
INTRODUCTION TO

SOCIOLOGY

Complete Unit Resource

Grades 10 – 12 | 4 Weeks | 20 Lesson Plans

Course	AP Psychology & Sociology Electives
Duration	4 Weeks (20 Lessons)
Grade Level	10 – 12
Focus Areas	Sociological Imagination, Culture & Subcultures, Social Institutions, Stratification & Inequality, Race/Class/Gender Intersectionality, Deviance, Social Change
Includes	20 Lesson Plans, 4 Current Events Activities, Stratification Simulation, 5 Intersectionality Case Studies, 15 Deviance Discussion Cards, Unit Test & Key, 3 Semester Project Options

UM Printables — Premium Classroom Resources

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SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

- Current Events Sociology Connection Activities (4 Weekly Activities)
- Stratification Simulation Activity
- Intersectionality Case Study Set (5 Cases)
- Deviance Discussion Cards (15 Cards)
- Unit Test & Answer Key
- Semester Project Options (3 Projects)
- Review Request

UNIT OVERVIEW

This four-week introductory sociology unit is designed for students in Grades 10–12 enrolled in AP Psychology or Sociology elective courses. The unit provides a comprehensive foundation in sociological thinking, moving from the foundational concepts of the sociological perspective and imagination through culture, institutions, stratification, intersectionality, deviance, and social change. Each lesson is discussion-based and explicitly connected to real-world issues, encouraging students to see the social world as both shaped by and shaping of their own lives.

Essential Questions

1. How can viewing the world through a sociological lens transform our understanding of everyday life?
2. How do culture, socialization, and institutions shape individual identity and opportunity?
3. What are the causes and consequences of social stratification and inequality across race, class, and gender?
4. How do societies define deviance, and who benefits from those definitions?
5. How do individuals and groups create social change, and what role can I play?

Enduring Understandings

1. The sociological imagination connects personal experiences to broader social forces and historical context.
2. Culture is learned, shared, and variable; it both enables and constrains human behavior.
3. Social institutions reproduce patterns of advantage and disadvantage across generations.
4. Intersectionality reveals that race, class, and gender are interconnected systems of power, not independent categories.
5. Deviance is socially constructed; what is defined as deviant reflects power dynamics within a society.
6. Social change results from the collective actions of individuals and groups who challenge existing structures.

Standards Alignment

This unit aligns with the **APA National Standards for High School Psychology Curricula** (Sociocultural Domain), the **C3 Framework for Social Studies State Standards** (D2.Soc.1–12 through D2.Soc.16–12), and the **College Board AP Course Guidelines** for sociology-elective content. Learning objectives are written to be measurable and aligned with higher-order thinking skills (Bloom's Taxonomy: Analyze, Evaluate, Create).

Four-Week Pacing Guide

Week	Theme	Lessons	Key Assessment
1	Foundations of Sociology	1–5	Sociological Imagination Reflection
2	Culture, Socialization & Institutions	6–10	Current Events Analysis #1 & #2
3	Stratification, Inequality & Intersectionality	11–15	Stratification Simulation, Case Studies, Current Events #3
4	Deviance, Social Change & Synthesis	16–20	Deviance Discussion, Current Events #4, Unit Test

Assessment Overview

Assessment Type	Description	Weight
Formative	Exit tickets, discussion participation, daily quick-writes	25%
Current Events Activities	Weekly analysis connecting unit concepts to real-world events	15%
Simulation & Activities	Stratification simulation, intersectionality case studies, deviance cards	20%
Unit Test	Multiple choice, short answer, and essay (Lessons 1–20)	25%
Semester Project	Extended research or creative project (3 options)	15%

Course Design Principles

- **Discussion-Based Learning:** Every lesson centers on structured student discourse, using Socratic seminar protocols, think-pair-share, and small-group discussion to develop critical thinking and collaborative analysis skills.
- **Real-World Connection:** Weekly current events activities ensure students apply sociological frameworks to contemporary social issues, making abstract concepts tangible and relevant.
- **Multiple Perspectives:** Content intentionally presents diverse viewpoints, including marginalized voices, to develop students' capacity for perspective-taking and sociological empathy.
- **Scaffolded Skill Building:** Lessons progress from foundational knowledge (Week 1) through conceptual application (Weeks 2–3) to synthesis and evaluation (Week 4), building analytical complexity over time.

WEEK 1: FOUNDATIONS OF SOCIOLOGY

Week 1 establishes the intellectual foundation for the entire unit. Students learn to see the world sociologically, distinguish sociology from other disciplines, understand the contributions of founding thinkers, apply the three major theoretical perspectives, and explore the research methods that make sociology a social science.

LESSON 1: WHAT IS SOCIOLOGY? THE SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Duration: 50 minutes

Key Terms: sociology, sociological perspective, social facts, beginner's mind, social forces, common sense vs. sociological knowledge

Learning Objectives

- Define sociology and explain how it differs from other social sciences (psychology, anthropology, economics).
- Describe the sociological perspective and explain why C. Wright Mills called it the 'quality of mind.'
- Identify examples of how social forces shape individual behavior and choices.
- Articulate the value of adopting a 'beginner's mind' when studying one's own society.

Materials Needed

- Whiteboard/projector, Student journals, Handout: 'Common Sense or Sociology?' (5 statements), Chart paper and markers

Opening / Hook (7 min) — 'Why Do You Wear What You Wear?'

Project the question on the board: 'Why do you wear what you wear?' Give students 2 minutes to write a response in their journals. Then ask 3–4 volunteers to share. Chart responses, categorizing them as 'personal choice' or 'social influence.' Reveal that most answers contain both — and that sociology focuses on the social influences we often overlook. This sets up the core insight: our 'personal' decisions are shaped by social forces we rarely notice.

Direct Instruction

What Is Sociology? Define sociology as the systematic study of human society and social interaction. Emphasize 'systematic' — sociology relies on evidence and research, not just opinion. Distinguish from psychology (focuses on the individual mind), anthropology (often focuses on culture through ethnography, sometimes in non-Western contexts), and economics (focuses on production and distribution of goods/services). Sociology uniquely examines how social structures, institutions, and group memberships shape behavior.

The Sociological Perspective (Peter Berger): Introduce Berger's concept: seeing the general in the particular. Help students understand that the sociological perspective means recognizing patterns in individual behavior that reflect larger social forces. For example, rising divorce rates are not just about individual couples but about changing gender roles, economic pressures, and shifting cultural norms.

Common Sense vs. Sociological Knowledge: Present the 'Common Sense or Sociology?' handout with five statements (e.g., 'People who are poor just don't work hard enough' vs. sociological evidence about structural barriers to mobility). Discuss how common sense can be misleading and how sociology uses empirical research to test assumptions.

Social Facts (Durkheim): Briefly introduce Émile Durkheim's concept of social facts — patterns of behavior that exist outside the individual and exert coercion. Examples: laws, norms, language, institutional practices. Social facts can be measured and studied systematically.

Guided / Independent Practice (12 min) — 'Seeing the General in the Particular'

In pairs, students receive a set of 6 everyday scenarios (e.g., a student choosing a college, a person commuting to work, a family buying a home). For each scenario, they identify at least two social forces that

influence the individual's decision — going beyond the personal to the structural. Pairs share one scenario with the class. Teacher models the first example to set expectations.

Discussion Questions

1. What is the difference between a 'personal trouble' and a 'social issue'? Can something be both?
2. Why might people resist the sociological perspective? What does it challenge about how we see ourselves?
3. How might adopting a sociological perspective change the way you view a current social issue?
4. Berger said the sociological perspective involves 'seeing through' the surface of social life. What might we miss if we never look beyond the surface?

Closure / Exit Ticket

Exit Ticket: Write one sentence that demonstrates the sociological perspective applied to your own life. Format: 'I used to think [X] was just a personal choice, but now I see that [social force Y] also shapes it.' Collect as students leave.

Differentiation Strategies

Support: Provide a sentence starter and one pre-identified social force for the practice activity. **Extension:** Challenge students to identify a social force that operates invisibly (e.g., cultural norms about success) and explain why it is harder to recognize than visible forces like laws. **ELL:** Provide a vocabulary reference sheet with definitions and visual examples for each key term.

LESSON 2: THE SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

Duration: 50 minutes

Key Terms: sociological imagination, personal troubles, public issues, biography, history, social context

Learning Objectives

- Define C. Wright Mills' concept of the sociological imagination and explain its two components (biography and history).
- Distinguish between personal troubles and public issues and explain how they are connected.
- Apply the sociological imagination to a contemporary social phenomenon.
- Evaluate the claim that understanding social context is essential for solving individual problems.

Materials Needed

- Whiteboard/projector, Handout: 'Trouble or Issue?' (5 scenarios), Student journals, Large poster paper (one per group of 4)

Opening / Hook (8 min) — Unemployment: Personal or Social?

Present a scenario: 'Maria lost her job when her company downsized. She is one of 50 workers laid off from her plant this year; 8,000 workers in her region have lost jobs in the past two years.' Ask: 'Is Maria's unemployment a personal trouble or a public issue?' Students discuss in pairs for 2 minutes. Then reveal Mills' insight: it is both. The personal trouble (losing a job) is connected to a public issue (structural economic shifts). When one person is unemployed, that's a personal trouble; when thousands are, that's a public issue. This is the sociological imagination.

Direct Instruction

C. Wright Mills and the Sociological Imagination (1959): Introduce Mills' landmark work. Define the sociological imagination as the ability to see the relationship between individual experiences (biography) and the larger social context (history). Emphasize: the sociological imagination is a *quality of mind* — a way of thinking, not just a set of facts. It allows us to 'grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society.'

Personal Troubles vs. Public Issues: Present a structured comparison. Personal troubles occur within the individual and within the range of their immediate relations; they have to do with self and with limited areas of social life. Public issues transcend the individual and have to do with the organization of many milieux into the institutions of a historical society. Provide additional examples: divorce (personal trouble ↔ rising divorce rates as a public issue), obesity (personal trouble ↔ food deserts and agricultural policy as public issues), student debt (personal trouble ↔ rising tuition and policy decisions as public issues).

The Promise of Sociology: Discuss why Mills believed the sociological imagination was essential for understanding social change and for individuals to make sense of their own lives during periods of rapid transformation. Connect to students' experience: they live in a time of technological disruption, economic uncertainty, and social change — the sociological imagination helps them understand their moment in history.

Guided Practice (12 min) — 'Trouble or Issue?' Activity

In groups of 4, students receive the 'Trouble or Issue?' handout with 5 scenarios. For each scenario, they must: (a) identify the personal trouble, (b) identify the corresponding public issue, and (c) explain how the two are connected using Mills' framework. Groups record their best example on poster paper and post around the room

for a brief gallery walk. Teacher circulates and provides real-time feedback on the quality of the biography–history connections.

Discussion Questions

1. Mills argued that people often feel 'trapped' by personal troubles they cannot solve individually. How does the sociological imagination offer a way out of that trap?
2. Think of something in your own life that feels like a personal trouble. What public issue might it be connected to?
3. Can you think of a situation where calling something a 'personal trouble' might serve someone else's interests?
4. How might a political leader benefit from framing a public issue as a personal trouble? Give an example.

Closure / Exit Ticket

Exit Ticket: Choose one of the following and write a brief sociological imagination analysis (3–4 sentences): (A) A student who struggles with anxiety during standardized tests, or (B) A worker who cannot afford health insurance. Identify the personal trouble AND the connected public issue.

Differentiation Strategies

Support: Provide a graphic organizer with labeled columns for 'Personal Trouble,' 'Public Issue,' and 'Connection.'

Extension: Ask students to research a current news story and write a one-paragraph sociological imagination analysis for homework. **ELL:** Provide bilingual vocabulary cards and model the first scenario as a class.

LESSON 3: FOUNDING THINKERS — COMTE, DURKHEIM, MARX, WEBER

Duration: 50 minutes

Key Terms: positivism, social solidarity (mechanical/organic), anomie, bourgeoisie, proletariat, class conflict, rationalization, Verstehen, capitalism, alienation

Learning Objectives

- Identify the contributions of Auguste Comte, Émile Durkheim, Karl Marx, and Max Weber to the development of sociology.
- Explain how the historical context of the Industrial Revolution, urbanization, and the Enlightenment gave rise to sociology.
- Compare and contrast the founding thinkers' views on what holds society together and what drives social change.
- Analyze a contemporary social issue using concepts from at least two founding thinkers.

Materials Needed

- Whiteboard/projector, 4 station posters (one per thinker), Station readings (1-page each), Jigsaw recording sheet, Markers

Opening / Hook (5 min) — 'What Holds Society Together?'

Project the question: 'If all laws disappeared tomorrow, would society fall apart or hold together? Why?' Students write for 2 minutes, then share with a partner. Chart answers: some will say society falls apart (need rules/order), others will say people cooperate naturally (shared values, interdependence). This fundamental tension — consensus vs. conflict, order vs. change — is the central debate among sociology's founding thinkers.

Direct Instruction

Why Sociology Emerged When It Did: Briefly contextualize the birth of sociology. The Industrial Revolution disrupted traditional communities, created massive urban poverty, and raised new questions about order, inequality, and change. The Scientific Revolution and Enlightenment encouraged the application of reason and empirical methods to social life. Sociology was born from the desire to understand and address these upheavals.

Auguste Comte (1798–1857): Coined the term 'sociology.' Advocated *positivism* — the application of the scientific method to the study of society. Believed society passes through three stages: theological, metaphysical, and scientific (positivistic). Emphasized social order and progress through rational understanding of social laws.

Émile Durkheim (1858–1917): Established sociology as an academic discipline. Key concepts: *social facts* (patterns external to the individual that exert control), *mechanical solidarity* (cohesion in traditional societies based on similarity), *organic solidarity* (cohesion in modern societies based on interdependence and division of labor), and *anomie* (a state of normlessness during rapid social change). His study of suicide demonstrated that even the most personal act has social causes.

Karl Marx (1818–1883): Focused on *class conflict* as the engine of social change. Society is divided between the *bourgeoisie* (owners of the means of production) and the *proletariat* (workers who sell their labor). Capitalism creates *alienation* — workers are disconnected from the products of their labor, from the process of work, from their own creativity, and from each other. Marx predicted that the proletariat would develop class

INTRO TO SOCIOLOGY: UNIT TEST

Name: _____

Date: _____

Period: _____

Section A: Multiple Choice (2 pts each = 30 pts)

Circle the best answer for each question.

1. C. Wright Mills defined the sociological imagination as the ability to:

- A. Understand individual psychological motivations
- B. See the relationship between individual experiences and the larger social context
- C. Conduct rigorous scientific experiments on human behavior
- D. Distinguish between right and wrong in moral dilemmas

2. Which founding thinker coined the term 'sociology' and advocated for positivism?

- A. Karl Marx
- B. Émile Durkheim
- C. Auguste Comte
- D. Max Weber

3. According to structural functionalism, a latent function of the education system is:

- A. Teaching reading and writing skills
- B. Preparing students for the workforce
- C. Socializing students into norms like punctuality and obedience
- D. Distributing textbooks to students

4. A sociologist studying how people negotiate meaning through facial expressions and gestures is using which theoretical perspective?

- A. Structural functionalism
- B. Conflict theory
- C. Symbolic interactionism
- D. Feminist theory

5. Which research method involves a researcher immersing themselves in a group over an extended period to understand their culture?

- A. Survey
- B. Experiment
- C. Secondary data analysis
- D. Participant observation/ethnography

6. Judging another culture by the standards of one's own culture is known as:

- A. Cultural relativism
- B. Ethnocentrism
- C. Multiculturalism
- D. Assimilation

7. Norms that carry a strong moral significance and provoke outrage when violated are called:

- A. Folkways

UNIT TEST: ANSWER KEY

Section A: Multiple Choice

Q#	Ans	Q#	Ans
1	B	9	C
2	C	10	C
3	C	11	C
4	C	12	B
5	D	13	C
6	B	14	D
7	B	15	C
8	B		

Section B: Short Answer Rubric

Criteria	Proficient (8-10 pts)	Developing (4-7 pts)	Inadequate (0-3 pts)
Conceptual Accuracy	Correctly defines and applies all sociological terms.	Defines terms but application is vague or partially incorrect.	Terms are missing or incorrectly defined.
Use of Examples	Provides specific, original, and relevant examples.	Provides examples but they are generic or loosely connected.	No examples provided, or examples are inaccurate.
Depth of Analysis	Explanation goes beyond surface; shows structural thinking.	Explanation is mostly descriptive; limited structural analysis.	Explanation is superficial or relies on common sense.

Section C: Essay Rubric

Criteria	Exemplary (34-40 pts)	Proficient (26-33 pts)	Developing (0-25 pts)
Thesis & Structure	Clear, arguable thesis; well-organized with logical flow.	Thesis present but may be descriptive; basic organization.	No clear thesis; disorganized or difficult to follow.
Theoretical Application	Accurately and insightfully applies 2+ theories/perspectives.	Applies theories but with some inaccuracy or superficiality.	Fails to apply theories or applies them incorrectly.
Use of Evidence	Integrates specific, relevant examples to support every claim.	Uses examples but they may be generic or partially connected.	Lacks supporting evidence; relies on opinion.
Sociological Imagination	Consistently connects individual experiences to structural forces.	Makes some structural connections but slips into individualism.	Analysis relies on individual-level or common-sense explanations.

- **Presentation:** Create a visual presentation (slideshow, poster, or video) summarizing your findings and proposed solutions for the class.
- **Format:** 4–6 page written report + visual presentation. Use at least 10 sociological terms (bolded).

PROJECT 3: SOCIAL MOVEMENT ACTION PLAN

Description

In this project, you will design a comprehensive plan for a social movement addressing an issue you care about. You will apply sociological theories of deviance, social change, and social movements to create a realistic, strategic plan that demonstrates your understanding of how collective action creates change.

Requirements

- **Issue Identification:** Select a social issue that you want to address. Explain why this issue matters, using data or evidence to demonstrate its significance.
- **Movement Classification:** Classify your proposed movement using Aberle's typology (alternative, redemptive, reformatory, revolutionary). Justify your classification.
- **Theoretical Foundation:** Apply relative deprivation theory AND resource mobilization theory to explain why a movement is needed and how it can succeed.
- **Deviance Analysis:** Explain how the current social norms or laws surrounding your issue constitute a form of structural deviance or injustice. Apply labeling theory or conflict theory to explain how the status quo is maintained by those in power.
- **Action Plan:** Develop a detailed plan that includes: (a) Goals (short-term and long-term), (b) Strategies and tactics (protests, lobbying, education, media campaigns), (c) Resource needs (funding, leadership, networks, media access), (d) Timeline (6 months to 2 years).
- **Presentation:** Create a persuasive pitch (5–7 minutes) presenting your movement to the class as if recruiting them to join.
- **Format:** 4–6 page written action plan + persuasive presentation. Use at least 10 sociological terms (bolded).

Universal Project Grading Rubric

Criteria	Exemplary (90-100%)	Proficient (80-89%)	Developing (70-79%)	Inadequate (<70%)
Sociological Application	Terms used accurately, insightfully, and fluently throughout.	Terms used accurately but sometimes forced or superficial.	Some terms used correctly; others misunderstood.	Terms missing or fundamentally misused.
Structural Analysis	Consistently moves beyond individual-level to structural analysis.	Mostly structural but occasionally slips into individualism.	Mixes structural and individual explanations unevenly.	Relies entirely on individual-level or common-sense explanations.
Evidence & Support	All claims supported by specific, relevant evidence or examples.	Most claims supported, but some evidence is generic.	Some claims unsupported; relies on assertion.	Little to no supporting evidence.

Quality & Creativity	Work is polished, original, and demonstrates deep engagement.	Work is competent and complete; some originality.	Work meets minimum requirements but lacks depth or originality.	Work is incomplete or poorly executed.
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