



# Project Chimps

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**Activity Name:** The History of Chimpanzees in Medical Research

**Learning Objectives:** S7L1, S7L4, SB5.b, L6-8WHST1, VAHSDR.PR.1

**Grade/Age Level:** 6-12

**Estimated Time:** 3-4 hours onsite w/ tour, 60-90 min. in classroom/virtual

**Materials:** roll of brown paper, misc. paper, pens, pencils

**Methods:** review, discuss, research, write, think, debate

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**Goal:** Educate students on the history of chimpanzees used in medical research and look at where we stand today and what can be done to help chimpanzees used in medical research.

## **Background:**

- **1920s:** Chimps were 1<sup>st</sup> used as test subjects in medical research as early as the 1920s when Robert Yerkes established a research facility at Yale University.
- **1950s & 60s:** There was a mass importation of baby chimps from the wild in the 1950s and 60s as chimps became research subjects for the Air Force and space travel. During this time chimps became popular test subjects for many other tests including different aspects of biomedical research, disease research, toxicity testing and experimental research.
- **1973: Endangered Species Act (ESA)** changed the classification of chimpanzees to threatened. Made it illegal to import baby chimps. The focus switched to breeding programs so there would be a continued supply of test subjects.
- **1980s:** In the 1980s chimps were used in HIV/AIDS research; however, they proved to be very poor test subjects as results were not always applicable and useful to humans.
- **1990 Endangered Species Act (ESA)** created the split listing of chimpanzees and declared wild chimps endangered but captive chimps were still considered threatened, and therefore not under the protection of the ESA. Because the law only protected wild chimpanzees and not captive ones, captive chimpanzees could still be used for research, entertainment and in the pet trade business.
- **1990s:** By the 1990s there were approximately 1,500-1,800 chimps being used in laboratories across the United States for medical research.



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- **1997:** The US Air Force ended its use of chimps in research and retired all of their chimps to sanctuary. At this time, as well, two major medical testing labs closed down - the **Coulston Lab** (largest chimpanzee research lab in the world) and **Laboratory for Experimental Medicine & Surgery in Primates** (LEMSIP). Many of these chimps now enjoy a forever home at **Save the Chimps** in Port St. Lucie, Fl.
- **2010:** A coalition of organizations began petitioning the **United States Fish & Wildlife Services** (USFWS) to end the split listing of chimpanzees.
- **2011:** **National Institute of Health** (NIH) asked **Institutes of Medicine** (IOM) to begin a review of the use of chimpanzees in medical research. **The IOM found the use of chimpanzees in medical research unnecessary!!**
- **2013:** NIH announced to cut funding for chimpanzees in medical research and to retire all federally owned chimpanzees, except 50 of them. At this time, they decided to keep 50 in case medical research proved necessary in the future.
- **2015:** USFWS ended the differentiation between “wild” and “captive” chimps and declared all chimpanzees as endangered and therefore protected under ESA! Sanctuaries prepared to find places for all the chimps being used in medical research and NIH indicated they would release all federally-owned chimps to sanctuary.

### Procedures:

1. **Discuss.** Have a discussion on the background information and review some of the important parts of the timeline on chimps in medical research above.
2. **Tour.** If onsite- take your tour!
3. **Activities.** Complete 1 or more of the activities below. All lesson plans can be shared to complete more activities in the classroom post field trip.
4. **Assessment.** Discuss the assessment questions below.

### Activities:

1. **Timeline.** Create a timeline of the main events concerning chimpanzees being used in medical research.
  - Depending on group size either do as a group or split into smaller groups
  - Using large sheets of brown paper each group can draw/describe/write/explain about the different events to create their timeline



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2. **Critical Thinking.** Identify if the traits listed are associated with a [human or chimp](#).
3. **Letter Writing and Debate.** In 2017 NIH released a plan to have all chimpanzees used in medical research moved to sanctuaries within 10 years. However, in 2018, after nine out of 51 chimps that had been transferred to Chimp Haven died, they changed their mind and decided they would keep the older ones to reduce the health risk during transport to the sanctuary and the stress thereafter.
  - Write a letter to the NIH and encourage them to keep their word and release all the remaining chimpanzees in labs to sanctuary.
  - Debate. Split class into 2 groups.
    - ½ of your group will represent the NIH and ½ of your group will represent the chimps.
    - Debate whether the remaining older chimps should be moved to sanctuary. Is it better for them to live longer lives in the labs or risk the transport to sanctuary in exchange for the opportunity to live out the remainder of their lives, even if short, in sanctuary?

**Assessment:** Discuss the following questions.

- Do you think it's ok to use chimpanzees in medical research? Why or Why not?
- Do you think the laws concerning chimps were just and fair? Why or Why not?
- What changed the course of things in 2010 for the chimps? What did people do to make a difference?
- Do chimpanzees make a good research model for humans?
- Was it fair to distinguish "wild" chimps from "captive" chimps? Why do you think they did this?

**Conclusion:**

Chimpanzees were used in a wide variety of medical research for almost a century! It took over 90 years for us to realize that chimpanzees are simply not a good research model for human beings. Captive chimps have long endured lifetimes of pain and suffering and they now deserve to live out their lives in sanctuary.

**Notes to Instructor:**

- [Chimps in Research Assessment Questions](#)
- [Human or Chimp](#)
- Use your judgment to gear this lesson to different ages.



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- Be objective.
- Thank you for being a part of our community!