



POWELL CENTER FOR
ECONOMIC LITERACY

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Grand Rapids, MI
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A Chair for My Mother

Time Required

15 Minutes

Grade Level and Subject

Primary; Children's Literature

Keystone Principles

Principle #1 – We All Make Choices

Principle #2 - There Ain't No Such Thing As A Free Lunch

Principle #7 – Economic Thinking is Marginal Thinking

Voluntary National Content Standards in Economics

Standard #1 - [Scarcity](#)

Standard #2 – [Marginal Cost/Benefit](#)

Economic Concepts

Choice - *Decision made or course of action taken when faced with a set of alternatives.*

Income – *Payments earned by households for selling or renting their productive resources. May include salaries, wages, interest and dividends.*

Marginal Benefit – *The additional gain from consuming or producing one more unit of a good or service; can be measured in dollars or satisfaction.*

Opportunity Cost – *The second-best alternative (or the value of that alternative) that must be given up when scarce resources are used for one purpose instead of another.*

Savings – *Money set aside for a future use that is held in easily-accessed accounts, such as savings accounts and certificates of deposit (CDs).*

Overview

This lesson was developed as a complement to the book, *A Chair for My Mother* by Vera B. Williams. It is the poignant story of a family sacrificially saving for a mutual goal. After a fire consumes their possessions, neighbors help them get back on their feet. The young daughter resolves to help her mother again have a comfortable chair in which to rest. The story highlights the value of delayed gratification as this young girl evaluates her options and remains convinced she has made the right decision.

Objectives

- Students will understand how to evaluate costs and benefits when making decisions.
- Students will understand the difference between short term goals and long term goals.

Materials and Handouts

- *A Chair for My Mother* by Vera B. Williams, Greenwillow Books, c. 1982.
- Handout # 1 – A rectangular piece of paper divided into four equal rectangles with each one numbered 1 – 4

Teaching Activity

1. Review/teach the above definitions
2. Ask your class, “Why do you think it is important for people to save some of their income?”
3. As you read the story to the students (or have them read it), tell them to mentally note when the members of the family are able to save some of their income so that they can put money in the jar.
4. Distribute Handout #1. Pair students up. Explain that you are going to read part of the text again and after you read it you want each pair of students to quietly discuss which family member was able to save their income and where the income came from.
 - Read page 1 – have the students respond with words or pictures in space #1
 - Read page 2 – have students respond with words or pictures in space #2
 - Read page 3 – have students respond with words or pictures in space #3
 - Read page 9 – have students respond with words or pictures in space #4
5. Discuss as a class that with all three family members contributing to the coin jar it still took a year to save up until the jar was full.
6. In partner groups – think/pair/share to the following questions: Do you think that Rosa had a hard or easy time giving part of her money to the savings jar?

- Do you think that there were other things that she wanted to do with the money?
 - What do you think some of those other things might be? (Talk about opportunity cost – the next best option which they had to forego.)
 - How do you think Rosa and her family felt when the new chair arrived at their home?
 - Do you think it was worth saving for a whole year to get the chair?
 - Is there something you would like to save for? (Make a class list of the items that the class would like to save for.)
7. Review the benefits of saving.

Follow-up Activities

1. Write the next chapter of the book. Have the family save for the next item or write an adventure that they have in their new chair, or an adventure that Rosa and her mother have working at the Blue Tile Diner.
2. Brainstorm something that you would like to save for as a class (perhaps something for the classroom or something for someone in need). Have the children bring in coins from their allowance or for doing jobs at home. Even if you do not have much money to spend, this is an important opportunity for the students to view themselves as instrumental in helping others, rather than being passive. It also provides a practical motivation for your students to master counting coin combinations.
3. If you have a classroom economy, talk together as a class and offer the opportunity to donate some of the class income to a savings jar so you can collectively purchase something for your class or purchase a whole class privilege. This is a particularly good opportunity to encourage (relatively) long-term planning.

1.

2.

3.

4.

1.

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