it cannot get better.

Why did Terry Fox die?

- After Terry Fox had his leg amputated, he began the Marathon of Hope.
- At some point during his run across Canada, he found out that the cancer cells spread to other parts of his body.
- The cancer cells that spread caused his body to get so sick and he could not get better, no matter how much medicine the doctors gave him.

My grandparent/parent/sibling/etc had cancer but they didn't die.

- That's wonderful! Doctors and scientists all over the world are working everyday to try to find new medicines and ways of treating people's cancer.
- Because of the Terry Fox Foundation, more and more people are getting better from cancer.

My grandparent/parent/sibling/etc died from cancer.

- It makes me sad to hear that (avoid apologizing).
- Some people do die from their cancer, which is why our school likes to help the Terry Fox Foundation raise money to try to find more medicines and cures for cancer.

I don't want to die.

- Neither do I! Hopefully we will all live very long and healthy lives.