



POWELL CENTER FOR
ECONOMIC LITERACY

Lesson Plan

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Spatial Scarcity

Time Required

15 – 30 Minutes

Grade Level and Subject

K-2 (easily modified for Grades 3-6); Study Skills

Keystone Principles

Principle #1 – We All Make Choices

Principle #7 – Economic Thinking Is Marginal Thinking

Economic Concepts

Choice – *What someone must make when faced with two or more alternative uses of a resource.*

Cost - *The total spent for goods or services including money and time and labor and opportunity cost.*

Marginal thinking – *The ability to evaluate whether the benefit of one more unit of something is greater than its cost.*

Scarcity – *Not being able to have all of the goods, services, time or space that you want. Scarcity forces people to make choices.*

Voluntary National Content Standards in Economics

Content Standard #1

Overview

It is important to recognize that issues of scarcity expand beyond the traditional idea of goods and services. The concept is just as applicable to issues of time and space. Many students confront spatial scarcity as they try to manage the contents of their backpacks. Applying the economic principles of choice, cost and marginal thinking will help students bring order and clarity to a sometimes daunting task.

Objectives

- Students will be able to explain how they can confront scarcity by making choices that involve opportunity costs and tradeoffs.

Materials and Handouts

- The backpack or tote bag you use to carry items back and forth to school, and an assortment of things you carry in it
- Picture list of backpack items

Teaching Activity

1. Begin this activity by asking the following three questions of the class:
 - Can anybody tell me what scarcity means?
 - Can anybody give me an example of an item in our classroom that can be scarce?
2. Can anyone identify a spot in our class where there does not seem to be enough space for what we want to do in it? That is an example of space scarcity.
3. Relate to your class your own difficulty with spatial scarcity, or use the following scenario. *Last night I had a space scarcity problem. Do you see this big bag? You may see it by my desk every morning. I usually fill it at the end of the day with the items that I want to take home. Here are all of the items that I wanted to take home last night.* (Display items – use the items that you usually take home with you.)

Suggested items:

- Lunch bag
 - Letters from the office
 - 24 math homework notebooks
 - Reading teacher's manual
 - 3 literature books
 - Lesson plan book
4. *Can anyone identify the problem that I had last night?* (There was not enough room in the bag for all of the items you wanted to take home.)
 5. *How do you think that I solved that problem?* (I had to prioritize – choose which items that I wanted most to be in the bag and the rest I had to carry in my arms or leave here.)

6. *Does anything like this ever happen to you with your backpack?*

Group Activity

Have a child sized backpack (you can even ask a student to volunteer theirs for the activity) and a sampling of items that your students would generally have to fill their backpack such as:

1. Lunch box
2. Pencil case
3. Art project
4. Ball for recess
5. Baseball glove
6. Hat
7. Show and tell item
8. Binder
9. Extra shirt
10. Packet of graded papers

Ask the following questions of your students:

1. *I have a sample of items that you often need to take home at night. Do you think they will all fit in the backpack?* Have a student volunteer to try it.
2. *What happened?* Answers will vary.
3. *What should we do now? How can we make sure that the most important things go home protected in our backpack?* Have the students consider all of the items and choose the most important one to go in first.
4. *I have a big sheet up here (Handout #1) that has a picture of each item with a little block in front of it. We are going to vote as a class on which item is the most important. The item with the most votes gets a number one. Then we will vote on the item that is the second most important and so on.* Fill in the large sheet as a whole group. Have one student stuff the backpack according to the priority list. You might ask students to predict how many of the prioritized items they think will fit.
5. *What should we do with the extra items that are left over and do not fit into the backpack?* Answers will vary. Leave some at school and take them home the next day, ask a friend to help you take the items to your car, or try to carry the rest in your hand. State that each of these ideas are valid options depending on how important it is to get all of the items home.
6. Remind students that they often deal with spatial scarcity in the classroom. Explain that the exercise just completed was done as a group, but individually they may have different priorities. Pass out a copy of handout #1 to each child. Instruct students to number the items from 1 – 10 in order of importance to them. Allow 5 minutes for the numbering. Instruct those who finish early to color those items which they think are fragile, or have students draw on the back any additional items they might want to have in their own backpack.
7. Ask for two volunteers to share with the class the numbers they assigned and why

they chose that particular order. Alternatively, with guidance from the teacher the two volunteers could model sharing their answers and reasons with each other as a partner share. Then divide the rest of the class into pairs and have them share with each other.

Summary

Spatial Scarcity is something that we often deal with in our class and in our lives. At the end of the activity, ask for a student to remind the class what spatial scarcity is or give an example. Ensure that students understand having a plan for good choices helps handle the problem of spatial scarcity. Encourage them to remember this activity any time they have difficulty finding enough room their backpacks.

Lesson Extensions

- Center. Put the backpack and the items in a center and have each student try their priority plan and write a response as to how it worked.
- Language. Create a class book about what is in their backpacks. Each child can contribute their own page. Some students may be able to draw the items on a master with a picture of a backpack on it and then choose one of the following activities
 1. Dictate a sentence on the bottom of the page.
 2. Fill in a form sentence partially filled in. *I have _____ in my backpack.*
 3. Free write and describe what is in their backpack.
- Mathematics. You can also have each child count how many items that they have in their backpack and then count on the number line to find out how many items that the class has all together in their backpack.

Name _____



Order the items below in the priority that you would put them in your backpack. Number the items by putting a number one by the item that you think is the most important all the way to putting a number ten by the least important.

