we the economy
20 SHORT FILMS YOU CAN’T AFFORD TO MISS
CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

This lesson fits in perfectly with units that address curriculum standards in social studies, civics, economics, thinking and reasoning, history, media studies, business, government, and finance.

SAMPLE STANDARDS ALIGNMENTS

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language of a court opinion differs from that of a newspaper).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.6 Determine an author’s point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how an author uses rhetoric to advance that point of view or purpose.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.2 Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.

CCSS.MATH.CONTENT.7.SP.A.1 Understand that statistics can be used to gain information about a population by examining a sample of the population; generalizations about a population from a sample are valid only if the sample is representative of that population. Understand that random sampling tends to produce representative samples and support valid inferences.

CCSS.MATH.CONTENT.HSS.MD.B.5.B Evaluate and compare strategies on the basis of expected values.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.2 Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary describing political, social, or economic aspects of history/social science.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7 Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.B Work with peers to promote civil, democratic discussions and decision-making, set clear goals and deadlines, and establish individual roles as needed.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.C Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that probe reasoning and evidence; ensure a hearing for a full range of positions on a topic or issue; clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions; and promote divergent and creative perspectives.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.D 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.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.1 Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RST.11-12.9 Synthesize information from a range of sources (e.g., texts, experiments, simulations) into a coherent understanding of a process, phenomenon, or concept, resolving conflicting information when possible.
LESSON PREPARATION

• Prepare a monitor with Internet access to screen the short film, “Monkey Business” at www.wetheeconomy.com/films (TRT 6:06)
• Prepare tokens to be offered as prizes (i.e., candies, trinkets)
• Prepare a series of classwork review questions to be used in the quiz show activity

KEY WORDS AND PHRASES

Income, inequality, parity, technology, globalization

STUDENT OBJECTIVES

• Students will be introduced to the term “income inequality.”
• Students will learn to empathize with some potential emotional responses to the experience of inequality.
• Students will analyze the various causes of income inequality in society.
• Students will explore various experts’ responses to the topic of income inequality and develop their own position on the topic.
• Students will integrate information from a media source into their own thoughts and ideas.
• Students will communicate their opinions in writing and verbally, using information collected from the film and from additional sources.
• Students will deepen newly acquired information with independent, in-depth research.

REQUIREMENTS

MATERIALS

• Whiteboard and markers, chalkboard and chalk, or chart paper and markers
• Monitor/projector, and computer with Internet access
• Tokens for prizes

TIME:

• 1 class period

TECHNIQUES AND SKILLS

Vocabulary building, large group discussion, problem solving, critical and analytical thinking, utilizing information sources, communicating ideas, weighing pros and cons, research skills, listening skills, categorizing and organizing ideas, research and expository writing
PROCEDURES

1. Tell the class that today they will be participating in a “quiz show” game for classwork review. They will be placed in teams, and asked questions about material they have learned in class, and if they answer correctly, they will win prizes.

2. Divide the class into 4 groups. Instruct students to rearrange themselves so they’re sitting in their teams.

Note: For the purposes of this activity, groups should not be randomly selected. If possible, try to place all the students with the chosen “special skill” (see Procedure 4, below) on one team. Pay extra care not to arrange a team with all of the perceived high-achievers or perceived low-achievers in the class. Team selection should be based on a special skill not related to this specific class.

3. Tell each team to choose a representative to provide the team’s official answer. The team can and should confer in order to reach a response, but this representative must raise his/her hand and be called on in order for the team’s answer to be considered.

4. Begin asking questions. These questions can be about any information covered in class over the past several weeks.

Note: The purpose of this activity is to illustrate some of the root causes of economic inequality, as well as the feeling that inequality creates in individuals. Therefore, as the moderator of the game, abide by the following rules:

   A. In an obviously disproportionate amount, call on the same group (privilege and nepotism).

   B. Make sure at least one category of questions depends on a skill that only students on one of the teams have (i.e., computer skills, competency in another language, sports skill, etc.), therefore limiting the number of teams capable of answering the question (technology).

   C. At random intervals, call “Bonus Prize!” and inform the class that you are doubling the amount of tokens that the winning team currently has (therefore the team with the most tokens will suddenly have exponentially more than the others) (governmental regulation).

   D. Allow a “tie” to occur, where the representatives of 2 teams raise their hands simultaneously. In response, offer the question to the team that is first willing to take half a token for a correct response rather than a whole token (globalization, outsourcing jobs for lower pay).

5. Allow 15 minutes for the class to play the game, enough time for the “rules” above to become somewhat apparent. Students may begin complaining that the game is “unfair.”

6. When enough of the kids in the class are frustrated by the inequity of the game, call the game and reconvene as a large group.
PROCEDURES CONTINUED

7. Conduct a whole-group debrief using some or all of the following questions as a guide:
   • What did you notice in terms of how the game was moderated? Did you notice that some teams had an advantage over the others?
   • How did it make you feel when you noticed that there was a disparity among the teams?
   • What were some of the advantages that you noticed as you were playing the game?

8. As the class answers the last question, jot some of their answers on the chalkboard, whiteboard, or chart paper. Explain to the class that the game they just played was meant to illustrate some of the ways in which economic inequality might develop in a society.

9. Define economic inequality for the class: “Economic inequality is a disproportionate gap between a society’s rich and a society’s poor.” Tell the class that they will now view a short film that talks more about economic inequality, and offers some of the factors that cause it. Direct their attention to the monitor or screen and play “Monkey Business” (TRT 6:06).

10. After the film ends, allow time for a whole-group discussion. Elicit the 3 causes of economic inequality that were listed in the film: Globalization, Technology, and Government. Ask students to draw parallels between these 3 economic factors and the way the game was played earlier in the class. Use some or all of the following questions to guide the discussion:
    • Why do you think the audience laughed at the monkey’s response to this experiment? Were you surprised by the monkey’s response?
    • How does the fairness study with the 2 monkeys relate to economic inequality?
    • What is the state of income inequality in our country? When did this state of inequality start?
    • What are the three main causes of income inequality?
    • How did the game we played earlier model the three main causes of inequality we learned about in the film?
    • How does globalization contribute to inequality?
    • How does technology contribute to inequality?
    • How does government contribute to inequality?
    • What are some of the solutions that the economists offer in the film?
    • What do the economists disagree on?
    • How might inequality be proven to be a natural side effect of a free market economy?
    • What was the point that economist Larry Mishel was trying to make when he said “if you starve the monkeys, eventually they’ll end up working for cucumbers”?
    • What kind of society do you want – do you want most Americans to get grapes or cucumbers? Explain.
    • Does the film offer a solution to income inequality?
PROCEDURES CONTINUED

11. Ask students to return to their groups. Explain that for the rest of the class period, and for homework, they will be working together to create a supporting document for a statement that will be assigned to them.

12. Tell the class that because the film ended with a question, they’ll be using information from the film, their own opinions, and information gathered from research to explore different solutions for income inequality. Assign the following statements, one to each group:

- Income inequality is a problem that needs to be addressed by implementing regulatory changes such as stronger laws to prevent abuses by large banks and corporations and to shape market forces rather than leaving those forces to chance.
- Income inequality is a problem that needs to be addressed by shifting money away from the top 1% with changes such as increasing taxes on the rich, limiting tax loopholes and tax breaks, changing the rules of lending so the middle and lower classes can get loans, and raising minimum wage.
- Income inequality is a problem that needs to be addressed by increasing support programs for the poor and young, such as focusing on improving public education, subsidized healthcare, and incentivizing welfare to work.
- Income inequality is an important by-product of a healthy free market economy and should not be addressed.

13. For homework, students should conduct additional research on their assigned statement and gather additional information to support it, complete with citations. Note: Students may watch the film again at home by going to www.wetheeconomy/films/, and should incorporate data or information from other sources including films, books, articles, etc.

Note: If time allows, an option is to reconvene groups in subsequent class periods so students can combine their information into one response paper, or, alternatively, conduct a whole-class debate where groups present their findings to their classmates. If time does not allow, students should write individual research papers on their assigned topic for homework.