The Rising Tide of Poverty

We live in an economically divided world. One-fifth of the world's population enjoys relative wealth, while the other four-fifths have barely the means of survival. As the wealthy industrialized countries speak of economic progress, the ranks of the poor in less developed countries continue to grow. This disparity of wealth and the spread of poverty threaten the future quality of life for all of Earth's inhabitants.

For the majority of the world's people, poverty is far more than an economic condition. Poverty's effects extend into all aspects of a person's life, such as susceptibility to disease, limited access to most types of services and information, subordination to higher social and economic classes, and complete insecurity in the face of changing circumstances.

The number of people living in slums and shantytowns is rapidly increasing. A growing number lack access to clean water and sanitation and hence fall victim to the diseases that arise from this absence. There is noticeable progress in some places, but on the whole, poverty continues and the numbers of people living in poverty multiply. About one-third of people living in developing countries, or 1.3 billion people still struggle to provide for their basic needs on one dollar a day.¹

Who Are the Poor?

Most of the world's more than one billion poor live in Africa, Asia and Latin America. The poor are overwhelmingly illiterate, and therefore lack access to information and ideas that could help them escape poverty. Three-quarters of the poor live in rural areas and are dependent on agriculture for their main source of income.² With most of the land owned by a wealthy few, the majority of the world's population is landless. Population growth divides family subsistence farms into smaller and smaller plots, until they no longer provide subsistence. Then, typically, poor people are forced to work as dispossessed laborers for others, unable to achieve economic prosperity.

Poverty is not fairly distributed among people. Women, children, the elderly and ethnic minorities are inevitably hardest hit. Women are disadvantaged by the fact that they frequently cannot own land or get access to credit, and have less access to education and good employment opportunities. For children, chronic hunger can harm their health and mental development and stunt their growth. Worldwide, 160 million children are malnourished, and 110 million children are out of school.³ Lacking sufficient nourishment and clean water, one in ten of these youngsters dies before her or his fifth birthday.⁴

What A Difference!

Great disparities in living standards exist between the world's rich and poor. In 1996, the world had 358 billionaires. Their income and assets totaled more than the combined annual incomes of countries where 45 percent of world population lives.² Wealthy nations have almost tripled their per capita income since mid-century, but that figure in the poorest countries has remained basically constant. Developing countries make up only $5 trillion of the $23 trillion of the global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) every year, despite the fact that they are home to 80 percent of the world's people.⁶ Furthermore, a full 60 to 70 percent of people in most countries earn less than their nation's average income.
In recent years, the term “developing country” has become a misnomer: many countries are not so much developing as they are losing their fights to eradicate poverty. Only 15 countries have seen rapidly rising incomes since 1980. In 70 countries, average incomes are lower than they were in 1980. Though industrialized countries experienced an economic resurgence, other regions of the world did not share in this prosperity. Less developed countries in Africa and Asia endured economic decline, accompanied by rapid population growth, famine and ecological deterioration.

**No Place Like Home**

Although most of the world’s poor are residents of less developed countries, due to unequal distribution of wealth, people in even the world’s richest countries can fall victim to vicious cycles of poverty. In the United States, for example, the richest one percent of the people own 36 percent of the nation’s wealth. Throughout the developed world, in places like Canada, the United States, Australia and countries in Europe, a total of 100 million people live below the poverty line, and an estimated five million people are homeless.

The housing situation in less developed countries is also bleak. Low-income housing is almost non-existent in most developing-world cities. Generally, those on low incomes either rent rooms, live on the streets or construct shacks in *shantytowns*, illegal settlements of cardboard shacks surrounding cities. Thirty to 60 percent of all people in developing countries live in shantytowns. Without indoor plumbing, shantytown dwellers use open latrines which produce airborne poisons and contaminate the water supply. The location of shantytowns, often near garbage dumps and hazardous waste sites, further endangers their residents. Disease and death are everyday occurrences for millions of urban poor.

The appearance of these shantytowns is usually due to the migration of people from the countryside, where jobs in largely agriculture-based economies are scarce, to the city in hopes of finding work and building a better life. It is estimated that over one million people each week relocate to urban areas in the developing world.

**Impoverish the Earth**

Continued poverty places much of the world’s people on a collision course with environmental disaster. Most of the world’s countries depend on the export of agricultural products for their livelihood. But agricultural expansion can often cause ecological stress. Wealthy landowners, cultivating more and more acres for commercial crops, continue to push subsistence farmers onto poor land. Farmers, pushed onto marginal land by population growth and inequitable land distribution, attempt to increase their cropland by cutting forests and cultivating land on steep slopes. Both of these practices increase the incidence of soil erosion, resulting in droughts and floods.

Such natural disasters have occurred in recent years with droughts in Africa, India and Latin America, and floods throughout Asia.
The Rising Tide of Poverty

The Widening Gap
Growth in Per Capita GNP
1970-1996

Why does the gap in per capita GNP continue to widen? The economies of high-income nations have grown steadily over the past 25 years but the population growth rates have slowed or stabilized. And while many middle-income countries have recently had strong economic growth, they have also had high population growth rates, so there are more people sharing the same economic pie. In many of the poorest countries, the economies are barely keeping up with, or are falling behind, a high population growth rate.


parts of Africa and the Andean region of Latin America. The poor, living on vulnerable hillsides and along unprotected shores, are overwhelmingly the victims of these disasters.

Population and Poverty

How are population growth and poverty related? Scholars agree that poverty frequently contributes to rapid population growth. Low wages, poor education and high infant death rates are all symptoms of poverty, and they are also associated with high fertility rates which cause rapid population growth. Educating women and girls, and making good employment opportunities available to women are two of the most effective ways of decreasing both poverty and fertility rates.
The Rising Tide of Poverty

Student Reading

Does population growth contribute to poverty? On the household level, larger family size means that parents are able to invest less in the health and education of each child. These children then have less potential and skills they could use to obtain a good-paying job.

On the national level, in the short run, rapid population growth always means a decrease in per capita income, as limited resources are spread over more people. Over the long run, the situation gets a little more complicated. Some economists argue that a growing number of available workers and consumers may accelerate economic growth, or even be necessary for economic growth. They argue that if people invest enough in the country’s economy, it will grow fast enough, and create jobs fast enough, to absorb the growing numbers of people.

However, it is important to point out that very few economies in the developing world are growing fast enough to absorb population growth at the rate of three to four percent per year. The result is greater unemployment, more landlessness, further environmental degradation and poverty.

Reversing the Trend

Although the challenges to breaking the cycle of poverty are monumental, failure to launch an assault on poverty will guarantee the destruction of much of our shared biosphere. Progress has been made since the 1960’s: child death rates have been cut in half, malnutrition has been reduced by a third, the percent of children out of school has decreased from one-half to one-quarter, and life expectancies are increasing. In addition, the poverty gap, or the amount of money that would be needed to bring every one in a developing country up to the poverty line, would be only three percent of those developing countries’ annual incomes. And only one percent is necessary to draw everyone out of extreme poverty.

Studies on every continent show that as literacy rates rise, especially those of women, so do income levels, nutrition levels and child survival rates. Population growth slows as child survival and infant mortality rates improve and parents no longer need to have more children than they desire so they can be sure enough survive to adulthood. As school enrollment for children and women’s participation in the paid workforce increases, children become more expensive and less vital to a family’s economic survival, and the number of children a couple desires usually falls.

The World Bank advocates a two-branched approach to eradicating poverty. First, a country needs to make investments in basic social services to provide its people with primary health care and education. The slower the rate of population growth, the easier it becomes to effectively provide these services. And second, the country needs to promote an economic development pattern that makes efficient use of the available labor. Following this plan, people in developing countries will be prepared and able to become productive members of society and will have the employment opportunities to do so.

However, international reforms are equally as important, since poor countries often have heavy debts to other countries and to big banks, which sometimes causes them to sacrifice their natural resources in order to pay off the debts. Clearly, eradicating poverty will require cooperation and humanitarian planning from every nation.

Endnotes

2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
The Lion’s Share

Introduction:
The relationships between income, consumption, family size and total population are complex. The following activities help students to examine the relationship between population and economic growth by examining the per capita gross domestic product (GDP) in countries around the world. Students will also examine how family size and income in North America are related to the amount of money each of us spends for food, shelter, transportation and the many services and products that make our lives more comfortable.

Procedure:
Distribute copies of the Student Worksheet. After students have a chance to work through the questions, go over answers in class. The follow-up activity is best assigned for homework.

Note: Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is defined on Part 2 of the Student Worksheet. Students may be more familiar with the term GNP (Gross National Product), so you may want to explain to students that it is virtually the same thing. The only difference is that GDP measures economic activity within a country’s borders, while GNP also includes a country’s economic activity occurring in other countries. Both figures provide a good insight into the economic “might” of a country.

Suggested Answers for Student Worksheet:
Part 1:
a) housing and utilities; yes; the low-income family
b) $3,708 on food per year; $7,596 on housing and utilities per year
c) $5,754 per person; $927 per person for food
d) $3,836 per person; $618 per person for food

Part 2:
a) The United States has the highest GDP; Kenya has the lowest. The countries should be ranked as follows:

1. United States
2. France
3. China
4. Canada
5. Russian Federation
6. India

b) See the listing below for per capita GDP. Note to students that the figures do not mean that each person receives this amount, since GDP involves more than wages paid and wealth is distributed unequally. However, GDP does tend to indicate the relative availability of goods and services in a particular country.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Per Capita GDP 1995 (in U.S. dollars)</th>
<th>Ranking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>$26,423</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>581</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>349</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>6,605</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>341</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian Federation</td>
<td>2,326</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>26,439</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chile</td>
<td>4,739</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>1,025</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>2,724</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>19,221</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Concept:
Just as family size and income determine lifestyle, a country’s population size directly relates to its per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

Objectives:
Students will be able to:
• Demonstrate how family size and income are related to the amount of money spent on necessities, goods and services.
• Explain the relationship between a country’s population size and its per capita GDP.
• Calculate their possible living expenses in the future, based on their goals and expectations.

Subjects:
Social studies, math, economics, family life

Skills:
Analyzing data, math calculations, research, preparing a budget

Method:
Students analyze a series of data tables related to income, population, relative wealth, consumption patterns and family size. In the last part of this exercise, students analyze their own potential earning and spending patterns based on research and the data provided.

Materials:
Copies of Student Worksheet
c) See listing on previous page for ranking: China moved down the most, followed by India, while Saudi Arabia and Chile both moved up 5 places in the ranking. The change in ranking indicates that straight GDP figures do not necessarily indicate how wealthy the average person in the country is likely to be. The countries which moved down had large GDP's, but had to divide it among a very large number of people. The reverse is true for the countries that moved up in the ranking.

**Part 3:**

a) India had a 88 percent increase; the United States had a 143 percent increase.

b) India's per capita GDP was $250 in 1980 and increased to $349 in 1995 (39 percent increase); U.S. per capita GDP was $11,891 in 1980 and increased to $25,055 in 1995 (111 percent increase). These figures show that when a population growth is also considered, increases in GDP for the whole country can be misleading. Also, the disparity between India and the United States becomes more pronounced.

c) When a country's population is growing at a faster rate than the GDP, a substantial increase in GDP will not mean more money for most individuals in that country.

**Follow-up Activity:**

As these activities indicate, population growth and economic growth do not necessarily go hand in hand. Also, students should realize that population and economic growth rates are influenced by local and global factors.

Have students bring in an article or articles about current economic, political, or social events in a particular country. The article can be about a specific event (such a flood or civil war), or about a general economic or social trend (for example, increased trade to South Africa or later marriage and childbirth among Indonesian women).

Have students look up the current GDP (or GNP) and population of the country featured in the article and determine the per capita GDP as they did in Part II of the activity. Students could then examine the article in light of the per capita GDP and write a report predicting whether the reported event or trend will affect future population and economic growth in the country, and what those effects might be.

For a longer project, students could collect articles over a period of time, or conduct more in-depth research on a country before writing their reports.
The Lion’s Share

This activity is divided into four parts. In the first part, you will see how a middle-income and low-income family in the United States spend their salaries. You will then calculate how much money is available for each family member if family size increases. In the second part, you will work with a chart showing the Gross Domestic Product for several countries. From this chart, you will calculate the individual and family “share” of the GDP for each country. In the third part, you will examine one example of how GDP and population size relate to each other. Finally, you will plan a hypothetical budget for yourself.

Part 1:

Look at the Monthly Budget chart below and compare how these two families spend their money. Answer the following questions:

a. What item takes the largest percentage of the family income in the low-income family? Is the same true for the middle-income family? Which family spends a larger percentage of its income on food?

b. The chart show figures for one month. How much does a low-income family spend on food in a year? On housing?

c. What is the average amount of money available to each low-income family member in a year? How much does each member have for food in a year? (Assume that the money and food are divided equally among all family members even though children may actually consume less than adults.)

d. If the family grew by two more children and the income remained the same, what would be the average amount of money available for each family member in a year? How much would each member have for food?

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### Monthly Budget for a Family of 4 (in 1995 dollars)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Low-Income*</th>
<th></th>
<th>Middle-Income**</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% Income</td>
<td>Amount</td>
<td>% Income</td>
<td>Amount</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>$309</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>$455</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing and Utilities</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>$633</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>$1,031</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>$335</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>$637</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothing</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>$102</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>$164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Care</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>$134</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>$159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taxes, Pension, and</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>$116</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>$620</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Security</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>$289</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>$548</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>$1,918</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>$3,614</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


*Based on annual household income before taxes of $16,114
**Based on annual household income before taxes of $44,783
1 Figures are for families of all sizes within income group. Expenditures will vary depending on actual family size.
2 Includes shelter, fuel, utilities and public services, household operations, furnishings, and housekeeping supplies.
3 Includes vehicle purchases, gasoline and motor oil, other vehicle expenses and public transportation.
4 Includes life insurance, entertainment, personal care, mailing, education, tobacco and smoking supplies, alcoholic beverages, cash contributions and miscellaneous expenditures.
5 Where expenditures exceed income, the difference is made up by personal debt, private assistance, and/or programs and services subsidized by federal, state and local government agencies.
**The Lion's Share**

**Student Worksheet**

**Part 2:**
Review the chart below. GDP stands for Gross Domestic Product, which is a measure of a country's goods and services (i.e., the wealth of the country).

a) Which country has the highest GDP? The lowest? Rank the countries by putting a number next to their GDPs (1=highest, 11=lowest).

b) Using the population figures on the chart, calculate the per capita GDP (i.e. each person’s “share” of the GDP) for each country. Does this mean that each person in these countries receives the amount you calculated?

c) Now rank the countries according to the per capita GDP. Which countries moved the most on the scale? What does their change in ranking indicate?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Gross Domestic Product (in U.S. currency)</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>$6,952,020,000,000</td>
<td>263,100,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>697,647,000</td>
<td>1,200,200,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>324,082,000,000</td>
<td>926,400,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>125,501,000,000</td>
<td>19,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>9,095,000,000</td>
<td>26,700,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian Federation</td>
<td>344,711,000,000</td>
<td>148,200,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>1,536,089,000,000</td>
<td>58,100,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chile</td>
<td>67,297,000,000</td>
<td>14,200,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>198,079,000,000</td>
<td>193,300,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>250,038,000,000</td>
<td>91,800,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>586,928,000,000</td>
<td>29,600,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Lion's Share

Student Worksheet

Part 3:
Look at the chart below, which contrasts India's GDP and population with the U.S. GDP and population.

a) Notice that the GDP has increased for both countries. What was the percentage of increase for each country from 1980 to 1995?

b) Calculate the per capita GDP by dividing the population into the GDP for both countries for each year.

c) Using this information, explain why a substantial increase in a country's GDP does not necessarily mean more money for most individuals living in that country.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INDIA</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>GDP</td>
<td>Population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>172,321,000,000</td>
<td>688,994,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>324,082,000,000</td>
<td>929,400,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UNITED STATES</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>GDP</td>
<td>Population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>2,708,150,000,000</td>
<td>227,757,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>6,592,020,000,000</td>
<td>263,100,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Part 4:
The first chart you analyzed shows how two typical American households spend their money. Imagine that you are setting up your own household and are preparing your budget. Will you be married? Having children? Going to college? Sharing an apartment with friends?

After you decide on your hypothetical situation, look in the classified ads of your newspaper to see how much monthly rent you would have to pay for your house or apartment. Use the grocery ads to calculate your food bill for a month. Check your household's present utility bills to estimate the costs you may anticipate. Look at car ads and estimate monthly car payments, insurance, and gasoline, or calculate monthly bus or subway fare. Then add a figure for miscellaneous expenses such as medical bills, clothing, taxes, entertainment, etc. What is your monthly total?

As a last step, turn again to the newspaper and look in the employment section. Do any of the jobs for which you might be qualified provide enough money to meet your monthly bills?

As you do the above activity, divide expenditures into either necessities or luxuries. If your income were to be reduced, what items would you forego? Are they mostly items you listed as luxuries? Do you think people in countries with low GDP's spend the same percentage of their income for luxury items that you do?
Living on $500 a Year
Student Activity 25

Concept:
To understand the distribution of wealth in the world today and the need for economic development, students must first gain an understanding of the nature of poverty.

Objectives:
Students will be able to:
• Evaluate the effectiveness of the reading as a tool for change.
• Compare change in per capita GNP in the U.S. and Sub-Saharan Africa over a 20-year period.
• Examine their own needs and wants and prioritize them in a critical light.
• Identify the most pressing problems facing poor countries and brainstorm solutions to those problems at the international, national, community, and individual level.

Subjects:
Social studies, economics, language arts, family life

Skills:
Critical thinking, evaluation, decision making, brainstorming, cooperation, problem solving

Methods:
Students read and discuss a short passage on living on $500 a year and then evaluate their own needs and wants in a short activity. Finally, students divide into teams where they role-play different groups and organizations and brainstorm on ways to close the gap between rich and poor nations.

Materials:
Copies of Student Reading
Copies of Student Worksheet
Situation Cards

Introduction:
The following exercises helps students imagine the life of a poor family in a “less developed” country. Through reading, discussion and activities, students will come to understand what “less developed” means for the three billion people for whom it is not a statistic but an experience of daily life. The activities focus on identifying basic needs and on ways we can work to lessen the gap between the developed and the developing countries.

Part 1: Reading and Discussion
Copy the suggested reading and distribute it to the class. Give all the students a chance to read through the article. Make sure to leave plenty of time for discussion so that the message does not seem overwhelmingly bleak and hopeless for the students.

Discussion Questions:
Evaluating the Article as a Tool for Change
1. How did this article make you feel? Why do you think you felt that way?
   Students may answer that they felt sad, angry, helpless, upset, or that they didn’t want to think about it or don’t believe the information is true.
2. Can you think of other situations where you felt the same way?
   Some answers might include: When I see a homeless person, when my friends are in trouble, when I hear about environmental problems, when something goes wrong and I don’t know what to do.
3. What were some intangible things that weren’t taken away from the family in the reading?
   Students might need some help getting started on this question. Answers might include: family, love, religion, culture, a sense of community. The teacher can discuss with students how poverty puts severe psychological as well as physical stress on a family, but that factors such as a strong sense of community, culture and family can make life more bearable.
4. Why weren’t these more positive things mentioned in the article?
   Because the article focuses on material well-being.

5. What was the author’s purpose in writing this article? Why do you think the author decided to make this article so grim?
   Answers might include: the author wants to shock the reader, the author wants the reader to feel angry and guilty, the author wants to make the reader understand the seriousness and importance of the problem.

6. Do you think that the author made the right choice by making the article depressing? What might he have done differently to communicate his message effectively?
   Teachers may want to ask this question at this point of the discussion and again at the end of the activities to see if there is a difference in student response. Teachers may also want to have students list alternative ideas and use those ideas as a basis for follow-up activities in persuasive writing.

Evaluating the Information
1. The information in the article has been updated to use 1996 figures. What would you guess that the GNP per capita for the United States and a Sub-Saharan African country were 20 years before in 1976?
   The teacher should then draw the chart below on the board and fill in the line for 1996 using the data from the article. The teacher should then ask the students to guess what the per capita GNP per capita for the United States and Sub-Saharan Africa was in 1976. Note: Student answers will vary widely. Once the students have made a variety of guesses, write the correct information in the boxes.

2. Where has there been a larger change?
   The United States. The GNP per capita in the United States has more than tripled, while the GNP per capita in Sub-Saharan Africa has grown, but not yet doubled.

3. Why do you think that is the case?
   While the world’s economy as a whole has grown dramatically over the years, the growth has not benefited all nations equally. The United States has a strong, established economy and a relatively slow rate of population growth. On the other hand, most
nations in Sub-Saharan Africa have weaker economies with high rates of population growth, meaning that while their economies have grown, they have grown more slowly, and the growth has to be divided by a larger pool of people.

4. Are you surprised by this information? Did you expect there to be more change or less?

5. What else might have increased besides income levels?

Cost of living. Inflation. Both have increased substantially in the United States.

Note: the 1976 dollar figures are not adjusted for inflation. When the 1976 figures are expressed in 1995 dollars, the difference in growth rates are even more dramatic — per capita GNP for the United States in 1976 is $8,180, for Sub-Saharan Africa the 1976 GNP per capita is $460 (World Tables 1995, The World Bank).

6. In what other ways has life in the United States changed since 1976?

Answers will range, some answers might include: widespread use of computers, information technology, more home conveniences like microwaves and VCRs, more women in the workplace, civil rights movement.

7. Based on the information in the chart, would you say that the scenario in the article you read is still relevant for much of the world’s population?

Yes, the scenario is still true for many of the world’s people. Things have improved for some people in some places, but many people still live in extreme poverty and with continued population growth and environmental problems the situation will probably continue.

8. What are some things (both positive and negative) that people do to escape or alleviate poverty?

Answers might include: seek more education; turn to crime or drugs; migrate to another city; state, or country; work in a high risk job or illegal job (prostitution, smuggling); borrow money (often at high interest rates); or sell belongings.

9. How would eliminating poverty help to solve problems in both the United States and in the world?

Part 2: Needs vs. Wants

In North America, we live a culture that emphasizes abundance. Students are constantly bombarded with messages that tell them to want and seek more material satisfaction. In such an environment, it can be difficult to appreciate what they already have, much less understand what it means to live with less. In this activity, students clarify the difference between needs and wants, reevaluate their consumption patterns, and determine what they would be willing to sacrifice to accommodate others.

Procedure:

1. Instruct students to draw a line lengthwise down the middle of a sheet of paper. Students can work individually or in small groups.

2. On the left side they will list the basic needs of every human being: water, food, clothing, shelter, etc.

3. On the right, they will list the things they need or want for their own lifestyles: color-TV, stereo, video game system, car, fast food, movies, hot water, etc. Next to each item, they should name some of the resources
products needed to produce, use, and maintain these things: oil (for plastic and fuel), electricity, iron, aluminum, pesticides, grain, water, etc. Give the students enough time to write between ten and fifteen items.

Notes: The teacher may want to go through some of the examples of products we use regularly, and the resources they are made of or use to operate, to get students started. Students can use the article as a guide, but should be encouraged to list from their own lives as well.

4. Tell them to select three items on the right that they would be willing to give up so that people who currently lack the basic necessities (listed on the left) can survive. Have them cross those items off their lists.

5. Tell the students to select an additional three items. Have them cross those items off their lists.

6. Continue to have students cross out items until they only have a few left.

Discussion Questions:
1. Which were the first items to go on your list? What did you elect to keep? Why?
2. Do you think that most North Americans would be willing to lower their consumption level to help others in developing countries? Why or why not?
3. Are there any alternatives to giving up those items on your list? What are they? Sharing, using less of everything, recycling, finding more efficient/less wasteful ways to make or run products.
4. How do you think that giving up these items on your list would affect your happiness? What makes you the happiest? What do you most enjoy doing? Make a list on the board — be sure to include items like friends, family, playing sports, reading, singing, playing in a band, etc.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic Necessities</th>
<th>My Needs or Wants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>food</td>
<td>stereo (oil — for plastic, water, electricity, steel)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>water</td>
<td>TV (metal, oil — for plastic, electricity, glass)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shelter</td>
<td>fast food hamburger (grain, pesticide, oil, fertilizer, wood, metal, beef)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>clothing</td>
<td>hot water (water, oil or gas, copper, lead, iron)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Part 3: What Can We Do?
In this activity, students will work in groups to brainstorm on how to eliminate poverty and close the gap between rich and poor countries. Each group will approach the problem from a different point of view as determined by a Situation Card.

Procedure:
Divide students into six groups. Give each group a Situation Card and a copy of the Student Worksheet. Tell the students that they must work together and their work will be graded as a group. After all the groups have had a chance to work, have each group prepare a short presentation for the class. Discuss the similarities and the differences between the groups’ ideas and approaches. Were there any basic agreements? Any fundamental differences?

Note: This activity can be a short, one class period assignment, or it can be expanded to a longer activity where the students do research and prepare a display and a rehearsed presentation. See the Suggested Resources for Further Research at the back of the book for information on research sources.
In order to understand the long road ahead for less developed countries, we must make a radical adjustment of our picture of the world. It is not easy to make this mental jump. But let us attempt it by imagining how a typical American family, living in a small suburban house with an income of $28,000 (the U.S. per capita GNP), could be transformed into an equally typical family of the less developed world. We will use Africa as a model, where the majority of the countries have a per capita GNP under $500. (Note: GNP refers to the Gross National Product, which is a way of measuring the economic value of a country’s goods and services. Per capita means that the figure shows a relative measure of the population’s wealth; i.e., each person’s “share”).

We begin by shutting off the electricity and removing everything that uses it — lamps, appliances, radio, television.

Next we shut off the heat and air conditioning.

We take out the beds, chairs, rugs, and curtains. We are left with only a few old blankets, a kitchen table and a wooden chair. Along with the dressers go the clothes. Each family member may keep in his “wardrobe” his oldest suit or dress, a shirt or blouse. We will permit a pair of shoes to the head of the family, but none for the wife or children.

Next we shut off running water. If the family is lucky, there we will be a latrine and pump down the road to share with the community.

We move to the kitchen. The appliances have already been taken out, so turn to the cupboards. A box of matches, a small bag of flour, some sugar and salt may stay. A few moldy potatoes, already in the garbage can, must be rescued, for they will provide much of tonight’s meal. We will leave a handful of onions, and a dish of dried beans. All the rest we take away, the fresh vegetables, the canned goods, the meat, the milk.

Now that the house is stripped, we take it away. The family moves to the tool shed. It is crowded, at least they have shelter. Although the family is in a smaller space, their numbers have increased. Instead of being an average North American two-child family, they now have six children (the average in most of Africa). All other houses in the neighborhood have also been replaced with small structures, jammed together, full of people.

Communication must go next. No more newspapers, magazines, books — not that they are missed since we must also take away the family’s literacy. Instead, we will allow one radio in the shantytown.

Next, government services must go. No more postal carrier, no more fire fighter. There is a school, but it is three miles away and consists of two classrooms. They are not overcrowded since only half the children in the neighborhood, mainly boys, go to school.

There are no hospitals or doctors nearby. The nearest clinic is ten miles away and is tended by a midwife. It can be reached by bicycle, provided that the family has a bicycle, which is unlikely. Or one can go by bus — there is usually room on top, if not inside.

Finally, money. We will allow our family a cash board of $10. Meanwhile they must earn their keep. Since the children are not likely to be in school long, most of them will work beside their parents all day. As peasant cultivators with three acres to tend they may raise the equivalent of $200 to $500 worth of crops a year. If they are tenant farmers, which is more than likely, a third or so of the crop will go to the landlord, and probably another 10 percent to the local moneylender.

But there will be enough to eat, or almost. The average human body needs a daily input of 2,000 calories just to replenish the energy consumed by its living cells, and people in Sub-Saharan Africa average 2,095 calories. Like any insufficiently fueled machinery, their bodies run down sooner; the life expectancy in Africa is 53 years old.

This is life as lived by hundreds of millions of people. Of course it is just an impression — it is missing the many strong smells and sounds of streets overflowing with humanity. It is also missing the sense of familiarity these people have with their situation; what may seem shocking to us is softened for those who have never known anything else. But the impression provides the general idea of life in the Less Developed Countries, adding a picture of reality to the statistics by which underdevelopment is ordinarily measured. When we are told that half the world’s population enjoys a standard of living “less than $500 a year,” this is what that figure means.

**Living on $500 a Year**

**Situation Card: Your Class**

Your class has decided that as a senior project, that you will all work together to make others aware of the extreme poverty in many parts of the world, and take some sort of action to help the poor in other countries. At first this task seems overwhelming, so your group has been elected to come up with a class plan. Using the worksheet as a guide, discuss ways a small group of students can raise awareness and take action to combat this problem. Be as creative as you can and don’t forget to help students make the connection between their own behavior and what happens overseas. Remember that the more low-cost and free activities that you can think of, the more you will be able to do.

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**Situation Card: Village Leaders**

Your group is made up of the respected leaders of a small, impoverished African village. Life has been very hard for your village in the last few years, and your group has been chosen by the community to try and alleviate some of the poverty and improve the situation. If you come up with a plan to improve life for the people in your village, you can expect to receive a very small amount of money (about $500) from the local government and an international relief organization. Only one of your group is literate, so please select that person to write down all of your ideas. Please use the worksheet and your first-hand knowledge of the local situation to formulate a plan to improve the lives of the people in the village. Remember, you won’t be able to do everything, so focus on those things that will make the most difference.

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**Situation Card: USAID Country Team**

Your group works for the U.S. government in the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in a South Asian country where the majority of the people live in conditions like those described in the article. Your mission is to work with the government and people of that country to make the lives of the people better, but you only have a limited budget, and Congress may cut your resources once again. Using the worksheet to get started, determine the best way to accomplish your mission given your limited resources. What are the greatest needs? What do you concentrate on first? What is the most efficient way to help those people who are the most in need? Remember, you won’t be able to do everything — decide as a group on what is most important.
Living on $500 a Year

Situation Card: Local Community Group
You are members of a small community group in North America and you have become concerned about the extreme poverty in many parts of the world, and would like to organize and take action to help others in your community understand the problem and to help the needy in some of the world’s poorest countries. At first this task seems overwhelming, so your group has decided to write an action plan. Using the worksheet as a guide, discuss ways a small group of citizens can raise awareness and can take action to combat this problem. Be as creative as you can and don’t forget to help others make the connection between their own behavior and what happens overseas. Remember that the more low-cost and free activities that you can think of, the more you will be able to do, as your budget is extremely limited.

Situation Card: Special Working Group of the United Nations
The Secretary General of the United Nations has declared that eliminating poverty is the most important goal of the UN. Your group is a special team brought together to decide the best way to improve the lives of the world’s most poor, and to close the gap between rich and poor countries. Since this is such a large project, the secretary has asked you to identify the top four problems contributing to the problem of poverty and the inequity between nations, and to suggest ways of solving those problems. Using the worksheet as a starting point, identify the four most serious problems and come up with a plan for addressing one of these problems. Remember, you can think big, but that ultimately your plan should make a real difference in people’s lives.

Situation Card: Government Advisors in a Developing Country
You are advisors to the newly-elected prime minister in an impoverished developing nation. Your party campaigned on the promise to eliminate poverty and to improve the lives of the people. Now that you have been elected, the prime minister has asked your group to come up with an action plan to relieve the worst of your country’s problems. You are committed to helping your people and eager to get started, but your budget is extremely limited and probably won’t increase much in the next few years. Using the worksheet as a guide, determine the best way to accomplish your mission given your limited resources. What are the greatest needs? What do you concentrate on first? What is the most efficient way to help those people who are the most in need? Remember, you won’t be able to do everything — decide as a group on what is most important and then go from there.
Living on $500 a Year

What Can We Do?

Group Situation:

Names of People in the Group:

Note: This worksheet is a tool to get you started. Feel free to record your group’s goals, ideas and action plan on other pieces of paper as needed.

1. Based on the scenario outlined in your situation card, identify the most important and pressing problems facing your group and write goals or priority statements for your group to work towards accomplishing.

   Examples of Goals and Priority Statements:

   Raise $500 dollars for housing construction in an African village.
   Adequate nutrition for every person in our country.
   Clean drinking water for everyone in our town.
   Health services for all the poor families in the country.
   Every child in the world will complete school through grade six.

2. After you have written down four or five goals, pick one goal that your group will work on first.

3. What are some simple short-term things that could be done to help you meet your goal?

4. What are some long-term things that could be done to help you meet your goals?

5. Using the back of this sheet or another sheet of paper, create an action plan and with a time-line for reaching your goal.