

## Using NewsHour Extra Feature Stories

### STORY

#### **Pay Phones, Phone Booths Quickly Becoming a Thing of Past, 12/11/07**

[http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/features/july-dec07/phone\\_12-11.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/features/july-dec07/phone_12-11.html)

Estimated Time: One 45-minute class period with possible extension

[Student Worksheet](#) (reading comprehension and discussion questions without answers)

### PROCEDURE

#### **1. WARM UP**

Use initiating questions to introduce the topic and find out how much your students know.

#### **2. MAIN ACTIVITY**

Have students read NewsHour Extra's feature story and answer the reading comprehension and discussion questions on the student handout.

#### **3. DISCUSSION**

Use discussion questions to encourage students to think about how the issues outlined in the story affect their lives and express and debate different opinions.

### INITIATING QUESTIONS

- 1. When's the last time you used a pay phone? Where was it located?**
- 2. How might cell phones affect the use of phone booths?**
- 3. Why are phone booths useful? Even if you don't use them, can you think of people who might?**

### READING COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS – [Student Worksheet](#)

**How many wireless customers are there in the United States? What impact have they had on public phone usage?**

#### ANSWER

And because more people have them - 251 million U.S. wireless customers among a population of 301 million - fewer people have the need or desire to use public pay phones. The drop in usage means more companies are pulling out of the pay phone business.

#### **2. What did AT&T announce last week?**

#### ANSWER

AT & T, the largest U.S. phone company, announced last week that it will be stopping its pay phone service in 13 states by the end of 2008. The company said it would turn over its phones to independent operators or remove them altogether.

#### **3. How many pay phones will be impacted by this announcement? What trends are there in the number of pay phones in the United States?**

#### ANSWER

AT&T's decision will impact about 65,000 phones, further depleting the number of pay phones in the United States.

There were 2 million pay phones here in 1997 but by last year that number dropped to 1 million, according to the Federal Communications Commission.

**4. When was the first pay phone installed? How is it different than a modern pay phone? Where were more modern pay phones first installed?**

ANSWER

The first pay phone, which was serviced by an attendant who took a customer's money, was installed in 1878, according to AT&T spokesman Michael Coe.

Coin-operated machines, the ancestors of the modern pay phone, were first installed in Hartford, Conn., in 1889 in the Hartford Bank.

**5. What impact will the decline in the public pay phone have on society according to some?**

ANSWER

Some worry the decline in pay phones will have a detrimental impact on safety, health and welfare in low-income communities or remote areas where cell phone networks are weak.

The traditional pay phone is "publicly accessible. It doesn't discriminate against income," Mason Harris, of the Atlantic Payphone Association, told the Gazette.net.

"There's still clearly a demand for pay phones," Harris added. "Though it seems everyone in the world has a cell phone, that's not the case."

**6. What is one option for a community that is harmed by the loss of a pay phone or phone booth?**

ANSWER

One option for communities potentially harmed by the loss of a phone booth is to apply for a government program called PIPS, or "public interest payphones." Some state governments will help support the service if the application is approved.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (more research might be needed)

**1. Do a survey of your community. How many public pay phones or phone booths can you find? Where are they located? Why do you think they are located in these areas?**

**2. Imagine that you don't have access to a cell phone or telephone for one day. How might your life be different? What challenges would you face? How would you overcome these obstacles? Can you imagine what your life would be like if this was an everyday occurrence?**

**3. According to the article the popularity of cell phones has impacted the number of pay phones that exist. In what other ways has the cell phone impacted your culture and society? Which of these changes are good? Which are bad? Explain your answer with clear examples. What might you change about this situation if you could? How would you do so?**

**4. Do you think cell phones have affected businesses, politics, education? How?**

**Extension Activity**

Have students write a 300-500 word essay on this topic providing clear examples. Send your completed editorial to NewsHour Extra (extra@newshour.org). Exceptional essays might be published on our Web site.