



Pupil Story sheet

Rat Park

Back in the 1970s a man called Bruce Alexander from Canada conducted an experiment with rats.

First of all he kept rats in a cage. Each rat was by itself and there was little in the cage for the rats to do. They had a choice of drinks – plain water or water which contained the drug heroin. He found that the rats tended to prefer the heroin water much more than they did the plain water. It looked as if the rats had become addicted to heroin.

Bruce Alexander then created what he called Rat Park for the rats to live in. Rat Park was 200 times the floor area of a standard rat cage. There were 16–20 rats of both sexes in Rat Park and they had plenty of food, toys and wheels to play with, and enough space for mating.

Again the rats were offered plain water or water laced with the drug heroin. This time he found that the rats sometimes tried the heroin water but overall they would much prefer to drink just plain water. In Rat Park the rats did not seem to become addicted to heroin in the same way they did when they were alone in their cage.



Discuss the questions below:

- What do you think Bruce Alexander was trying to show with his experiment?
- Why do you think the rats became addicted to heroin in their cages but not in the Rat Park?
- Bruce Alexander suggested that when people become addicted to drugs it was quite often because they were like the rats in the cages – they were alone or bored or depressed. Do you agree with him? Why / why not?