The Hard Times Jar

Lesson by: Jessica Kocon
New Heights Charter School

Grade Level: 3rd - 4th
INTRODUCTION

I work at a small, K – 12, charter school in Stillwater, Minnesota. Although our single school is actually our own district, we teach according to standards and have an Authorizer that ensures we are professionally sound as teachers. The students at our school are primarily of low socioeconomic status. Although we have little diversity in terms of race and ethnicity, our students have varying degrees of parent involvement in their life and often, limited life experiences. Our school has a rate of 50% free/reduced lunch, with a large majority of elementary students living in a nearby trailer home community.

Because of the dynamic background my students bring to the classroom, I really enjoyed using the book The Hard Times Jar. I chose the book because of its subtle references to poverty, which relates strongly to students who struggle with money at home. The book also helps to emphasize the importance and value of education. (A value my students often take for granted or do not recognize.) The use of this book helped to supplement the curriculum and textbook I usually use to teach social studies.

A few modifications were made for students of lower academic ability. Rather than writing during different portions of the lessons, students were able to draw a picture and in the assessment when reading was required of students, I read the page for them.

LESSON DESCRIPTION

In this lesson, students learn about scarcity, alternatives, economic choices and opportunity cost. The lesson begins with a review of the economic concepts of scarcity, alternatives, economic choices and opportunity costs. The book, The Hard Times Jar by Ethel Footman Smothers is then read aloud.
Discussion follows as students answer questions in a whole group about the story and how it pertains to the economic concepts. After the discussion, students work through an economic-related hands-on activity involving hot chocolate. As an assessment, students demonstrate their understanding by identifying the economic concepts in specific scenarios and then make up a scenario themselves.

TIME REQUIRED: 2 sessions of 35 minutes

CONTENT STANDARDS

- Social Studies (Economics)
  - 1.2.3.3.1: Define scarcity as not having enough of something to satisfy everyone’s wants and give examples.
  - 2.2.3.3.1: Describe the trade-offs of a decision and the opportunity cost of a choice as the next best alternative that was not chosen.
  - 4.2.1.1.1: Apply a reasoned decision-making process to make a choice.

KEY ECONOMIC CONCEPTS

- Choice
- Alternatives
- Opportunity Cost
- Scarcity
- Income (previously taught)
- Saving (previously taught)

RELATED SUBJECT AREAS

- Language Arts (Reading, Writing)
- Math (Problem Solving)
OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to:

- Define scarcity
- Explain how scarcity influences decisions
- Identify economic choice, alternatives and opportunity cost in a given situation

MATERIALS

- The Hard Times Jar by Ethel Footman Smothers
- Loose Leaf paper for each student
- 1 Copy of Supplement 1: Key Economics
- Styrofoam cups (1 per student)
- Hot water (enough for 1 ½ full cup per student)
- Hot Chocolate Mix (1 serving per student)
- Mini Marshmallows (4 mallows per student)
- Measuring Cups (1 per group – students should share)
- Spoons (1 per group – students should share)
- 1 Small Sized Baggie per student
- Copies of Assessment Parts 1 and 2 (1 per student)
- 1 Copy of Assessment Parts 1 and 2 KEY
DAY 1

PREPARATION

- Make all copies
- Locate The Hard Times Jar book

PROCEDURES / INSTRUCTION

1. Distribute a sheet of loose-leaf paper to each student. Tell students to list EVERYTHING they would buy at Target if everything were free. 
   ( Adaptation: students may draw ) Give students 5 minutes to write ( but don't let them all finish ). Tell them to number the top 3 choices with 1, 2, and 3. Begin a discussion with following questions:
   a. Were you able to write down everything you would buy? (no)
   b. Why weren't you able to write everything down? ( didn't have enough time
   c. When you go to your favorite store, are you able to buy everything you want? (no)
   d. Why don't you get everything you want? ( not enough money, not enough time. )

2. Display Supplement 1: Economic Concepts

3. Explain the following to students:
   a. The reason you were not able to write down everything you would buy at the store is because you didn't have enough time. This means that your amount of time was scarce ( i.e. you had too many things you wanted to write down and not enough time ).
   b. The reason you are not able to buy everything you want at the store is because you ( or your parents ) don't have enough money or don't have enough time. This means that your amount of time or money was scarce ( i.e. you had too many things you want to buy with not enough time or money to buy them )
c. Therefore, **scarcity** means that you have less of something that you want.

d. When you go to the store and you don't have enough time or money, you need to make an **economic choice** between two possibilities. The possibilities are called **alternatives**. The **opportunity cost** is the alternative you gave up to make a choice.

e. So, for example, if you go to Target and you want to buy a new DS and a new iPod, but your money is scarce and you can't buy both, you have a **scarcity** of money. What are your alternatives? (buy the DS or the iPod) If you purchase the iPod, what are you giving up? (DS) What is your **opportunity cost**? (DS) If you choose to purchase the DS, what are you giving up? (iPod) What is your **opportunity cost**? (iPod)

f. Ask a few students to identify the **alternatives**, **economic choice** and the **opportunity cost** from their list.

4. Tell students that you are going to read a story to them about a girl named Emma. Tell students to listen carefully for what is scarce and for opportunity costs.

5. Read **The Hard Times Jar**

6. Discuss the following:

   a. What was **scarcity** for Emma and her family? (money)

   b. What was Emma's solution to read without having books? (make her own stories)

   c. What did Emma and her family do with the money they made? (saved it and put it in the hard times jar, only to be used in case they ran out of something important)

   d. What would Emma buy with the money if she could? (books)

   e. What did Emma and her family to do earn **income**? (pick and sell apples)
f. What did Mama tell Emma she was going to do instead of picking apples? (go to school)

g. What was the opportunity cost for Emma going to school? (picking less apples, making less income)

h. What did Emma find that was not scarce at her school? (books)

i. What choice did Emma have to make about the books? (to keep them at school or bring them home)

j. What did Emma do with the income that her family had earned? (bought books)

k. Do you think Emma would have been able to buy books if her family had not saved it in the Hard Times Jar? (no)

7. Explain to students that tomorrow they are going to have a special treat to help practice these concepts of economics.

**DAY 2**

**PREPARATION**

- Prepare hot water
- With 1 baggie per student, measure the necessary amount of hot chocolate (see label on package)
- Count out enough marshmallows for each student to have 3 (modify as necessary)

**PROCEDURES / INSTRUCTION**

1. Remind students that yesterday we read a story about Emma and her family.
   a. What was the story about? (Emma was a young girl who was very poor; she helped her family pick and sell apples for a living; she
was finally able to go to school but had to give up helping her family
make money)

b. What was scarce in the story? (money, books)

2. Set out enough cups for each student.
3. Divide students into groups of 4 or 5
4. Pour hot water into cups
5. Give students the pre-measured amount of hot chocolate – give 1 less
   baggie than there are students in the group
6. Give each group a spoon to share
7. Supervise students as they mix
8. Pass out marshmallows and instruct students to equally divide the
   marshmallows (pass out enough for 3 per student, except for 1 student in
   the group)
9. Soon after, students should be letting you know that they didn’t get
   enough marshmallows or chocolate mix
10. When students come to you with this problem, instruct them that they
    need to determine the alternatives and make a choice about how to solve
    the problem. (Alternatives: students each get a very small cup of hot
    chocolate or a full gallon is made but is watered down so that each
    student gets a full cup)
11. When students decide on a choice and pass out the hot chocolate, the
    other students may complain or be shocked by what they were given.
12. Discuss the following with students:
   a. Why couldn’t everyone have a full glass of hot chocolate? (hot
      chocolate mix was scarce)
   b. Why couldn’t everyone have an equal amount of marshmallows?
      (marshmallows were scarce)
   c. What were the alternatives to solve the scarcity problem? (all
      students get a smaller amount of hot chocolate OR all get a full
      glass that is watered down)
d. What was the final choice made? (whatever was chosen)
e. What was the opportunity cost? (the opposite of what was chosen)
f. Did you find it hard to make the choice? (yes) Why? (didn’t want to make anyone upset)
g. What else was scarce in the activity? (spoons)
h. NOTE: Students may solve the problem independently and not bring the problem to your attention. If this occurs, still work through the questions as mentioned above. Some students may also need the scarce items pointed out.
i. Make sure all students gets a “good” glass of hot chocolate and marshmallows at the end of the discussion

CLOSURE

1. Review the important content in the lesson by discussing:

➢ What is a choice? (a decision made between two possibilities)
➢ What are alternatives? (possibilities you can choose from)
➢ What do we call the alternative that was given up when we made a choice? (opportunity cost)
➢ Do you find it hard to make choices in real life when you want more than one thing? (yes)
➢ Why do we have to make choices? (because there’s not enough of everything we want; scarcity)

ASSESSMENT

1. Distribute Handout 1: Assessment Part 1 and Part 2
2. Review the instructions for the assessment page. Assign the page. Give students time to finish. (Adaptation: Read page aloud to students)
3. When students have finished their worksheet, review the answers with them.

EXTENSION / CONNECTION

1. Activity from "So Few of Me" lesson by Andrew T. Hill, Ph.D., Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia
2. Students can create a list of items they would buy from a specialty store, then prioritize their choices; noting the alternatives and opportunity cost.

REFLECTION

I presented this lesson toward the beginning of my economics unit. The students in my class had not learned about economic concepts prior to the unit that was presented this year; therefore, they had minimal background knowledge with the vocabulary. This was something that I kept in mind while presenting the unit and lesson. Additionally, I knew that my students struggle with money issues at home so I knew I needed to be sensitive to these kinds of situations yet also knew that I could use student's prior knowledge of their home experiences.

After completing the entire lesson in 1 day, I realized that it should have been broken up into two separate sessions. This would make me work through the prior knowledge and vocabulary at a slower pace as well as prepare for the hot chocolate portion of the lesson with additional time. When I broke the students up into groups with the scarcity of hot chocolate and marshmallows, my students took it upon themselves to solve the problems with scarcity, therefore I had to facilitate a conversation about how to manage the scarcity after the lesson rather than during. From this realization, I altered the lesson to give out the edible materials in small baggies to aid in the student realization that there was not enough of something. Alternatively, I could have used a trail mix as the edible treat, utilizing a scarcity of certain items to demonstrate the economics
concepts. This would be a great alternative for a warmer day, especially if the preparation of the hot was too time consuming or difficult to prepare.

Overall, the lesson went well and my students demonstrated learning in the assessment for the Economics in literacy class as well as with the classroom assessment. The students really enjoyed the lesson and were engaged in the process of learning about scarcity.
Supplement 1 – Key Economics

**Economic Choice** - A decision that has to be made between possibilities.

**Alternatives** – The possibilities that we can choose in a situation.

**Opportunity Cost** – What we give up to get our first choice.

**Scarcity** – Wanting more of something than is available.
**Assessment - Part 1**

**Situation 1:** Keenan is having a party and you need to buy him a gift. You know he really likes karate and math but you only have enough money to buy 1 thing. So, you could buy him either nunchakus (2 pieces of hardwood joined by a chain) or a math workbook. Decide what you should buy Keenan.

What is **scarce**? ____________________________________________

List the **alternatives**

1) ____________________________________________

2) ____________________________________________

What would you **choose** to buy him? ____________________________________________

What would be the **opportunity cost**? ____________________________________________

**Situation 2:** Alondra is having a party and you need to buy her a gift. You know she likes reading and jewelry but you only have enough money to buy 1 thing. So, you could buy her either a book or a necklace. Decide what you should buy Alondra.

What is **scarce**? ____________________________________________

List the **alternatives**

1) ____________________________________________

2) ____________________________________________

What would you **choose** to buy her? ____________________________________________

What would be the **opportunity cost**? ____________________________________________
Assessment Part 2

Draw a line to match the vocabulary word on Side A with the definition on Side B.

1. Opportunity Cost
   a. Possibilities to choose
2. Scarcity
   b. Decision about what to do
3. Choice
   c. Having less of something than you want
4. Alternatives
   d. The best alternative that is given up when a choice is made

5. Why do we have to make choices? ________________________________

_________________________________________________________________

6. Write about a time that you had to make a choice between two different things.

What was scarce? ________________________________

List the alternatives 1) ________________________________

   2) ________________________________

What did you choose? ________________________________

What was the opportunity cost? ________________________________
**Assessment Part 1 - KEY**

**Situation 1:** Keean is having a party and you need to buy him a gift. You know he really likes karate and math but you only have enough money to buy 1 thing. So, you could buy him either nunchakus (2 pieces of hardwood joined by a chain) or a math workbook. Decide what you should buy Keean.

What is **scarce?** Money

List the **alternatives** 1) Buy the nunchakus

2) Buy a math workbook

What would you **choose** to buy him? **Either alternative**

What would be the **opportunity cost?** Opposite alternative of final choice

**Situation 2:** Alondra is having a party and you need to buy her a gift. You know she likes reading and jewelry but you only have enough money to buy 1 thing. So, you could buy her either a book or a necklace. Decide what you should buy Alondra.

What is **scarce?** Money

List the **alternatives** 1) Buy a book

2) Buy a necklace

What would you **choose** to buy her? **Either alternative**

What would be the **opportunity cost?** Opposite alternative of final choice
Assessment Part 2 - Key

Draw a line to match the vocabulary word on Side A with the definition on Side B.

1. Opportunity Cost
2. Scarcity
3. Choice
4. Alternatives

a. Possibilities to choose
b. Decision about what to do
c. Having less of something than you want
d. The best alternative that is given up when a choice is made

5. Why do we have to make choices? Because of scarcity; we can't have everything that we want

6. Write about a time that you had to make a choice between two different things.

Answers will vary; check for reasonableness.

What was scarce?

List the alternatives 1)

2)

What did you choose?

What was the opportunity cost?
Pictures of Lesson
The Hard Times Jar by Jessica Koocon

Name: Keenan

Date: 19/10

ASSessment - Part 1

Situation 1: Keenan is having a party and you need to buy him a gift. You know he really likes karate and math but you only have enough money to buy 1 thing. So, you could buy him either a nunchakus (2 pieces of hardwood joined by a chain) or a math workbook. Decide what you should buy Keenan.

What is scarce? money is scarce

List the alternatives 1) nunchakus

2) math notebook

What would you choose to buy him? nunchakus

What would be the opportunity cost? math notebook

Situation 2: Alondra is having a party and you need to buy her a gift. You know she likes reading and jewelry but you only have enough money to buy 1 thing. So, you could buy her either a book or a necklace. Decide what you should buy Alondra.

What is scarce? money

List the alternatives 1) a book

2) a necklace

What would you choose to buy her? a book

What would be the opportunity cost? a necklace
Assessment Part 2

Draw a line to match the vocabulary word on Side A with the definition on Side B.

1. Opportunity Cost
   a. Possibilities to choose
2. Scarcity
   b. Decision about what to do
3. Choice
   c. Having less of something than you want
4. Alternatives
   d. The best alternative that is given up when a choice is made

5) Why do we have to make choices? ___________ things

6. Write about a time that you had to make a choice between two different things.
   What was scarce? ________________
   List the alternatives 1) ________________
   2) ________________
   What did you choose? ________________
   What was the opportunity cost? ________________
**ASSessment - Part 1**

**Situation 1:** Keean is having a party and you need to buy him a gift. You know he really likes karate and math but you only have enough money to buy 1 thing. So, you could buy him either a nunchakus (2 pieces of hardwood joined by a chain) or a math workbook. Decide what you should buy Keean.

What is scarce? **Money** +

List the alternatives 1) **Workbook** +

2) **Nunchakus** +

What would you choose to buy him? **Nunchakus** +

What would be the opportunity cost? **Workbook** +

**Situation 2:** Alondra is having a party and you need to buy her a gift. You know she likes reading and jewelry but you only have enough money to buy 1 thing. So, you could buy her either a book or a necklace. Decide what you should buy Alondra.

What is scarce? **Money** +

List the alternatives 1) **Book** +

2) **Necklace** +

What would you choose to buy her? **Book** +

What would be the opportunity cost? **Necklace** +
Assessment Part 2

Draw a line to match the vocabulary word on Side A with the definition on Side B.

1. Opportunity Cost
2. Scarcity
3. Choice
4. Alternatives

- a. Possibilities to choose
- b. Decision about what to do
- c. Having less of something than you want
- d. The best alternative that is given up when a choice is made

5. Why do we have to make choices? Because we can't do everything.

6. Write about a time that you had to make a choice between two different things.

What was scarce? Money

List the alternatives 1) buy guitar
2) save money

What did you choose? Save money

What was the opportunity cost? Buy guitar
**Assessment - Part 1**

**Situation 1:** Keean is having a party and you need to buy him a gift. You know he really likes karate and math but you only have enough money to buy 1 thing. So, you could buy him either a nunchakus (2 pieces of hardwood joined by a chain) or a math workbook. Decide what you should buy Keean.

What is **scarce?** not enough money

List the **alternatives** 1) nunchakus + 2) of math work book

What would you **choose** to buy him? nunchakus

What would be the **opportunity cost?** math work book

**Situation 2:** Alondra is having a party and you need to buy her a gift. You know she likes reading and jewelry but you only have enough money to buy 1 thing. So, you could buy her either a book or a necklace. Decide what you should buy Alondra.

What is **scarce?** not enough money

List the **alternatives** 1) jewlery + 2) book +

What would you **choose** to buy her? jewlery

What would be the **opportunity cost?** book +