Overview

Concern for the importance of a multicultural dimension in the school curriculum has been growing in recent years. Interdependence among all nations as they face global issues related to scarce natural resources, the ecosystem and environment, nuclear weapons, poverty, immigration, and human rights makes it necessary for future citizens of all nations to understand the importance of our culturally diverse world. A curriculum guide using an economic perspective can help teachers and students appreciate the multicultural dimension of our diverse society.

The Economics of Our Diverse Society: Lessons on Economic and Social Issues curriculum unit is designed for courses in social studies, economics, and civics at the secondary level. The goals of this unit are to demonstrate that economics can help students understand complex issues related to diversity and to apply economic analysis to a variety of topics such as immigration, entrepreneurship, poverty, and boycotts and labor strikes. Students are introduced to relevant economic concepts, including incentives, exchange, decision making and opportunity costs, broad social goals, human capital, investment in human capital, and entrepreneurship.

The lesson format is teacher-friendly and ready-to-use in the classroom. Each lesson includes a statement of concepts, instructional objectives, materials required, and detailed teaching procedures. Black line masters are also included for ease of teacher use, along with suggested follow-up activities and resource materials.

Lesson 1 — Youth in the Economy

Adolescents, regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, or gender participate in the economy. This lesson helps students understand that they take similar roles in the economy as consumers, workers, savers, and investors. In this lesson, students interview a partner to complete a survey that examines their economic behavior and the choices they make as participants in the economy. The survey information provides a basis for discussing their roles in the economy.

Lesson 2 — The Constitution: Economic Equity and Freedom

By participating in a survey activity and analyzing the results of the survey, students learn how the U.S. Constitution affects their own, as well as their families’, daily lives.

Lesson 3 — Goals and Trade-offs

Students learn about the broad social goals of the United States. They analyze the trade-offs that are made among goals when a particular policy or program is undertaken. Students recognize that these trade-offs are made because our population is diverse. People’s beliefs about these broad social goals and the programs or policies designed to achieve them depend on the people’s ages, race, gender, cultural background, religious beliefs, current employment, education level, and many other factors.
Lesson 4 — What Should Local Governments Do?

Students role-play a city council, using the PACED decision-making process to choose how to allocate city funds for programs. All levels of government — local, state, and national — make economic decisions. To make these decisions, the members of government must determine what the goals of citizens are, which resources are available to meet these goals, and how best to allocate resources to meet these goals. Communities, states, and the United States have diverse citizens who have different priorities and goals. Those making government decisions must keep these different priorities and goals in mind when making decisions.

Lesson 5 — When the New World Was Old

This lesson introduces a set of questions that can be used to guide economic thinking about human behavior. Regardless of the differences among societies, the economic way of thinking is a tool of analysis that can help predict how people will behave. Students work in groups to identify and analyze the economic principles described in two readings about Native American cultures.

Lesson 6 — Asian, European, Hispanic Immigration to the U.S.

Many people from all over the world look outside their countries for increased employment opportunities and economic freedom. Immigrants respond to incentives. They seek the most advantageous combination of benefits and costs. In this lesson, students apply economic reasoning to explain why people emigrate to the United States. Millions of immigrants came to the United States between the Civil War and World War I. While many came from Western Europe, an increasing number came from Asia, South America, and Africa. Initially, there were no limits set on the number of people who could enter the United States from other countries; however, over time, immigration laws were established.

Lesson 7 — Boycotts and Labor Strikes

Students read and discuss an essay about the grape boycott led by Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta. Students learn about the formation of the National Farm Workers Association and examine the economic impact of the nationwide grape boycott.

Lesson 8 — What Is Money?

Over time, people of different cultures throughout the world progressed through similar stages in the development of money: specialization, barter exchange, exchange using commodity money, and exchange using fiat money. In this lesson, students read about items that were used as money in different cultures and analyze how well these items met the criteria for a good medium of exchange. They also learn about two other functions of money: standard of value and store of value.
Lesson 9 — Successful Entrepreneurs

Males and females, people of all races, ethnic origins, and religions are entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurs have human capital that allows them to succeed. In addition, successful entrepreneurs develop their human capital through training and experience. In this lesson, students learn about important attributes that entrepreneurs possess. They learn about successful entrepreneurs and how these entrepreneurs improve their human capital. Additionally, students assess their own human capital in terms of entrepreneurial qualities.

Lesson 10 — The Economics of Poverty

Poverty occurs among people regardless of race, gender, or ethnic background. It occurs in urban and rural areas among both young and old. There is much political debate about the issue of poverty. Do people choose to be poor, are people poor through no fault of their own, or does poverty result from some combination of people’s choices and outside factors? In this lesson, students analyze data to determine who the poor are and attempt to apply economic reasoning to the problem of poverty.

We hope that you will find these lessons useful in your classroom. This set of lessons would not be possible without the assistance of many people, specifically Dwain Myers, Cindy Case, Sharon Nemeth, Dr. Robert Sorensen, Barbara Flowers, Sarapage McCorkle, and Nebraska Economics Fellows.

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