

RATIONALE

Poverty and inequality are issues that speak both to our hearts and minds. We are confronted daily with inequalities in our own communities, and learn through travel, the media, our own experience, or personal relationships about the challenges faced by the poor around the world. Not only are poverty and inequality challenges to our sense of justice, fairness, and responsibility, but we have also seen time and again how they can be a direct threat to peace and safety. When people in our own country or other countries feel marginalized, exploited or left behind that resentment can lead to hostility.

This inquiry lesson asks students to brainstorm about possible causes of poverty, and then gather evidence in support of each hypothesis by examining datasets provided. They will seek to answer the following question: *What explains inequality in our world; why are some people rich and some people poor?* The goal of the lesson is not to come up with one right answer, but to discover more about the myriad causes of poverty around the world, which will help students be compassionate world citizens. It will help students recognize some of the factors that have contributed to their own privilege or underprivilege. It will also encourage students to accept the complexity of the problems that we face.

This lesson is designed for an advanced economics class, although it could easily be adapted for use in a lower level economics class or a course on political science, geography, diversity, or current events. It could be tailored to motivate further study about trade, credit, environmental problems, governance, conflict, or any number of other related topics. By choosing less technical datasets or a different thematic focus, this lesson could also be used with younger students.

OBJECTIVES

At the end of the lesson students will:

- 1) Identify factors contributing to poverty and inequality.
 - 2) Utilize new data to support or undermine prior hypotheses.
 - 3) Demonstrate understanding of economic concepts such as GINI coefficient, trade liberalization, and purchasing power parity through use of these terms during discussion.
 - 4) Form new hypotheses as additional evidence is introduced.
 - 5) Evaluate the available evidence and use it to support tentative conclusions.
 - 6) Verbally express ideas.
 - 7) Disagree with other students in respectful and appropriate fashion.
 - 8) Generate new questions for future inquiry.
 - 9) Write a three page paper synthesizing the three most convincing arguments.
 - 10) Use evidence to support written ideas.
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TIME

This lesson will take five class periods to implement.

Day 1: Set up lesson (hook) and brainstorm hypotheses.

Day 2: Work on data sets in groups.

Day 3: Work on data sets in groups.

Day 4: Work on data sets in groups.

Day 5: Discuss most convincing hypotheses as a group. Generate new questions for future inquiry.

MATERIALS

- Computer and projector connected to the internet (for introductory video and data sets)
- Copies of the datasets for each student.
- Blank transparencies for recording hypotheses
- Desks arranged in groups of four.

LESSON PROCEDURE

Engagement

Day 1:

To introduce the lesson, show students the 18 minute video from the PBS Frontline World series which follows the journey of a Mexican immigrant, Matias Garcia, who died trying to cross the border into the US.

<http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/stories/mexico/>

The video is an appropriate hook because it is a compelling and sad story which motivates the students to care about the issue of poverty by linking global poverty to our dependence on immigrant labor in the US. The video shows extensive footage of Garcia's home and family, and provides a starting point for thinking about the causes of poverty for his family. Any other film clip showing people living in poverty, or extreme disparities of wealth, would serve as an appropriate hook.

Hypothesize

Remind students that the video shows one portrait of poverty, there are many other scenarios in different regions of the world. Following the video, have students brainstorm answers the focus question. Write the following question on the board:

What explains inequality in our world; why are some people rich and some people poor?

Have students silently brainstorm and write their ideas on a piece of scratch paper. Then put students in groups of four, have them share their hypotheses, and generate new ones together. (it may be a good idea to carefully choose groups so that they are heterogeneous) Once they have had enough time to generate a long list, ask them to

“think outside the box” and generate three more ideas that they don’t agree with, but that other people might propose. (this gives them the opportunity to include ideas like “laziness” which they might be reluctant to bring up lest they seem prejudiced.)

Ask each group to designate one member as the reporter, and focus attention on the front of the room. Hand out the “Hypothesis Record Sheet” to all of the students. Instruct the students that the next step is to gather all the hypotheses. Ask the first group for one of their ideas. Write it on the (overhead) sheet and instruct all of the students to do the same. Then ask the second group for one idea, different from the first. Record their idea and move on, again asking for a *different* idea. Continue around the room until all of the hypotheses have been exhausted. The students should all have the same hypotheses recorded on their sheet in the same order. Keep the overhead in order to more easily refer back to the initial hypotheses.

Gather Data

On days 2-4 students will work in groups to analyze data sets and find evidence that supports or undermines the hypotheses generated by the class.

Complete list of Datasets:

1. GDP per capita map, graph of world poverty lines
2. Excerpt on Burma Resources Curse
3. Trade Liberalization and World Poverty
4. Agriculture in India
5. <http://www.peacecorps.gov/www/multimedia/slideshows/springbox/index.html>, a Slideshow about water in Cameroon.
6. Human Development Report pp 16-18: Water and Poverty
7. IFPRI Issue Brief: Globalization of Food and Agriculture
8. UN GINI Coefficients and WDI GDP per capita
9. <http://www.oxfam.org/en/video/2008/conflict-in-dr-congo>, Video about conflict in Congo.
10. IFPRI Issue Brief: Public Expenditure
11. Education and Poverty
12. WDI 2008 Global Economy Intro

Day 2: Pass out Dataset 1 and let students study the maps and graphs. Have them discuss the information with their groups and determine which hypotheses are supported or undermined. Go around the room and ask each group to report to the class. Model for students how to record this information on the Record Sheet.

{** before moving on, explain the concept of purchasing power parity }

Pass out dataset Dataset 2 and have a student read it to the class. Again, ask students to discuss with their group which hypothesis is supported or undermined by the evidence. Briefly discuss this as a class.

{** before passing out Dataset 3, review the terms *trade liberalization, economic growth, tariffs, subsidies.*}

Pass out the third dataset and have the students read it aloud in their groups, then note which hypothesis are supported or undermined. Before the end of the hour, ask the class if anyone has come up with a *new* hypothesis not yet mentioned. Review which hypotheses were supported and undermined by the first three datasets.

Day 3: Start the class by having two students read Dataset 4 aloud. Discuss in groups, report to class. Watch Dataset 5

<http://www.peacecorps.gov/wvs/multimedia/slideshows/springbox/index.html>, a slideshow about water in Cameroon. Pass out Dataset 6. First have the students look only at the graphs on page 17. Point out on a world map where each country is located. Lead a short discussion illuminating the differences between piped water, protected wells, unprotected wells, surface water, utilities and informal providers to be sure that students understand the significance of the graphs. Work in groups to discuss the significance of the graphs, then have them read the text aloud within their group to identify which hypothesis are supported or undermined. Report to class. Last, hand out dataset 7 and have the students read it quietly to themselves, write down the evidence as it applies to the hypotheses, and *then* confer with their group. Report back to the class, and review the evidence of the day.

Day 4: {***Start the class by introducing the GINI coefficient, GDP per capita, PPP, and the Rich/Poor ratios.}

Hand out dataset 8 and have students study it in together to pull out relevant evidence. Report to class. Watch Dataset 9 <http://www.oxfam.org/en/video/2008/conflict-in-dr-congo>, discuss in groups. Report to class. Lastly, hand out datasets 10 and 11. Have students examine these on their own to find relevant evidence, conferring with groups as needed. Report to class. Assign dataset 12 as homework.

Conclusions

Day 5: Lead the class in a discussion about the focus question:

What explains inequality in our world? Why are some people rich and some people poor?

First, give students five minutes at the beginning of class to gather their ideas and pull together evidence about the two best hypotheses, although as discussion proceeds they can change their minds based on the points made by their peers. (Emphasize that this is a tentative conclusion, subject to change based on new evidence.) Ask students to support their conclusions with specific evidence and references to the datasets. Encourage them to challenge their peers in a respectful way by bringing up contradictory, undermining, or alternative evidence. Encourage all students to participate and call on quiet students when there is a lull. If time permits, ask which hypotheses were undermined most by the data.

During the last ten minutes have the students generate a list of questions that the inquiry has raised. These questions could form the basis for future lessons, or for research projects later in the semester.

Assign the students a three page paper where they identify the two most convincing hypothesis, and the least convincing hypothesis based on the data they have collected. They should provide specific evidence that either confirms or undermines each hypothesis.

ASSESSMENT

- 1. Informal:** Let students know on the first day that part of their grade will depend on their active participation in small group discussions. During the three days of data gathering, circulate and observe students level of participation.
- 2. Oral:** Evaluate students ability use evidence to support their ideas during the summative discussion on day five.

Written: Have students hand in their Evidence Record. In addition, will write a three page paper based on the evidence they have Complete list of Datasets:

13. GDP per capita map, graph of world poverty lines
 14. Excerpt on Burma Resources Curse
 15. Trade Liberalization and World Poverty
 16. Agriculture in India
 17. <http://www.peacecorps.gov/wws/multimedia/slideshows/springbox/index.html>, a Slideshow about water in Cameroon.
 18. Human Development Report pp 16-18: Water and Poverty
 19. IFPRI Issue Brief: Globalization of Food and Agriculture
 20. UN GINI Coefficients and WDI GDP per capita
 21. <http://www.oxfam.org/en/video/2008/conflict-in-dr-congo>, Video about conflict in Congo.
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- 3.** gathered.