



Lesson Plan: The Impact of Traumatic Brain Injury on Veterans and Their Families

OVERVIEW

In this lesson, students will investigate traumatic brain injury (TBI), which has become the signature injury of military service in Iraq and Afghanistan. Students will watch video clips that illustrate issues related to TBI, research additional information and create fact sheets to educate soldiers and their families about TBI and direct them to organizations that can provide support. For detailed information on TBI, please see the [Resources](#) section.

This lesson uses a number of video clips from the film **Where Soldiers Come From**, a documentary that provides an intimate look at a group of young men from Michigan's Upper Peninsula area who join the military together and get deployed to Afghanistan. It provides one of the first and only available snapshots of the effects of combat from mobilization to deployment to return and reintegration.

Please note that the filmmaker's version of the film contains profanity throughout. If you would like to use the entire film in the classroom, you can avoid such language by recording the broadcast version or borrowing it from the POV lending library – FOR FREE! Note: POV documentaries can be recorded off-the-air and used for educational purposes for up to one year from their initial broadcasts. Get started by joining our [Community Network](#).

OBJECTIVES

By the end of this lesson, students will:

- Define traumatic brain injury (TBI).
- Explain the impact of TBI on two veterans trying to manage their combat-related injuries.
- Conduct research on TBI and write fact sheets on the subject in order to educate soldiers and their families and direct them to organizations that can provide support.

GRADE LEVELS

6-12

SUBJECT AREAS

Behavioral Studies, Current Events, Geography, Social Studies, Health

MATERIALS

- Internet access and equipment to show the class online video and conduct research
- Handout: [Viewing Guide](#) (PDF file)

ESTIMATED TIME NEEDED

One 50-minute class period

VIDEO CLIPS

Clip 1: [What Is Traumatic Brain](#)

[Injury?](http://www.traumaticbraininjuryatoz.org/The-Brain/What-is-Traumatic-Brain-Injury.aspx) (<http://www.traumaticbraininjuryatoz.org/The-Brain/What-is-Traumatic-Brain-Injury.aspx>) (Note: The video clip is on the right side of the page, with the transcript in the middle section.)

Clip 2: "Bodi Talks About His Traumatic Brain Injury" (TBI) (length: 2:24)

Having been in many trucks which were struck with improvised explosive devices (IED) while serving in Afghanistan, Matt "Bodi" Beaudoin now suffers from traumatic brain injury, or TBI. Bodi explains how he deals with TBI now and how it is different from other brain injuries.

Clip 3: "Dom's Truck Is Hit By An IED in Afghanistan" (length 3:06)

The clip begins at 42:24 with a truck passing and on-screen text that says, "We're heading up to where we found the IED's previously." It ends at 45:15 with Dom's uncle saying, "You hope!"

Clip 4: "Back Home" (length 5:24)

The clip begins at 1:05:04 with the on-screen text, "Michigan National Guard Reintegration Workshop." It continues with a scene of Bodi alone in his house talking about his reintegration process and then shifts to Dom drawing at his desk at Finlandia University, talking about TBI. You will then see a trip to the lake in the winter where Dom talks about feeling like an "anti-social nutcase." The clip ends with Bodi playing video games in his living room, talking to Cole. The last line is- "I'll be 50 years old and losing feeling in my arms and legs and going brain dead"

Clip 5: "The Mural" (length 3:37)

The clip begins at 1:11:47 with the Finlandia University sign. It ends at 1:13:20 when Dom and his teacher give each other a high five. It continues with Dom working on the mural later in the film and ends with the words, "Give them a Charlie's Angels."

Clip 6: "Bodi at the VA" (length 1:22)

The clip begins at 1:14:47 with an exterior shot of the Veterans Affairs Hospital and ends at 1:15:56 with Bodi standing outside the hospital, saying, "not bad, not bad."

ACTIVITY

1. Ask if anyone in the class has ever had a concussion. Allow anyone who has to share his or her experiences. How did the concussion happen? How was the student diagnosed? What impact did the concussion have on the ability to participate in everyday activities? If no one has ever had such an injury, consider showing all or part of the **NOVA** video, Brain Trauma (<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/sciencenow/0306/02.html>) (length 11:19), in which a teenaged boy talks about his experience recovering from a concussion sustained while skiing.

2. Explain that a concussion is a form of traumatic brain injury, or TBI, a condition that is increasingly common among soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan who have survived repeated blasts from improvised explosive devices, or IEDs.

3. Give each student a copy of the Viewing Guide handout. Tell students that they are going to work in small groups to create fact sheets that can educate soldiers and their families about TBI and direct them to organizations that can provide support. To help the class better understand TBI and related issues that they might address in their fact sheets, show them the series of short video clips for this lesson. Instruct students to take notes on their handouts as they watch.

- Begin with Clip 1 What Is Traumatic Brain Injury? (<http://www.traumaticbraininjuryatoz.org/The-Brain/What-is-Traumatic-Brain-Injury.aspx>) (Note: The video clip is on the right side of the page, with the transcript in the middle section.)
- Explain that the next three clips follow the stories of two American soldiers - Dom and Bodi. In the first clip, Bodi talks about his traumatic brain injury. In the second clip, Dom's enhanced armored vehicle is attacked by an IED. The last clip shows both Dom and Bodi trying to manage TBI and adjust to their civilian lives after deployment.
- The last clips show Dom painting a mural and Bodi visiting the Veterans Affairs Hospital and talking about his reintegration experience.

4. Discuss student responses on the handout.

5. Divide the class into small groups and have each group conduct research and create a fact sheet on TBI that can be used to educate soldiers and their families on the condition and direct them to organizations that can provide support. The Resources section provides a number of sites that will help students get started.

EXTENSIONS AND ADAPTATIONS

- Develop a plan for sharing the fact sheets. After students have completed their research in the main activity, discuss ways they can share their fact sheets with veterans and their families. Students should then develop an outreach plan and be given extra credit for implementing it.

- Explore other POV resources that portray the experiences of soldiers and their families. The following websites provide video, background information and educator materials.
 - **Armadillo** (<http://www.pbs.org/pov/armadillo>) follows a Danish platoon deployed to Afghanistan in 2009.
 - **Regarding War** (<http://www.pbs.org/pov/regardingwar/>) includes an extensive collection of war stories submitted by site visitors, video exploring the impact of war and a wealth of links to related resources. One relevant conversation addresses veterans adjusting to civilian life (<http://www.pbs.org/pov/regardingwar/conversations/coming-home/>).
 - **Soldiers of Conscience** (<http://www.pbs.org/pov/soldiersofconscience/>) explores the moral dilemmas of killing.
 - **War Feels Like War** (<http://www.pbs.org/pov/warfeelslikewar/>) tells the story of journalists who risked their lives to provide first-hand reports on the war in Iraq.
 - **The Way We Get By** (<http://www.pbs.org/pov/waywegetby/>) shows a community's commitment to providing a warm airport welcome for hundreds of thousands of U.S. troops returning from war.
- Compare the experiences of Danish and American soldiers who served in Afghanistan in 2009. Screen both **Where Soldiers Come From** (<http://www.pbs.org/pov/wheresoldierscomefrom/>) and **Armadillo** (<http://www.pbs.org/pov/armadillo>). Then, assign students to write film reviews that analyze the similarities and differences between the two groups' experiences. How did the soldiers change over time? What risks did they face? How did they feel about their mission and the people of Afghanistan? How did their service in a war zone affect loved ones back home? How did the approach of each filmmaker impact the story that was told? Encourage students to post their reviews on the school website or on a site such as [IndependentFilmReviews.com](http://www.IndependentFilmReviews.com).
- Investigate non-traditional strategies used to help veterans heal after they have served in war zones. Begin by showing students Clips 5 for this lesson, in which Dom's art teacher assigns him a "flexible project that related to his life, to bring himself back to normal." Discuss how art might help in the healing process. Next, have the class read the *New York Times* article "For Injured Veterans, Healing in Service to Others" (http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/02/giving/for-some-injured-veterans-community-service-is-a-way-to-heal.html?_r=1&src=rechp). Talk about why veterans might be drawn to public service after being wounded and the psychological benefits of helping others. Then, research a program like Horses Healing Heroes (http://www.horseshealingheroes.org/eap_eal.html) and consider how working with horses can help veterans. What psychological benefits do these three strategies share? How do programs like these differ from traditional psychological treatments, such as counseling? What other non-traditional activities would students recommend for helping veterans and their families?

- Plan and carry out a class service project or individual service projects to support active-duty soldiers, veterans or their families. Potential projects could include free yard work or babysitting for the family of someone deployed, raising funds and donating them to a program that serves veterans and their families and preparing cards and care packages for wounded soldiers. For more ideas, review this [online directory](http://www.military.com/benefits/resources/support-our-troops) (<http://www.military.com/benefits/resources/support-our-troops>) of charitable organizations that serve military service members and their families.
- Learn more about improvised explosive devices (IEDs). Have students watch Clip 1 again as a reminder of the threat posed by these types of bombs. Then ask small student groups to research more information about IEDs, such as what they are made of, the role they have played in the military conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, how soldiers typically detect and disarm them, related casualty statistics and the history of their use. Each group should then share its findings with the rest of the class.
- Research the latest advances in diagnosing and treating TBI. Have students refer to information on sites such as [BrainTrauma.org](http://www.braintrauma.org) and [Brainline.org](http://www.brainline.org/function_pages/all_ru.php) (http://www.brainline.org/function_pages/all_ru.php). Then, ask them to develop a strategy for sharing such advances with veterans groups, as well as local athletic coaches.

RESOURCES

Support for Veterans and Their Families

United States Department of Veterans Affairs.

<http://www.va.gov>

This department provides patient care and federal benefits to veterans and their dependents.

National Resource Directory.

<http://www.nationalresourcedirectory.gov>

This site provides access to resources and services for veterans at the national, state and community level.

Veterans and Families.

<http://www.veteransandfamilies.org/home.html>

This community service and support organization seeks to help veterans transition after deployment and/or from military to civilian life.

The Welcome Home Project.

<http://www.thewelcomehomeproject.org/>

This site seeks to encourage civilian awareness of veterans' issues and to create a visible community in support of returning veterans.

Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)

Brain Trauma Foundation. “Military & TBI.”

<https://www.braintrauma.org/tbi-faqs/military-tbi/>

This page provides some TBI statistics and describes some research underway that is aimed at advancing TBI detection in the field.

Military.com. “Traumatic Brain Injury Overview.”

<http://www.military.com/benefits/content/veterans-health-care/traumatic-brain-injury-overview.html>

This site provides a brief overview of TBI symptoms, effects and treatment, as well as some details on disability compensation.

NOVA. “Brain Trauma.”

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/sciencenow/0306/02.html>

This website includes a Q-and-A with a neurologist about TBI and a video (length 11:19) about what happens to the brain when it is injured, and how doctors are learning how better to diagnose and treat TBI.

Traumatic Brain Injury, The Journey Home. “Interactive Brain.”

<http://www.traumaticbraininjuryatoz.org/Interactive-Brain.aspx>

This feature includes a clickable diagram of the brain with information on the functions performed by each brain section.

Traumatic Brain Injury, The Journey Home. “What Is Traumatic Brain Injury?”

<http://www.traumaticbraininjuryatoz.org/The-Brain/What-is-Traumatic-Brain-Injury.aspx>

This page describes what happens when a brain injury occurs, and provides a terrific video clip (length 1:36) that includes animations related to TBI and the military.

Where Soldiers Come From In Context.

http://www.pbs.org/pov/wheresoldierscomefrom/photo_gallery_background.php?photo=4#gallery-top

POV provides background information on “hidden” war wounds, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and TBI.

The War in Afghanistan

FRONTLINE. “Chronology – The Afghanistan War.”

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/obamaswar/etc/cron.html>

This multimedia timeline outlines key milestones of the war in Afghanistan from 2001 to 2009.

PBS NewsHour. “Afghanistan: 10 Stories in 10 Years.”

<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/rundown/2011/06/afghanistan-stories.html>

This selection of stories from 2001 to 2011 provides an overview of the war in Afghanistan and how it has evolved. A photo essay is also included.

STANDARDS

Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science and Technical Subjects

(http://www.corestandards.org/assets/CCSSI_ELA%20Standards.pdf)

RH.6-8.1. Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

RH.6-8.2. Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.

RH.9-10.2 Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.

RH.11-12.2 Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.

RH.9-10.9 Compare and contrast treatments of the same topic in several primary and secondary sources.

RH.11-12.9 Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

SL, 9-10, 11-12.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups and teacher-led) with diverse partners on [grade-appropriate] topics, text and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

W.9-10, 11-12.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization and style are appropriate to task, purpose and audience.

WHST.6-8.7. Conduct short research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question), drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions that allow for multiple avenues of exploration.

WHST.6-8.9. Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis reflection and research.

Content Knowledge: (<http://www.mcrel.org/standards-benchmarks/>) a compilation of content standards and benchmarks for K-12 curriculum by McRel (Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning).

Behavioral Studies, Standard 4: Understands conflict, cooperation and interdependence among individuals, groups and institutions.

Civics, Standard 10: Understands the roles of voluntarism and organized groups in American social and political life.

Geography, Standard 13: Understands the forces of cooperation and conflict that shape the divisions of Earth's surface.

Health, Standard 2: Knows environmental and external factors that affect individual and community health.

Health, Standard 3: Understands the relationship of family health to individual health.

Historical Understanding, Standard 2: Understands the historical perspective.

Language Arts, Standard 1: Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process.

Language Arts, Standard 9: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media.

Language Arts, Standard 10: Understands the characteristics and components of the media.

United States History, Standard 31: Understands economic, social and cultural developments in the contemporary United States.

World History, Standard 44: Understands the search for community, stability and peace in an interdependent world.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Cari Ladd, M.Ed., is an educational writer with a background in secondary education and media development. Previously, she served as PBS Interactive's director of education, overseeing the development of curricular resources tied to PBS programs, the PBS TeacherSource website (now PBS Teachers) and online teacher professional development services. She has also taught in Maryland and northern Virginia.