

*Unimaginable*  
Educator  
COMPANION GUIDE

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

From the Producer

Episode Synopsis

Lesson Overview

Instructional Procedures

Extension Activities

Fact Sheet

Resource Materials



the  
**glow**media  
project

Mental health education for a new generation

## FROM THE PRODUCER

Dear Educators,

It's been four years since the world shut down due to Covid-19. ***Unimaginable*** is a short (15 minute) documentary about the effects of the pandemic on teen mental health. Why show this film now? Teens and young adults are experiencing an epidemic of depression and anxiety. The pandemic didn't cause this, but it heightened the effects of what was already happening in our society. Teens are already a vulnerable group. Combine that with a vulnerable time and the intensity grows exponentially. *Unimaginable* looks at Covid-19's harrowing effects on teen mental health, while also providing surprising insights into their unique development during this period of isolation.

Glowmedia films are intended to destigmatize challenges that can make teens feel isolated and worry that they are different from their peers. When the adolescents in the films struggle, students viewing the films will feel less alone, less stigmatized by their own issues. Our films emphasize the importance of getting support and learning coping strategies. Through our educational series, schools can present our films and start discussions, raising the chances that young people will feel valued despite the challenges they face.

This guide includes preparatory and resource materials for before, during, and after viewing the film. A synopsis of the film is included for your use. As part of your school's health curriculum, the film should ideally be viewed in two 45-min. class periods. Alternate learning activities are included which allow the film to be incorporated into other parts of the high school curriculum. Please explore what will work best with your students and the time. The lesson plan adheres to Common Core Standards as well as ASCA Mindsets and Behaviors for Student Success. To achieve the greatest benefits from the film, the information in the Parent/Guardian Companion Guide should be sent to parents/guardians along with a letter about the screening of the film so that discussion may continue in the home in addition to the classroom.

Sincerely,

Trish Glowacki  
Executive Director, the glowmedia project  
Executive Producer, ***Unimaginable***  
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## **EPISODE SYNOPSIS**

Unimaginable: Amidst an unprecedented pandemic, teenagers faced a staggering rise in mental health issues and a precarious, uncertain future. This uplifting documentary provides surprising insights into the creative coping mechanisms of three socioeconomically and racially disparate teens during this period of isolation.

# LESSON OVERVIEW

Grade Levels: Secondary 6-12

Lesson Duration: To be completed over two to four 45-minute class periods depending on how many lessons are utilized.

## Standards:

<p>COMMON CORE STANDARDS</p>	<p>English Language Arts Standards Speaking and Listening</p>	<p><u>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.(6.1/7.1/8.1)</u> Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade (6,7, or 8) topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.</p> <p><u>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.6.1.D</u> Review the key ideas expressed and demonstrate understanding of multiple perspectives through reflection and paraphrasing.</p> <p><u>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.7.1.D</u> Acknowledge new information expressed by others and, when warranted, modify their own views.</p> <p><u>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.8.1.D</u> Acknowledge new information expressed by others, and, when warranted, qualify or justify their own views in light of the evidence presented.</p> <p><u>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.(9-10.1/11-12.1)</u> Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades (9-10/11-12) topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.</p> <p><u>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1.D</u> Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives, summarize points of agreement and disagreement, and, when warranted, qualify or justify their own views and understanding and make new connections in light of the evidence and reasoning presented.</p>
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		<p><u>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.D</u></p> <p>Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives; synthesize comments, claims, and evidence made on all sides of an issue; resolve contradictions when possible; and determine what additional information or research is required to deepen the investigation or complete the task.</p>
<p>ASCA MINDSETS &amp; BEHAVIORS FOR STUDENT SUCCESS</p>	<p>K-12 College and Career- Readiness Standards for Every Student Category 1: Mindset Standards</p>	<p>School counselors encourage the Following mindsets for all students:</p> <p>M 1. Belief in development of whole self, including a healthy balance of mental, social/emotional and physical well-being</p> <p>M2. Sense of acceptance, respect, support and inclusion for self and others in the school environment</p>
<p>ASCA MINDSETS &amp; BEHAVIORS FOR STUDENT SUCCESS</p>	<p>K-12 College and Career- Readiness Standards for Every Student Category 2: Behavior Standards</p>	<p>B-SMS 6. Ability to identify and overcome barriers</p> <p>B-SS 2. Positive, respectful and supportive relationships with students who are similar to and different from them</p> <p>B-SS 4. Empathy</p> <p>B-SS 6. Effective collaboration and cooperation skills</p> <p>B-SS 10. Cultural awareness, sensitivity and responsiveness</p>

**Objective:**

Students will be able to reflect on their own experience during the Covid-19 pandemic and explore ways they can apply what they learned moving forward.

**Essential Questions:**

1. How did Covid-19 impact you?
2. What coping strategies and tools did you use?
3. What can you take from what you learned during the pandemic that will be helpful to you in the future?

# INSTRUCTIONAL PROCEDURES

Covid-19 has impacted everyone. Faculty are strongly urged to be attentive to the mood and tone of individual students and the group, as well as to your own responses. We encourage you to trust your instincts during the lessons as you will know your students best.

To that end, we have included a range of activities and guiding questions for you to utilize based on what you think will be the most productive for your class. While the questions and lessons are in a recommended order to help guide students through their thinking and processing, some groups of students may find it useful to complete the activities in a different order or skip elements completely.

Additionally, we have indicated recommended guiding questions that tie to each activity to help with planning.

## Launching the Lesson

- Review the included fact sheet with students or have them review it on their own.
  - Pose the following questions:
    - Do any of these facts surprise you? Why or why not?
      - The objective here is to get students thinking about the pandemic in the larger context before placing themselves back into the narrative in extension activities.
- Watch *Unimaginable* film
  - NOTE: We recommend you show the film two times. The second viewing can take place on the same day or on another day, but students should be encouraged to take notes on what they hear, what surprises them etc. when watching a second time in order to be better prepared for discussions and extension activities.
- Pose 1 or 2 of the guiding questions to gauge student response and determine which questions/activities will suit your particular group of students best.
- Complete guiding questions and extension activities as class time will allow.
- Wrap up with a reflection either verbal or written:
  - Which question or questions helped you to think more deeply about your experience?
  - Has anything changed about the way you think about the pandemic based on these discussions and/or activities?
  - Which activity was the most useful and/or engaging for you?
  - What is your biggest takeaway from this experience?

## Guiding Questions:

### *Accompanies the Extension Activities*

1. At the beginning of the film, the students refer to their experiences in the pandemic as being filled with loss. Many of us lost things during the pandemic - for example, activities we used to enjoy, celebrations and rituals like graduations, proms, performances, and sports games that didn't happen. Some of us actually lost people close to us who died of COVID-19.
  - a. Can you articulate your own sense of loss and for what/whom throughout the pandemic?
  - b. How do you think your experiences are similar or different to the students in the film and other people you know?
  
2. Grief is a completely natural response to the losses we have all experienced during the pandemic. While grief is often associated with death, we also grieve the loss of rituals, people we lose contact with, experiences etc. For example, given the prolonged and sudden lockdown, as well as the delayed return to familiar routines, you may grieve the loss of a sports season, school play, prom, time spent with friends, etc.
  - a. As the situation, which first felt like it might be for a short time, continued to be ongoing, do you think you allowed yourself to grieve those losses? Why or why not?
  - b. What does grief mean to you?
  - c. How can we support ourselves and each other in times of grief?
  
3. All three students highlighted in the film reference feeling very negative emotions at times, often to the point of extreme stress and overwhelm. In each case, the students found an outlet that helped them cope with those emotions. For Kylie it was singing, poetry, and music. For Anna it was baking. For Carolina it was painting. These activities may help to distract, achieve mastery, channel emotions, or provide an outlet that benefits others. Each student had a different response.
  - a. Have you ever felt negative emotions to the point of overwhelm? What kinds of experiences or circumstances caused you to feel that way?
  - b. What activities or techniques help you to cope with and relieve that stress?
  - c. Is there anything you saw one of the other students do that sounds like something that might help you? Why or why not?
  
4. Carolina says, "I want to write, read etc., but I'm so unmotivated." She feels unmotivated despite having goals and genuinely wanting to do things. Kylie says "I was unmotivated and didn't do anything" when speaking of her classes.
  - a. Have you or someone you know ever felt unmotivated despite having goals you want to achieve?

- b. Why is it important to accept and forgive yourself for this feeling (as it can be a common response to stress), rather than just blame yourself or add to your negative emotions?
  - c. What have you used to find motivation to move forward? )
  
- 5. Psychologist Lisa D'Amour says "when we have uncomfortable emotions, the healthiest thing we can do is talk about our feelings with the people we love. Doing so is actually how we can protect our mental health."
  - a. During the pandemic, everyone has been experiencing loss and isolation in different ways all at the same time. Has that made it more or less difficult for you to talk about your own feelings to those you care about?
  - b. In what ways has the pandemic experience caused you to isolate yourself from others?
  - c. In what ways has the pandemic made you more proactive in reaching out?
  
- 6. The students mentioned early on that they thought the lockdown would only be two weeks. Carolina even said she was "happy the pandemic happened to give me a break." However, as two weeks turned into months and then carried into the following school year, their responses changed.
  - a. What were your dominant feelings and behaviors at the start of the pandemic?
  - b. How did your feelings and behaviors change as the fall of 2020 started?
  - c. How do you feel now?
  
- 7. Social relationships are vital for our health. "I miss my friends" was a common quote from the students interviewed.
  - a. What do you prioritize in your relationships?
  - b. Has the pandemic changed the way you identify your own needs from relationships with your friends, family, teachers, etc.?
  - c. Has the pandemic changed the ways in which you conduct your relationships? If so, how?
  
- 8. During the pandemic, the online world became the environment for the majority of our relationships and experiences. In many ways, we were more connected than ever before. However, many people reported heightened senses of loneliness and isolation.
  - a. How do you think online tools for classes, social connection, and entertainment had a positive impact during the pandemic?
  - b. Has your relationship with digital tools, including social media, changed throughout the pandemic? (For example: more time online, more time offline, more or fewer social media outlets, consuming lots of digital content at once across multiple devices.) Why or why not?



9. Carolina said she has a tattoo that says “Remember you must die”, to remind herself that she isn’t immortal and needs to make the most of the time she has. Her plan is to also get a matching tattoo on the other arm that says “Remember to live.”
  - a. Which of these phrases do you find more motivating and why?
  - b. Do you think it is important to make the most of each day?
  - c. How do you go about setting goals so that you can feel successful without feeling overwhelmed?
  
10. Looking back over the pandemic, the students all referenced areas of growth such as being less judgmental, valuing their freedom, and valuing their relationships in more profound ways.
  - a. What have you learned about yourself in going through the pandemic?
  - b. Have your values changed in terms of how you spend your time?
  - c. When you’re 30 looking back on this time in your life, what positive things do you think you will have learned?

## EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

### Extension Activity 1 – Acknowledging the loss.

*Students will be able to identify their own areas of grief as well as the grief that is shared with peers.*

Suggested Guided Questions: 1-2

1. NOTE: The same steps will be repeated each round as the groups get larger. Each time, the group must agree on a new answer to the prompt.
  - a. ROUND 1: “A” Groups - Divide the class into small groups of 2-3 students.
    1. In “A” groups, have students brainstorm an answer to the following until they have two answers that finish the prompt: *“During the pandemic I have grieved the loss of.”*
    2. Students agree on one unified answer, then self-report the answer on the board. (This allows you and the class to have a visual representation of what’s being discussed at each stage of the activity.)
  - b. ROUND 2: “B” Groups
    - i. Two “A” groups join together to form a “B” Group.
      1. In “B” groups, have students brainstorm an answer to the following until they have two answers that finish the prompt: *“During the pandemic I have grieved the loss of.”* – Reminder that these should be new answers each time.
      2. Students agree on one unified answer, then self-report the answer on the board
  - c. ROUND 3: “C” Groups
    - i. Two “B” Groups combine to form a “C” Group
      1. Students in the larger group review answers on the board and try to answer the prompt again without repeating a response.
      2. Students agree on one unified answer, then self-report the answer on the board.
  - d. ROUND 4: Full Class
    - i. *Full Class comes together.*
      1. Students review answers on the board and try to answer the prompt again without repeating a response.
      2. Once the class can agree, that answer should be shared with the teacher and added to the board.
  - e. Once the final common answer is determined, discuss student reactions to the exercise. Questions to help get started: Was it difficult? What did you discover? How did it feel to complete the activity?
    - i. NOTE: *If this is a class that doesn’t have a strong level of trust to start, you can opt to have responses be a single word spoken, or written on paper and turned in for the teacher to share out and get the discussion going.*

### **Extension Activity 2 – Creative Expression**

*Students will be able to reflect on their journey through the pandemic in order to synthesize and share that information through a creative outlet.*

*Suggested Guided Questions: 3- 10*

For Students: Imagine you are from the future visiting your pre-pandemic self. Write a letter, compose a scripted scene, write a poem, song, comic etc. outlining what you'd like your pre-pandemic self to know about this experience. Think also about how the information you share would be useful/important to your pre-pandemic self.

- Questions to help students get started:
  - What has been the biggest challenge in the ongoing pandemic?
  - What do you wish you had known at the beginning of the pandemic that you know now?
  - What has been your greatest strength throughout the pandemic?
  - What has surprised you the most about yourself during the pandemic?
  - What aspects of coping with the pandemic have made you a stronger person and/or have helped you as you've grown?

For Teachers: Following the student creation of work, have students offer to share their piece if they are comfortable. See if as a group, you can identify common themes, again bringing the discussion to the full group to encourage more participation.

*NOTE: Depending on when this discussion takes place, e.g., whether the pandemic is ongoing or truly behind us, the tense of the questions may need to be altered.*

### **Extension Activity 3 – Group Art**

*Students will be able to respond emotionally to a piece of art in front of them, identify a way to contribute to that art in support of the group, and reflect on what they see.*

*Suggested Guided Questions: 3-10*

Each student starts with a blank piece of paper. They will add the element onto the paper in front of them in each round and then pass the paper clockwise. Depending on the size of the class, you can have the rotations run in groups of as few as 5 and as many as the whole class. However, in an ideal world, students only contribute to each piece once.

INSTRUCTIONS for each round given verbally by the teacher. (Remember: After each round, each student passes the paper they were working on. Each student will complete each step on a different paper.)

1. In the upper right-hand corner, write a word that comes to mind when you hear Covid-19. Draw a shape inspired by that word. (pass paper to the right).

2. Look at the word and the shape, add one visual element to the picture. NOTE: Your shape must touch the existing shape on the page. (pass)
3. Repeat instructions from step 2 as many times as you'd like.
4. Final Step: Look at the word and shapes, caption the picture in front of you.
5. Share out final pictures and captions. If time allows, encourage discussion in large or small groups.
  - a. What do you see in this image?
  - b. What does it make you think about?
  - c. How do the word in the corner and the caption impact your experience with the piece of art?

NOTES:

- There is a lot of variability in this activity. If you feel it is too abstract for the students, you can dictate something more concrete with directions to place something in the environment or add a face etc. and remove the “touch existing shape” direction.
- If practical in your classroom, it can be helpful to give students access to colors (markers, crayons, colored pencils etc.) so that the color can also have an emotional impact.

**Extension Activity 4 – Creative Expression**

*Students will be able to identify what brings them stress and overwhelm and identify coping strategies that they can lean on in the future. They will apply that information through visual representation in a collage.*

Suggested Guided Questions: 3-6

Either provide students with magazines, newspapers, etc. that they can cut out or set them up with an online collage maker for students.

- INSTRUCTIONS for students:
  - On the left side of your page, find images or collage words that represent areas of stress in your life. This can be representative of anything that may cause you to feel stressed or overwhelmed.
  - On the right side of your page, find images or collage words that represent tools and strategies you use to cope with that stress. Try to think of at least one strategy that you want to try, but haven't yet.
- If students are willing to share, have them share their collages and discoveries with the rest of the class.

**Extension Activity 5 – Commercial**

*Students will reflect on the challenges and problems they face, identify a solution, and create a way to effectively communicate both the need and the solution.*

Suggested Guided Questions: All

- Divide students into small groups.
- INSTRUCTIONS for students:
  - Reflect on all of the prior discussions and think about one of the biggest challenges you've had in dealing with the pandemic and all that has come with it: loss, isolation, new skills, changed relationships, etc.
  - As a group, select one challenge to focus on.
  - As a group, come up with a new product that would have helped to solve that challenge and create a commercial for it. *(Encourage students to think outside the box and to make the product unique. It will be more fun to sell in the commercial that way.)*
    - *NOTE: These products and commercials can be a serious response (a particular kind of mask, for example) or they can be sillier and more fantastical. The same guidelines go for the commercials themselves. Maybe they want to create a cape that traps and destroys germs, a pencil that can turn into a face shield, a transporter that allows them to travel without covid exposure, but only between two or three places (and is powered by peanuts) etc.*
  - Rehearse the commercial as a group.
  - Perform commercials for the class.
    - Following each commercial, the class should be able to discuss what the product was for and why they think it would be useful.
- *NOTE: If students are stuck, give them an item to help push creativity. For example: Provide them with a pencil as the "thing" that helps solve the problem and they can work to determine how it would be transformed. Sometimes, being able to choose from everything and anything is overwhelming and having a seemingly unrelated object can actually focus the creative flow.*

# FACT SHEET

## CDC Data for Adolescent Mental Health Effects of the Pandemic

- During March–October 2020, among all emergency department (ED) visits, the proportion of mental health-related visits increased by **31%** among US adolescents aged 12–17 years, compared with 2019.
- During this same period in 2020, the number of ED visits for eating disorders among adolescent females doubled.
- There was a 22% spike in ED trips for potential suicides by children aged 12 to 17 in summer 2020 compared to 2019. This number rose to 39% in spring of 2021.
- In 2021, more than a third (37%) of high school students reported they experienced poor mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic, and 44% reported they persistently felt sad or hopeless during the past year.

## HELPFUL ONLINE RESOURCES

The 988 Lifeline provides 24/7, free and confidential support for people in distress, prevention and crisis resources for you or your loved ones, and best practices for professionals in the United States.

<https://988lifeline.org>

Teen Line is an anonymous, nonjudgmental space for youth. Through our hotline, teens can access personal peer-to-peer support from highly trained teens supervised by adult mental health professionals. Our work extends to providing outreach and support to schools and other youth organizations.

<https://www.teenline.org>

Teen Talk provides a free, anonymous, safe space for teens to request support from trained peers and learn from others with similar experiences.

<https://www.teentalkapp.org>

**Office of the Surgeon General's Report on Teen Mental Health**

<https://www.hhs.gov/surgeongeneral/priorities/youth-mental-health/index.html#:~:text=Since%20the%20pandemic%20began%2C%20rates,youth%2C%20and%20other%20marginalized%20communities.>