



POWELL CENTER FOR  
ECONOMIC LITERACY

## *Lesson Plan*

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Last Modified: April 17, 2005

# Land of Erehwon

## Time Required

9 days

## Economic Concepts

Absolute advantage

Barter

Command economy

Comparative advantage

Currency

Demand

Export

Gross domestic product (GDP)

Import

Market economy

Opportunity cost

Rationing

Resources

Scarcity

Specialization

Supply

Traditional economy

## Overview

A sixth grade course on world geography and culture challenges the teacher to introduce students not only to many aspects of place and culture, but also to economics. Without a basic understanding of economics and economic terms, students cannot fully understand the lifestyles and cultures of different parts of the world. The Land of Erehwon ("nowhere" spelled backwards) invites students to create their own society, participate in economic choices, and enjoy learning!



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### Objectives

- Students learn social and governmental organization by constructing a society, a religion, and a governing structure.
- Students learn about scarcity and its impact on their society and government.
- Students learn about the impact of international economic decisions on their community.
- Students discover the impact of economic decisions on the social, religious, and governing structures of their immediate and combined communities.

### Materials and Handouts

Handout 1 — **The Land of Erewhon**

Handout 2 — **Village Background**

Handout 3 — **Creation of the Village**

### Teaching Activity

#### Day 1

Divide the class into four groups to create four different villages. During each class period, the students will work in their own groups. The teacher needs to be flexible and circulate to keep students directed. Use the last 15 minutes of each period to have each group report on what it has created and relate student examples to the appropriate economic terms.

Present Handout 1, **The Land of Erewhon**, to the class and give a copy to each group.

Next, distribute Handout 2, **Village Background**, to each group. Explain to students that as members of the four villages, they will create the villages, make decisions, and describe and illustrate what life is like in their village. Each student represents a family unit of eight people: the student, a mate, three older parents, a brother or sister, and two children. Only the members of each village know what it is like to live there. Any member of a group who leaves the village and tells the secrets of that village will be ostracized and banished from the village. Success of each group in the initial stages depends on secrecy.

The Nairotsih ("historian" spelled backwards) or recorder is chosen for each group to record the events in the village, how decisions are made and what decisions the village is faced with making as events occur. The Tnatnuocca ("accountant" spelled backwards) records the history of the village in The Offering of the Goods. The record for each day from the Nairotsih and the Tnatnuocca should be kept in a folder. The Offering of the

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Goods is made to Goddess Llewhtob (my name, "Bothwell," spelled backwards). Create your own Goddess name by spelling your name backwards.

At certain intervals, events will occur which may change a group's life patterns. Give these events to an individual or to the group. If you give the event to an individual, tell that student they may choose to share the information with their group or use it for their own benefit. Tell students that the rest of the group may eventually learn what they know.

### **Day 2**

Distribute Handout 3, **Creation of the Village**, to each group. Ask students to answer the questions and complete the documentation for the village. The Nairotsih records the history and the Tnatnuocca records The Offerings of the Goods in the folders.

Using their examples, introduce each group to the following social organization terms: *culture, social structure, tribal government, monarchy, democracy, and authoritarian government*. Introduce the following economic concepts to students as they create their economy: *scarcity, limited resources, rationing, command economy, traditional economy, market economy, specialization, opportunity costs, comparative advantage, and absolute advantage*. Introduction of the terms depends on the choices students make for their villages; you may not need to use all of these at this time. They can be worked into the lesson at a later point.

After all the groups have completed their creation documents, review and study the terms with the entire class. This introductory work may require two days instead of one.

### **Day 3**

Provide handouts for the daily group activity or have the materials available on an overhead for the class to read. Distribute the following changes to the group of villagers or to individual persons in the groups:

#### **Southwest**

Learn that the black streaks in rocks will melt when heated and harden when cooled.  
Learn to use vines to make fish nets.

#### **Mountain**

Learn that black rocks burn for a long time.  
Develop the bow and arrow.

#### **Plains**

Learn to domesticate animals.



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Learn to use a sharp bone for sewing.

### **Delta**

Learn to fire pots.

Learn to plant seeds.

Learn to weave.

The students in each village assess changes to their village, and the Tnatnuocca and Nairotsih record the history and The Offerings of the Goods. Review the economic terms from Day 2. Focus on the changes from technology and comparative advantage.

### **Day 4**

An earthquake destroys the mountain village. The survivors begin to roam the island. As they roam, one survivor wanders into each of the other villages. Each mountain survivor settles with a different village. See what happens: Are they absorbed into the existing villages? If so, why? If not, why not?

About halfway into the period, ask the following questions of the students. The Tnatnuocca and Nairotsih should record the history and The Offerings of the Goods.

1. How does this change your culture?
2. What happens when the survivors first arrive in your village?
3. What do you learn from them?
4. How do their cultural differences affect you?
5. How do you communicate?
6. What are the overall effects on your culture, lifestyle, government, social structure, and economy?

Answer questions again as a whole group or with each group. Discuss the interaction of cultures, sensitivity to other customs and beliefs, people feeling threatened by others who are different, and the idea that knowledge brings understanding.

### **Day 5**

The separated band of mountain people decide to meet again at the Big Rivers Junction at the end of two summers. Each village is invited to go to the meeting with them. Students will return to their village before the winter season begins. Tell students to decide whether they want to go and whether they are able to go. The Tnatnuocca and Nairotsih record the history and The Offerings of the Goods. Ask the villagers the following:

1. What are the dangers involved?
2. What problems do you think you will have when this group first meets?

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Let students meet and encounter their own difficulties before asking them the following questions. These are questions for all the groups, which met together at Big Rivers Junction:

1. What problems actually occurred when people from the villages first met at the river junction?
2. How does this gathering affect your thinking and decisions about your own lifestyle?
3. How does this gathering affect your choices about fulfilling wants and needs?
4. Has your list of wants and needs changed?
5. What will you do about these changes?
6. What occurred at this meeting that surprised you the most?

### **Day 6**

Villagers return home but plan to meet again at the end of the next summer. At the next meeting, ask villagers:

1. How will your life change over the next year?
2. What are some of the new problems that you will face as you plan for the next meeting?
3. How will you resolve these problems?
4. Do you want to trade with the other villages?

Discuss the problems of exchange, barter, and currency. Ask students how they can establish a currency if they want one. The Tnatnuocca and Nairotsih should record the history and The Offerings of the Goods. The villagers should list all the goods they produce that year. Discuss gross domestic product.

### **Day 7**

It is still the spring before the summer meeting with the other villages. Word spreads that some of The Offering of the Goods, which have been buried, are no longer there. Some villagers have dared to dig them up and nothing has happened to them. The belief still exists that the total amount of goods villagers have buried will be judged and affect the future of the villagers' children. Ask villagers:

1. If The Offerings of the Goods were stolen, would this benefit you?
2. What are the risks involved?
3. Why would someone steal The Offerings of the Goods?
4. What should be done to those who stole The Offerings of the Goods?
5. How has your life changed since The Offerings of the Goods were stolen?
6. Does this crisis affect your plans for the summer meeting?



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The Tnatnuocca and Nairotsih record the history and The Offerings of the Goods.

### **Day 8**

Divide the class period into thirds. Introduce the concept that items could be used as a currency. The villagers meet again, this time bringing goods and currency. In the first time segment, the villagers attempt to exchange goods for trade or barter. See if a group develops a type of currency on its own. At the end of the first third, discuss problems with barter or the advantages of currency (if one has developed).

In the second time segment, the villagers should agree to accept currency for goods. As they attempt to buy and sell using their own currency, ask villagers:

What gives the currency value?

The villagers record exchanges and discuss problems, for example, surpluses or shortages of their own currency or a foreign currency. Discuss this as a group before you go on. In the third time segment, the villagers attempt to buy and sell currency. Discuss the results of doing this. At the final council of all villages, discuss whether or not trade agreements would benefit or hurt them. The Tnatnuocca and Nairotsih should record the history and The Offerings of the Goods.

### **Day 9**

Each village lists its total accumulated wealth stored in The Offering of the Goods. The village with the greatest wealth wins the eternal blessings of Goddess Llewhtob in the Land of Erewhon. And they all live happily ever after.

The Land of Erewhon gives students an opportunity to create an imaginary society and at the same time begin to discover and label the economic concepts exemplified in the activity. They learn about cause and effect as one economic decision impacts many other parts of their future lives.



## HANDOUT 1 The Land of Erewhon

Far away in a land untouched by time, there is an island continent known as Erewhon. It is a beautiful island, about 500 miles across at any point, and its people are happy and peaceful.

In the center of the island, very high mountains surround a rocky plateau. Because of the altitude, the climate is moderate in the summer but quite cold in the winter. The growing season is short and snow covers much of the area in the winter.

To the southwest of the mountains, the land drops off sharply. The climate is tropical with a year-round growing season and heavy rains in the summer. The coastline is jagged with cliffs and rocks; the ocean waters are rough.

To the east of the mountains, high plains and gently wooded hills slope down to the coastal area. The seasons are moderate; rain is scarce. The river, which comes from the mountains, provides an oasis during the drier seasons.

The river spreads out at its mouth to form a delta. The coastal plains are rich from the soil brought by the spring floods. Wetlands and broad beaches allow the ocean waves to break gently against the island. Coastal winds bring rain throughout the year.

A village exists in each of the four geographic areas of the island, but no one ventures far from the village. The culture of each village is very different from the others. The religion and traditions talk of strange gods and devils that have occasionally appeared in the past. The people of the mountain village believe that they will displease their gods and die if they leave the ring of mountain peaks.

The culture reflects the way the villagers have learned to survive in their surroundings. Each village has a different climate, landscape, and different resources to use. Each group of villagers has learned to provide food and shelter. Each village has made decisions, conscious or unconscious, about how to satisfy the needs and wants of its people. Each village has its own form of economy.

The only tool the people have for gathering, hunting, or fishing is a spear-like object. The bow and arrow and the needle-punch for sewing have not been developed. The villagers know how to gather food but not plant it. The animals are all wild.

Each village has developed its own language, its own form of governing and protecting itself, its own social structure, and its own religious belief. The village ceremonies and traditions reflect these individual differences.

The oldest tradition and ceremony common to each village is The Offering of the Goods. This occurs at the beginning of every spring. It is believed that each family should plan well and be careful in its uses of goods and food. To be wasteful displeases Llewhtob, the Goddess of the Earth. Therefore, each family unit should have a surplus at the end of the winter to offer to Llewhtob. The surplus is recorded by the Tnatnuocca for each village. The surplus or Offering of Goods is buried in a sacred ceremony. The planting of the goods gives back and replenishes Mother Earth. This pleases Goddess Llewhtob, and she replenishes the earth with new growth for the new year. The villagers believe that the more they have to offer in the Offering of the Goods, the more they will benefit in the coming year. It is also believed that the total accumulated in the Offering of Goods over a lifetime will affect how their children will be treated during adulthood.



## HANDOUT 2 Village Background

### **Southwest Village**

Climate: Winter is short with temperatures averaging about 70 degrees. It rains almost daily during the rest of the year with temperatures varying from 85 to 95 degrees.

Landscape: Hilly, rocky, ravines, waterfalls.

Vegetation: Dense tropical forest — fruits, bananas, mangoes, large-leafed tropical trees.

Animals: Small game, rabbits, parrots, snakes.

Fish: Warm water fish, large salt water fish.

Minerals: Rocks with black strips.

### **Mountain Village**

Climate: Long winter with temperatures averaging about 30 degrees. Spring and fall temperatures are about 55 degrees; summers are about 72 degrees, with moderate rain.

Landscape: Rocky, mountainous.

Vegetation: On lower slope — timber and apple trees.

Animals: Bear, cougar, deer.

Minerals: Black, rock-like materials.

### **Plains Village**

Climate: Four equal seasons — winter temperatures average about 40 degrees, spring and fall temperatures average about 60 degrees, and summer temperatures average about 85 degrees. Very little rain.

Landscape: Flatlands for the most part with forests on the hilly areas in the east. A river runs through the plains to the forested areas.

Vegetation: Grains and small shrubs on the plains, forests to the east, some trees along the river with berries.

Animals: Horses, moose, deer.

Minerals: Yellow stones in the river.

### **Delta Village**

Climate: Four equal seasons — winter temperatures average about 50 degrees, spring and fall temperatures average about 70 degrees, and summer temperatures average about 90 degrees. Ample rain throughout the year.

Landscape: Flat land, rich soil, wetlands.

Vegetation: Forests, berries, green plants with large round roots.

Animals: Deer, small game, rabbit.

Fish: Salt water and fresh water fish.

Minerals: Clear, white crystals in dried-up marsh beds.

HANDOUT 3  
Creation of the Village

The following questions need to be answered by the members of the village. Other information about the village is also welcomed.

1. What do you eat?
2. How do you gather food?
3. How do you store water?
4. How do you preserve food?
5. How do you hunt for fish or meat?
6. Who prepares the food?
7. Who makes decisions about gathering or preserving food and water?
8. Who gathers food and water?
9. How many units of each food group would you like to have to feed your family for one day?
10. Do you always have as much as you would like? If not, why?
11. How do you prepare for the cold season?
12. How do you prepare for The Offering of the Goods?
13. How do you clothe yourselves?
14. What do you use for shelter?
15. How is space per family unit determined?
16. What are your total resources?
17. Do you use all of your resources?
18. What resources are the most valuable to you?
19. What would you like to have in greater abundance?
20. Do all family units in your village have the same amount of goods?
21. Are all family units considered equal? What, if anything, determines this?
22. How are individual or group decisions made about:
  - Protection of the village?
  - Order within the group?
  - Distribution of food?
  - Distribution of valuable goods?
23. How do you care for orphans or the elderly who do not have a family unit?
24. Do you exchange goods between family units?
25. If so, who makes the decisions and how do you exchange?
26. What traditions, ceremonies, or religious beliefs are parts of the village heritage?
27. Is there a special object(s) of value to your society? If so, describe it.

After you have worked through the questions, complete the following documentation for your village.

1. Determine a name for your village.
2. Draw a landscape map of your village area, showing features of the landscape, vegetation, and animal or fish life.
3. Draw a map of the shelters and other important points in your village.
4. Draw or illustrate objects and clothing that you use in daily life.
5. Draw or illustrate objects and clothing that you use in ceremonies.
6. Create words in the language of your village for the most important things or concepts you use, including parent, man, woman, child, food, water, clothes, animals, fish, spear, god(s), love, fear, birth, death, sun, rain, day, night, etc.