

CURRICULUM GUIDE FOR IMAGES OF AGING

SUGGESTED LECTURE/DISCUSSION CONTENT

The following issues relate to the content of AARP video, "[Images of Aging](#)"

1. Images of Aging

- Images of aging in art, music, literature, film, television
- Stereotypes of aging; ageism
- Changes over time
- Age, class, gender, cultural and generational differences in perceptions of age

Discussion question: What do you see yourself doing at age 75 that your grandparents would never have done?

2. Health

- Changes in health status and longevity
- The U.S. health care system and the calls for reform
- How Baby Boomers will change the nature of long-term care

Discussion question: We're living longer and healthier lives as we age. What are you doing to ensure a healthier lifestyle?

3. Economic Security

- Social insurance programs (Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid)
- Personal responsibility for economic security in retirement
- Is work the new retirement?

Discussion question: In general, the 50+ population is better off economically than previous generations. What strategies have you put into place that will prepare you financially for retirement?

4. Lifestyle

- How Baby Boomers are changing tomorrow's old age
- Positive aging
- Civic engagement

Discussion question: Baby Boomers are changing the way society looks at retirement. What kind of lifestyle are you pursuing as you age?

DISCUSSION EXERCISE

Pessimism about intelligence and creativity over the life span is widespread. Whether they admit it or not, many people would be inclined to agree with the stereotype that “you can't teach an old dog new tricks.” The challenge here is to enable students to understand that people of any age exhibit a diversity of capacities and, further, that these different cognitive capacities improve or decline in age-associated ways that are only now beginning to be better understood. For individuals, as for society as a whole, fears about cognitive change and aging need to pay attention to the danger of the “self-fulfilling prophecy” that discounts human potential. At the same time, debates on this issue also need to avoid wish fulfillment and should be based squarely on research. Try stimulating discussion with the following scenario:

Suppose you're running the job placement office at our college and you have the opportunity to hire a really good worker. However, she's 60 years old. You have two job openings for which you are considering using her. One is a position running the job placement data bank, which requires her to take computer software training for database management. The other position in the office involves coaching students on how to prepare for job interviews. Which position would you encourage your candidate to pursue and why?

This discussion is likely to elicit some stereotypes: such as the belief that “you can't teach an old dog new tricks,” in which case the computer job is ill-advised. On the other hand, some students may point out that older workers might initially be more fearful of computers or less familiar with them than younger people. *Is it fair to put an older worker into a situation that is likely to be threatening?* The discussion is also likely to elicit other generalizations, such as the observation that skill in dealing with social situations like a job interview can well be higher among those with more age and life experience.

In eliciting generalizations and stereotypes, it is important to remember from time to time that “older people” are not necessarily a uniform group. It may be that we need a lot more information than we now have in order to make any judgment at all about which job is most appropriate for the 60-year-old woman in this scenario. *How would we go about getting the information?*

Some further questions to consider are these: What does “creativity” mean to students in the class? How many people have ever met a really creative person? What traits did that person have? Can a person be creative in an ordinary job? Does creativity decline with added life experience or can it actually increase? What is the relationship between creativity and good judgment about life and people? (From Instructor's Manual for H.R. Moody, *Aging: Concepts and Controversies*, Sage, 2006).

RECOMMENDED READING

1. Images of Aging

Foley, Sallie, *Sex and Love for Grown Ups: A No-Nonsense Guide to a Life of Passion* (Sterling, 2005).

Nelson, Todd (ed.), *Ageism: Stereotyping and Prejudice against Older Persons* (MIT Press, 2002).

Riggs, Karen E., *Mature Audiences: Television in the Lives of Elders* (Rutgers University Press, 1998).

Roszak, Theodore, *America the Wise: The Longevity Revolution and the True Wealth of Nations* (Houghton Mifflin, 1998).

“[Images of Aging in Media and Marketing](#),” special issue of *Generations*, the journal of the American Society on Aging, Fall 2001.

2. Health

Haber, David, *Health Promotion and Aging: Practical Applications for Health Professionals* (Springer, 2003).

Hayflick, Leonard, *How and Why We Age* (Ballantine, 1996).

Olshansky, S. Jay and Carnes, Bruce, *The Quest for Immortality: Science at the Frontiers of Aging* (Norton, 2002).

Perls, Thomas T. and Silver, Marjorie Hutter, *Living to 100: Lessons in Living to Your Maximum Potential at Any Age* (Basic Books, 1999).

Rowe, John and Kahn, Robert, *Successful Aging* (Dell, 1999).

Weil, Andrew, *Healthy Aging* (Knopf, 2005).

3. Economic Security

Achenbaum, Andrew, [Best Books on Social Security](#) (AARP Academic Affairs, 2006).

Diamond, Peter, and Orszag, Peter, *Saving Social Security: A Balanced Approach* (Brookings, 2005).

Eisenberg, Lee, *The Number: A Completely Different Way to Think About the Rest of Your Life* (Free Press, 2006).

Ernst & Young's Retirement Planning Guide (Wiley, 2001).

Orszag, Peter, Iwry, Mark J., and Gale, William G., *Aging Gracefully: Ideas to Improve Retirement Security in America* (Century Foundation Press, 2006).

O'Shaughnessy, Lynn, *Retirement Bible* (Wiley, 2001).

Rix, Sara E., [*Aging and Work: A View from the United States*](#) (AARP Public Policy Institute, 2004). Also see Rix's [*Update on the Older Worker 2005*](#).

4. Lifestyle

Adler, Richard P. [*Best Books on Baby Boomers*](#) (AARP Academic Affairs, 2006).

Bolles, Richard N., *The Three Boxes of Life and How to Get Out of Them* (Ten Speed, 1981).

Cohen, Gene, *The Creative Age: Awakening Human Potential in the Second Half of Life* (Harper, 2001).

Freedman, Marc, *Prime Time: How Baby Boomers Will Revolutionize Retirement and Transform America* (Public Affairs, 1999).

[*Reinventing Aging: Baby Boomers and Civic Engagement*](#). A report from the Harvard School of Public Health and the MetLife Foundation, 2005.

Sadler, William, *The Third Age: Six Principles for Personal Growth and Rejuvenation after Forty* (Perseus, 2001).

Snowdon, David, *Aging With Grace: What the Nun Study Teaches Us About Leading Longer, Healthier, and More Meaningful Lives* (Bantam, 2002).

Thomas, William H., *What Are Old People For? How Elders will Save the World* (VanderWyk and Burnham, 2004).

Trafford, Abigail, *My Time: Making the Most of the Bonus Decades After 50* (Basic Books, 2005).

Vaillant, George E., *Aging Well: Surprising Guideposts to a Happier Life from the Landmark Harvard Study of Adult Development* (Little, Brown, 2003).

INTERNET RESOURCES

Identified and annotated by H.R. Moody

[**AGED BY CULTURE**](#) is the title of Margaret Gullette's fascinating book (University of Chicago Press, 2004).

AGING AND CINEMA. Recommendations on films relevant to issues in aging and important ideas about the human life-course from the [American Psychological Association/Kansas State University](#) and [Syracuse University](#).

AGEING AS EXILE? A remarkable blog that explores the intersection of aging, creativity, purpose, transition, learning and well-being. The site, covering news reports from around the world, is edited by Steve Dahlberg from the International Centre for Applied Imagination.

"**AGING IN AMERICA: The Years Ahead**" is a new award-winning photo book (and video) by Julie Winokur and Ed Kashi. Some of the images are available [here](#); a [slide version](#) is also available.

AGING WELL. George Vaillant, M.D., is the author of *Aging Well: Surprising Guideposts to a Happier Life* from the landmark Harvard Study of Adult Development (2002). Read [more](#) about this book or view an [excerpt](#).

ANTI-AGING MEDICINE. "The anti-aging medicine of the not-so-distant future would treat what we have usually thought of as the whole, the healthy, human life as a condition to be healed. It therefore presents us with a questionable notion both of full humanity and of the proper ends of medicine." From "[Ageless Bodies](#)" in a report, *Beyond Therapy: Biotechnology and the Pursuit of Happiness*, issued by the President's Council on Bioethics, Washington, D.C.

ART BY OLDER PEOPLE. [ARTSeniors](#) is an online gallery that makes available work by artists over age 55 years from around the world.

CONSCIOUS AGING. What is "Conscious Aging?" For one answer, read "[Conscious Aging: A New Level of Growth in Later Life](#)." For books and videos on "The Spiritual Dimensions of Conscious Aging" visit the website for [Spirituality and Health Magazine](#).

CREATIVITY IN LATER LIFE. Gene Cohen's book *The Creative Age* (Harper, 2001) is a good overview of creativity in later life and is reviewed [here](#). A slide show is available on one of Dr. Cohen's projects, the [Creativity Discovery Corps](#).

See a *Newsweek* article on "[Artful Aging](#)" for a useful account of creativity and age.

[This site](#) on art history has an interesting section on the "late style" of artists in old age.

CULTURE CHANGE & LONG-TERM CARE. Bill Thomas, M.D., founder of the Eden Alternative, is now a consultant working with AARP in Washington. Read a recent [interview](#) with him on the subject of "Culture Change" in long-term care. For a picture of Bill Thomas's utopian vision of livable communities for later life, read "[Eldershire: Transforming the Culture of Aging](#)," a presentation he gave to the Vital Aging Network of Minnesota. Bill Thomas is the author of [What Are Old People For? How Elders will Change the World](#).

EARTH ELDERS: THE WISDOM OF AGE. [Earth's Elders Foundation](#) is an educational non-profit organization which has embarked on landmark project to introduce the world to the sixty oldest people on earth. Its photo documentation project provides a window into the world of these "human time capsules," whose lives spanned more than a century reaching the outer edge of longevity. *Earth's Elders: The Wisdom of the World's Oldest People*, by Jerry Friedman includes contributions by Robert Coles and Lama Surya Das.

ERIK ERIKSON. SUNY Cortland has a compendium of resources and ideas about Erikson's [stages of lifespan development](#).

ETHICS & CAREGIVING. The President's Council on Bioethics has issued a report entitled "[Taking Care: Ethical Caregiving in Our Aging Society](#)."

FAIRY TALES ABOUT AGING. Learn more about Allen Chinen's inspiring collections of [fairy tales](#) about midlife and old age.

FOLKLORE. A detailed list of resources is available on "[Aging and Death in Folklore](#)."

INTERNET RESOURCES ON AGING. AARP now offers a site where you can search or browse through a directory of more than 900 carefully selected [Web sites on aging](#), regularly updated. The [AgeLine Database](#) is the world's largest bibliographical database on aging, including abstracts of over 600 journals as well as books, chapters, reports, videos, and other publications.

IS AGING A DISEASE? Ever wonder just why growing older makes us more vulnerable to disease? It's a good question, and here's at least one answer: "While there are scientists with different views about this issue," says George M. Martin, M.D., Professor of Pathology at the University of Washington School of Medicine, "I believe there are several fundamental processes of aging at the molecular and cellular level that 'set the stage' for the emergence of the diseases of late life."

MANY FACES OF AGE. "Look at the face of an older person. What do you see? What do you feel? What if you did not have the word "old" to describe that face? What if wrinkles did not mean old, but signaled the depth of life this person has experienced? People often sense a degree of fear when they see an old face. What if they instead felt a sense of longing to have what that older person has? What if power and money were not considered the highest possible awards, but maturity was? And what if maturity was a term only reserved for the very old, those who have lived a truly full life and have proven that they had the strength to age by not just accepting but embracing their aging as perhaps the richest part of their lives? What if we couldn't wait to be old, just like a child cannot wait to be an adult?" (by Nader Shabahangi).

MIDLIFE TRANSITION. Interesting essay on "[Midlife: The Crisis Reconsidered](#)" by Robert Atkinson, Ph.D. For well-documented research about midlife transition—often contradicting popular ideas—see the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation [Research Network on Successful Midlife Development](#). The process of mid-life transition can be described through the framework of [Myers Briggs](#) personality theory.

PLASTIC SURGERY. Read an AARP research report on "Public Attitudes Toward Aging, Beauty, and [Cosmetic Surgery](#)."

PRODUCTIVE AGING. The following publications highlight the many faces of productive aging:

["Older Adults' Engagement Should Be Recognized and Encouraged"](#)

["Satisfaction and Engagement in Retirement"](#)

["Many Older Americans Engage in Caregiving Activities"](#)

[Productive Aging: Concepts and Challenges](#), edited by Nancy Morrow-Howell, James Hinterlong and Michael Sherraden (Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2001).

An AARP update on [older workers](#) and trends in work and retirement.

RED HAT SOCIETY. Inspired by the opening lines of the poem "Warning" by Jenny Joseph, the 10,000 member "Red Hat Society" began when a few women decided to greet middle age with verve, humor, and elan. That original group inspired many other local chapters around the USA, some with memorable names like "Red Hot Mamas" or "RedNReady."

REMINISCENCE and LIFE-REVIEW. "[Telling Stories](#)" by Kathleen Woodward of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and Andrew Scharlach and Marilyn Fabe of the University of California, Berkeley discusses the structure and function of life review. The University of Wisconsin-Superior houses the [International Institute for Reminiscence and Life Review](#).

RETIREMENT. The Center for Retirement Research at Boston College has published valuable papers on retirement:

[Most People Don't Know the Social Security Retirement Age Is Rising](#)
[People Think They Have More Pension Coverage than They Do](#)
[People Think They Are Saving More than They Are](#)
[People Expect to Work Longer than They Actually Do](#)

For an article on changing images of later life among aging Boomers, read "[Retirement: A Field of Dreams](#)."

RETIREMENT AROUND THE WORLD. The most comprehensive study ever done on [global attitudes toward age](#) and retirement suggests that traditional ideas about retirement are changing fast.

SUCCESSFUL AGING. An historical overview describes the many uses of the term "[successful aging](#)" in gerontology. Interesting article [here](#) on "The Meaning of Life and Meaning of Death in Successful Aging." And don't overlook the basic text by John Rowe and Robert Kahn, *[Successful Aging](#)* (Pantheon, 1998), which has done so much to stimulate the current debate on the subject.

STAGES OF LIFE. “The 19th Century American painter Thomas Cole created a magnificent four-part painting cycle, "[The Voyage of Life](#)," now in the National Gallery in Washington, DC. "The Voyage of Life' is an allegory of the four stages of human life: childhood, youth, midlife, and old age. In each painting, the voyager, accompanied by a guardian angel, rides in a boat on the River of Life. The landscape, corresponding to the seasons of the year, plays a major role in telling the story” (from Sandra Bertman’s commentary on the Literature, Arts and Medicine Database). [Online images](#) of Thomas Cole’s paintings are available.

STATISTICS. The U.S. Administration on Aging has released its "[Profile of Older Americans](#)" with updated information in selected charts. See also "[Older Americans 2004: Key Indicators of Well-Being](#)," which features 37 key indicators selected by the Federal Interagency Forum on Aging-Related Statistics to portray aspects of the lives of older Americans.

WOMEN AND AGING. "[70 Up](#)" is a multimedia project whose mission is to put forth a positive image of women's aging via a traveling exhibit, web site and book. Images and life stories featuring Angela Lansbury, Betty Friedman, Marion Woodman, and others.