



## Monkeying Around with Economics

### OVERVIEW

“Monkeying Around with Economics” was a cross-curricular unit based on the book, *Summer of the Monkeys* by Wilson Rawls. The main character, Jay Berry, deals with scarcity, economic wants and opportunity cost throughout the book. Set in the Ozark Mountains, students identified with Jay Berry and learned how to apply economic concepts in their lives.

Cross-curricular connections were made through:

- a. Reading- Students read the book and searched for examples of economic terms that were being taught. Students used PowerPoint to develop a vocabulary file for economic terms.
- b. Language Arts- Students developed research projects on various topics in the book.
- c. Science- Students studied the difference between chimps and monkeys. Individual research was done on animals and plants from the Ozark Mountains.
- d. Social Studies- Students worked on map skills, learned about cultures, and the capital resources of the 1800s. They also learned about the development of libraries across the United States.
- e. Math- Students calculated price to charge for products and profit on the products that they made. Graphing skills were used to construct a graph.
- f. *Leader in Me* program by Steven Covey- Students learned leadership skills using the main character in the book as an example.
- g. Technology- Students learned to use our new Mac books including programs such as PowerPoint, Word, Photo Booth, iPhoto, and Wordle.

The goal for developing “Monkeying Around with Economics” was to give my students a chance to develop an understanding of economic concepts, develop their 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, and empower them to become better decision makers now and in the future. I also wanted to give my students a learning experience that would be relevant to their future. With a 71% poverty rate in my school community, my students lacked experiences that would encourage and enable them to be successful. Many of our students receive no training in economics or skills that would help them in their future and do not have access to computers on a regular basis. Some of our students have low self-esteem when it comes to their futures. I wanted to help them develop their human capital and give them the confidence to try new things.

Being creative in solving problems will allow students to be more productive in their education and their careers. Being able to collaborate on projects would allow them to be ready to work with others in the workplace. By giving students opportunities to do things that they had never done before, by making lessons relevant to their lives and making them responsible for their learning. I felt they would grow in confidence in their abilities and their skills.

My final goal was to create some excitement in my classroom. I wanted my students to come to class everyday wanting to learn. From past experiences, I knew that teaching economics would do just that. I wanted my students actively involved in preparing for their own futures.

The unit introduced the following economic concepts: goods, services, economic wants, scarcity, barter, productive resources, natural resources, capital goods, savings, division of labor, choices, human capital, interdependence, profit, opportunity cost, specialization, and human resources.

Students' economic knowledge and learning was assessed using a pre/post test. Pop quizzes were utilized to help students stay on track with their reading and assignments. As economic concepts were taught, activities were assigned to assess their understanding such as:

**Games** were used to quickly assess students' understanding.

1. Pass the Monkey- Students stood in a circle and pass around a monkey. When a student would get "stuck" with the monkey, they would have to stand in the middle of a circle and answer a question such as "Name 3 natural resources that begin with the letter a." The other students would pass the monkey as fast as possible until the person in the middle finished answering. The person holding the monkey at that point would have to go to the middle.
2. Flyswatter game- Students used flyswatters to locate economic concepts on a grid. The fastest one stayed and competed with the next student.

**Technology**- The programs that the students were learning were also used to document their economics learning. Students used PowerPoint to develop an economic vocabulary file. Each slide was a different economic concept. The title on the slide was the economic concept. In the text area, students would record the definition that I had given them, wrote a sentence using the word and illustrated the concept with clipart or pictures. I could easily see where they were in their understanding of the concept. Students also created word clouds using Wordle. They made the economic concept the largest word and surrounded it with examples.

**Scavenger hunt** – At the zoo, students searched for and recorded examples of economic concepts. They used digital cameras to illustrate their examples. When they returned from the trip, they downloaded the pictures and made PowerPoint slides for each concept.

In addition, pre and post test assessment revealed the following results:

Grade Level	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Gains
3 <sup>rd</sup> grade	27.3	66	38.7
4 <sup>th</sup> grade	46	79	33
5 <sup>th</sup> grade	51	91.2	39.8

Evidence clearly supports "Monkeying Around with Economics" was a successful unit and improved student achievement.