

Using Business Issues in Class

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1. How did that shoe get here?

Activity

- Take off one of your shoes.
- Where was it made?
- Where did you buy it?
- How far did it travel?
- What is the total shoe-travelling distance in the room?

Discussion

THE SHOE AS GEOGRAPHY

- How did all these shoes get from where they were made to where they were bought?

International trade happens through a complex web of intermediaries—shippers, customs facilitators, containers, ships, trains, trucking firms marketers, retailers...

- How is it possible that all of that can exist and the shoe only cost what it does?
- Why does this web exist?
- What would happen if it stopped?

THE SHOE AS HISTORY

- 2,000 years ago, almost no-one wore shoes. Now almost everyone does.
- Why?

1,000 years ago, most people wore something like a shoe, but chances are they made it themselves, or traded their farm produce for them with a neighbour.

- What caused that change?

500 years ago, most people wore shoes made within a few miles of where they lived, probably by someone they knew.

50 years ago, the shoe you bought might not have come from your neighbour, but it would almost certainly have been made in your country.

The modern way we get our shoes is only about 30 years old.

- Why does it seem natural and normal to us?

THE SHOE AS ETHICS

- How much did you pay for your shoes?

500 years ago, the person who made your shoe got all of the money from its sale to you.

- If you had to guess, what percentage of the amount you paid for your shoe did the person who made it get?
- Why?
- Do you think that's fair?

2. Ask an Entrepreneur

The usual definition of an entrepreneur is someone who started and runs their own business. Usually (but not always) these businesses are fairly small.

The purpose of this activity is to start to understand why at least some people start their own businesses.

Activity

Ask students why they think people start their own businesses.

Then, if possible, identify enough business owners so that a small group of students can each go interview one of them. Chances are, a number of the students will have parents who are entrepreneurs. There will also probably be people on the school's board who are entrepreneurs. Virtually all entrepreneurs are sociable and eager to talk about what they do and why.

Divide students into small groups, and go out and interview the entrepreneurs. Have each group ask the same basic questions:

- What does your company do?
- When did you start it?
 - What's happened to the company in the years since you started it?
- Why did you start it?
- What's the hardest thing about being an entrepreneur?
 - What's the best thing?
- Why did you start it?
- How does the money you make

They can, of course, add more questions if they want.

Have the students come back and report on their interviews.

- What answers did the entrepreneurs give?
- Did all of them give the same answers to all the questions?
- How did the answers the entrepreneurs actually gave compare to the answers students expected to hear?

After considering everything:

- Why do the students think people become entrepreneurs?

3. Water, Water, Everywhere

Background

- Some say the earth is running out of water.
- Some say the next war will be over water.
- Some say that the western United States is getting desperate for water.
- Some say access to clean, safe drinking water is a fundamental human right, so water should never be bought or sold, and should be free to everyone
- Canada has ___% of the world's fresh water.

Activity

Consider the sources:

- Who says the world has a water problem?
- Who says we don't?
- Who says the western United States is getting desperate for water?
- Who says they're not?
- How credible are each of these sources?

This is a discussion designed to exercise critical thinking skills, specifically on:

- weighing assertions
- judging sources
- sifting for evidence

Questions

- Is water a fundamental human right?
- If it is, does that mean we should get it for free from our government?
 - If that's the case, why do we pay our water bills?
- If it is, does it mean we should give it away for free to anyone who asks for it?

- Is water a product like any other?
- We don't say people have a fundamental human right to all products—only the ones they can afford.
- So what do we do about people who need water but can't afford it (both in Canada and around the world?)
- If it is, should we sell our water in bulk to the United States?
 - If we shouldn't, why is water different than trees?
- If we should, why don't we?
- Are there some things that should not be part of the “free” market? Are there some things that should not be for sale?
- How do we decide what (if any) things fall into this category?
- Pretty well all of us would say we shouldn't be able to buy and sell people?
- What about blood?
- What side of the line does water fall on?
- Why?

4. AIDS Drugs for Africa

A follow-on to the water issue

Background

__ million people in Africa are HIV positive

- There are drugs that can control HIV and keep it from developing into AIDS
- In North America, those drugs cost \$__
- - The companies that sell those drugs say they have to charge that much because it costs so much to create and test a drug.
- Most of the people in Africa who are HIV positive can't afford that?
- There are drug manufacturers in other parts of the world—India, for instance—who make these same drugs, but who the original creators of the drug say are violating their patent.

Activity

Talk through the debate, working back and forth between the positions:

- These drugs will save lives, so people who are sick should be able to get them—either for free or at a price they can afford.
 - But if we do that, the companies who made these drugs will lose money.
- Too bad; people are more important than profits.
 - But if you don't make it possible for drug companies to make money on drugs, they won't develop them.
- But the companies have already developed them.
 - But what about the next disease?
- Maybe we should force the drug companies to sell some of their drugs at a certain price.
 - If we do that, investors in those companies will stop investing and the companies will close, and fewer life-saving drugs will get created. How is that better improving people's lives?

5. Tear Gas and Sewing Machines

Do you know anyone who says WalMart is evil, and who refuse to shop there? Do you know anyone who shops at WalMart but feels guilty because they think it might not be a good company? Do you know anyone who shops there all the time and doesn't think there's any ethical problem at all?

The purpose of this activity is to look at these questions carefully, and to help you decide, on your own, which category you fall into—or if you don't fall into any category at all.

Activity

- Find some blogs and web sites that attack WalMart.
 - What criticisms do they make?
 - See if you can find some criticisms of WalMart by Christians.
- Go to WalMart. Take pictures of (or write down) everything you can find around their customer service area that seems to be trying to convince you they are a good company.
- Ask four small groups (or four students) to each play a role:
 - Speak on behalf of WalMart, as it makes its case that it's a good company (summarizing WalMart's materials).
 - Speak on behalf of WalMart critics, as they make their case (summarizing the blogs and web sites).
 - The respond on WalMart's behalf to the criticisms one by one.
 - And, finally, speak on behalf of WalMart's critics attacking its arguments that it's a good company.

Questions

- Like the shoes we looked at in case 1, most of the goods sold by WalMart are made in countries much poorer than ours. Although it's the most high-profile company, WalMart is far from the only company that sells goods made in less developed countries. Some people say that the global trading system is evil and should be stopped. Some people are so convinced about that they try to disrupt international trade talks.
 - *PowerPoint slides of protests available from bruce.duggan@prov.ca*

- What do you think of what they're trying to achieve? What do you think of their tactics?
- One of the main criticisms of the global trading system is that it exploits poor people in sweatshops.
- What actually goes on in sweat-shops?

- *PowerPoint slides of sweatshops available from
bruce.duggan@prov.ca*

- Most sweatshops have young adults working in them. The hours are long and the work is repetitive. Wages are near the average for the country where they are located, but are usually much less than the average wages in the country where the goods are sold.
- Is this fair?
- Another criticism is that the people doing the work in these sweatshops are children.
- Is that true?

<http://www.acdi-cida.gc.ca/CIDAWEB/acdicida.nsf/En/REN-218125535-PZX>

http://www.unicef.org/protection/index_childlabour.html

There are roughly 160 million children working in the world, 11% less in 2006 than in 2002.

70% are working in agriculture.

The others work primarily in street vending, as domestic servants, and in the sex trade.

There are some that work in factories, but most of these factories are small shops, making goods for a local market (for example, making fireworks for local celebrations). Often these workplaces are unsafe.

Many of the protesters—and many of the people in the sweatshops—are about your age.

- Why do you think someone your age becomes a globalization protester?
- Why do you think someone your age becomes a worker in a sweatshop?

6. What's a Fair Slice of Wealth?

How much the head of corporations should get paid is a heated topic right now. This purpose of this exercise is to encourage you to decide what fair compensation should be.

In Canada, wealthier people have more income—and more wealth—than poor people.

John Rawls developed a way of talking about

Activity

IMAGINE A FACTORY

- 200 employees
- 1 CEO
- 5 Vice Presidents
- 20 mid-level managers & foremen
- 154 line workers
- 20 low-skills jobs

Rawls

“THE ORIGINAL POSITION”

“THE VEIL OF IGNORANCE”

WHY?

DOES REALITY MATCH YOUR IDEAL?

HOW DID IT GET THIS WAY?

SHOULD WE CHANGE IT?

- How?

means

LIKE A PARTRIDGE THAT HATCHES EGGS IT DID NOT LAY IS THE MAN WHO
GAINS RICHES BY UNJUST MEANS.

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