Unit 2 Web Activity
Gangs in America

"A youth gang is an organization of tightly bonded youth who are joined together and controlled by a criminal leader. A gang is often conceived and nurtured by an individual who uses it as a vehicle to raise himself or herself to a position of power among his or her peers." (http://www.ncjrs.org/)

Introduction
In November 2003, the Federal Bureau of Investigation reported that the annual per capita murder rate in Washington, D.C., was much higher than in either New York or Los Angeles, which are both larger cities. The local authorities in Washington, D.C., blamed this high murder rate in part on an escalation of violence between street gangs. In this lesson, you will explore the initiatives that various private and government organizations across the country are taking to combat the influence of gangs on America's youth.

To begin, go to the FBI's Crime Clock to find out how frequently each of the following crimes occurs in the United States.

- violent crime
- aggravated assault
- robbery
- forcible rape
- murder property crime
- larceny-theft
- burglary
- motor vehicle theft

Although not all of these crimes are attributed to street gangs, the fact is that teenagers associated with gangs are more likely to be involved in crime than youths who are not.

To complete this lesson, follow the steps listed below. In each part of the lesson, there are choices about which steps to follow. Listen to your teacher's directions to determine which steps you or your group should take.

Step 1: Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) About Gangs
Step 2: The Reality of Gangs
Step 3: What Is the Federal Government Doing About Gangs?
Step 4: Justice Department Report on the Growth of Gangs
Step 5: Local Efforts—Baltimore, Los Angeles, Southwest Missouri
Step 6: Reflection

Step 1: FAQs About Gangs
Go to the National Youth Gang Center Web site and explore the *Frequently Asked Questions* page. Summarize the answers to each of these questions (also listed below).

1. What is a youth gang?
2. Is the youth gang problem growing?
3. What factors contributed to the proliferation of youth gang activity in the 1990s?
4. Are today's youth gangs different from gangs in the past?
5. What proportion of adolescents join gangs?
6. What is the racial and ethnic composition of youth gangs?
7. Is female gang involvement increasing?
8. What proportion of serious and violent crime is attributable to gang members?
9. Is gun use a common form of gang violence?
10. What is the impact of gang membership on individual offending levels?
11. What are the major risk factors for gang membership?
12. What are the consequences of gang membership?
13. Is there a relationship between gang member drug involvement and violence?
14. What can be done about youth gangs?

Step 2: The Reality of Gangs
The National Crime Prevention Council (NCPC) is an anti-crime organization. You may be familiar with NCPC's mascot, McGruff the Crime Dog, who says, "Take a bite out of crime." NCPC has created an excellent pamphlet called "The Reality of Gangs," which provides answers to the following questions. When you click on this link, it will open a PDF file on your computer which you can read to answer the questions. Your teacher might decide to print out this pamphlet for you to read on paper instead.

1. *What's the Deal With Gangs?*
   Take notes on some generalizations about gangs.
2. *Learn About Gangs*
   Take notes on some generalizations about gangs.
3. *Why Do Young People Join Gangs?*
   Take notes on the reasons that some teens join gangs.
4. *Join a Gang?*
   Take notes on what new gang members often have to do to become part of the gang.
5. *What Does the Future Hold for a Gang Member?*
   Take notes on the possible consequences of gang membership.
6. *Take Action*
   Take notes on what you can to do to avoid involvement with gangs.

Step 3: What Is the Federal Government Doing About Gangs?
A. Multi-Agency Cooperation

In 1995, the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) created a multi-agency group known as the Youth Gang

Consortium. The goals of the Consortium are to work together with federal, state, and local agencies to reduce gang-related crime.

Visit the Youth Gang Consortium's Web site to see which federal agencies are involved in this project. Make a list of the executive branch agencies involved in the project. (Note: Several agencies have more than one office working on this project.)

Discuss with a partner or small group in your class what you think these various agencies and programs could contribute to a multi-agency federal program. Then imagine how states and cities could add to that effort. Below, you will explore one or more of the programs sponsored by states or local governments to combat gang influences in their areas.

B. Programs Created With Federal Funding

Community Works: Smart Teens Make Safer Communities With funding from OJJDP, Street Law, Inc. and the National Crime Prevention Council provide a curriculum and training program called Community Works that combines education, community resource people, and service learning projects to enlighten young people about their chances of victimization and what they can do about it. It offers 31 interactive lessons that can be used by police officers, after-school club sponsors, teachers, or anyone who works with teens in a variety of settings.

Gang Resistance Education and Training (G.R.E.A.T.) A program created by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (ATF), G.R.E.A.T. is a series of 13 lessons designed to teach middle school students communication skills, empathy for others, how to deal with peer pressure, anger management, conflict resolution, and other skills. The city of Phoenix, Arizona, created the G.R.E.A.T. program with the ATF. Go to the G.R.E.A.T. Web site at the Phoenix police department to learn more about the program. This program is also active in New York City, Honolulu, Boston, Portland (Oregon), various cities in Connecticut, and other cities in almost every state.

After reading the program descriptions of Community Works and G.R.E.A.T., do you think one of these programs would work in your area? Discuss this with your classmates.

A major component of both programs is conflict resolution and anger management. Does your school have programs available to students who need to work on these skills? Do you have peer mediation available? What programs would you like to see in your own school?

Step 4: Justice Department Report on the Growth of Gang Problems

The U.S. Department of Justice published a comprehensive report in 2001 that studied the growth of youth gang problems in the United States between 1970 and 1998. That publication, available online, contains a wealth of information about gang problems in the

United States. As a matter of fact, the study contains too much information for a high school law class to digest, so we will direct you to the "Summaries and Explanations" chapter of the study.
The "Summaries and Explanations" chapter begins with a long bulleted list of summary statistics about the growth of gang problems in the United States. Your teacher may ask you to look for certain pieces of information there. Below that list, there is a section of explanations with the following headings. Your teacher will tell you whether he or she wants you to read one or more of those sections and paraphrase the information found.

- Drugs
- Immigration
- Gang Names and Alliances
- Migration
- Government Policies
- Female-Headed Households
- Gang Subculture and the Media

This report presents statistics and suggests explanations for those statistics, but does not present recommendations for future action by federal, state, or local governments. Discuss with your classmates what programs you think should be instituted to respond to the problems presented in this report. As a class, write a letter to the Attorney General, the Cabinet-level official who administers the U.S. Department of Justice, making suggestions for how he or she should follow up on the findings in this report.

Step 5: Local Efforts
Various cities around the United States have created programs to combat gangs and gang violence in their areas. Choose one or more of the cities below and research what they are doing to solve this problem.

** Note: The use of the cities below does not indicate that they have greater problems with gangs than do other cities. It simply indicates that their online resources were suitable for this lesson. You may research your own city and find excellent resources on gang activity. **

Baltimore
To see what the city of Baltimore did about its gang problem, read the report entitled "Gang- and Drug-Related Homicide: Baltimore's Successful Enforcement Strategy." Keeping in mind that this report is discussing Baltimore, and not generalizing for other cities, read the descriptions of the difference between adult drug organizations and youth gangs in that city. Click on the Gang Characteristics and Growth link for descriptions of Baltimore gangs. Find the answers to these questions:

1. How do Baltimore gangs maintain their control over their territories?
2. How does the gang leader maintain dominance over the membership?
3. What do the authors of the report mean when they say, "Gangs use the art of name recognition to maintain control”?

Click on the Effective Gang Enforcement link to see the methods that Baltimore used to combat gangs. If you are interested in more details about the investigations in Baltimore, read the section called Stanfield and Boardley Investigations.

Los Angeles
Los Angeles has many programs in place to handle the problem of street gangs. Browse these pages on the Los Angeles Police Department Web site and summarize some of the LAPD's methods for targeting gangs.

- Information on What Gangs Do and Why Young People Join Gangs
- How Are Gangs Identified
- Prevention: Jeopardy Program
- Pre-Teens and Gangs: Telltale signs
- Community Law Enforcement and Recovery (CLEAR) Program
- Using the courts: A Gang Injunction
- Other LAPD Programs and Resources

Southwest Missouri
Southwest Missouri Interagency Task Force on Gangs and Youth Violence
According to its Web site, "The Southwest Missouri Interagency Task Force on Gangs and Youth Violence, a Subsidiary of the Community Partnership of the Ozarks, is committed to the prevention of gangs and youth violence through education and prevention efforts and by partnering with local social institutions (i.e., schools, faith institutions, commerce, criminal justice, mental health) in their effort to reduce gang and violent youth activity."

Browse the many links on the task force's Web site to see what suggestions it has for how to reduce gang activity.

Step 6: Reflection
As a class, discuss the prevalence of gangs in your area and what the local government or police department should be doing to stop them. What were the best ideas you found? Can you add any new ideas to those currently in use in other cities and states? Depending on where you live and how prevalent gangs are in your area, you teacher may ask you to do any of a variety of culminating activities for this lesson.

- Invite your principal into your class and present your findings. Make suggestions to him or her regarding what the school should be doing to fight the influence of gangs.
- Write a letter to the chief of police in your town or city, making suggestions about what should be done to combat gang violence.
- Start a campaign to combat gang influence in your community—hold a public meeting, start a Web site with information and links to other resources, visit middle and elementary schools to talk about the dangers of gangs, etc.