

## **Lesson Description**

In this lesson, students experience scarcity through an activity. Following the activity, students relate the concept of scarcity to situations in school and their community. Students learn that people make choices because of scarcity.

## **Grade Levels**

Grades four through eight.

## **Economic Concepts**

- Scarcity
- Capital resources
- Natural resources

## **Content Standards and Benchmarks**

### **National Standard Number: 1**

Productive resources are limited. Therefore, people can not have all the goods and services they want; as a result, they must choose some things and give up others.

People make choices because they cannot have everything they want.

Natural resources, such as land, are "gifts of nature;" they are present without human intervention

Capital goods (resources) are goods produced and used to make other goods and services.

## **Objectives**

Students will:

- define scarcity as the condition that exists when wants exceed resources available to satisfy wants.
- define and give examples of capital resources and natural resources.
- identify scarce resources in countries or regions studied.
- identify choices societies made as a result of scarcity.

## **Materials**

- popped popcorn in a brown grocery bag, staple bag closed
- brown grocery bags stuffed with crumpled newspaper and stapled closed
- brown paper lunch bags (several per student)
- alternative snack such as dry cereal

## **Procedure**

1. Explain that a parent or the principal donated a snack for the class and that students will come to the front of the room, row by row, and serve themselves.
2. Call the first row of students up to the front and give them brown lunch bags in which to put their popcorn. Allow them to take as much popcorn as they want, giving them extra lunch bags to hold popcorn if needed.
3. Continue calling tables of students until the grocery bag of popcorn is empty.
4. Student will ask for the popcorn in the other stapled grocery bags. Open the bags and act surprised to find crumpled newspaper. Explain that you thought that all of the grocery bags were filled with popcorn.
5. Apologize to those students who did not receive a snack. Explain that everyone thought there was plenty of popcorn for all. Suggest that, if the first students served had known there was a limited amount, perhaps they might have been careful to leave enough for the rest of the class.  
**Note:** Students are likely to be very angry at the seemingly unfair situation; however, it is the purpose of this lesson for them to experience scarcity.
6. Discuss the following.
  - A. What is the problem? (There wasn't enough popcorn for everyone who wanted it.)
  - B. Why does this problem exist? (The amount of popcorn was limited and there were many students who wanted popcorn. Those who were selected first got as much or more popcorn than they could really eat.)
7. Explain that the experience students had with popcorn symbolizes a major problem that all societies face-scarcity. Scarcity occurs because people want many things, but resources available for producing the things people want are limited.
8. Tell students that other groups still need a snack, but there's no popcorn left. Ask student what could be done. (Those with popcorn could share. Teacher could pop more popcorn. Teacher could provide an alternative snack. Those without a snack could go without.)
9. Explain that when faced with scarcity, people and societies must make choices about allocation. When people allocate, they decide how something should be used and/or who should get something that is available.
10. Explain that people and societies make different allocation decisions. Explain that the number of computers available at school is limited. Capital resources are things produced and used to produce other goods and services.
11. Point out that the number of computers available is limited but students and teachers have unlimited wants for the computers. Students and teachers want to use the computers to write, to research, to learn to use software, and so on.
12. Ask the students who decides how to allocate the use of computers at school. (teacher, principal, other faculty)
13. Explain that natural resources are things that occur naturally in or on the earth. Ask the students for examples of natural resources in their community. (land, water, trees, coal, gold, air)

14. Explain that natural resources are scarce even in a country as wealthy as the United States. Point out that often the western part of the United States experiences droughts and people don't have enough water to satisfy all the wants they have for water.