

Introduction to Economics in U.S. History

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OVERVIEW OF THE KIT

Economics in U.S. History

Overview, Objectives, Pedagogy, and Practice

Overview

This kit provides educators with materials to engage students in a dynamic, interactive, and constructivist process of exploring media representations of economic issues in U.S. history. The lessons were designed to integrate basic economic concepts with media literacy and critical thinking skills into 8th grade U.S. history, but the document-decoding approach makes the lessons usable or adaptable from middle school through high school. The lessons, slide, print, and video materials may be downloaded free-of-charge on line at the Project Look Sharp website, or a bound teacher guide may be purchased with all of the print materials and a CD/DVD of the media materials. Visit the Project Look Sharp website www.projectlooksharp.org for details.

Objectives:

- To teach information and vocabulary about basic economic concepts.
- To present diverse and compelling perspectives on economic issues.
- To teach students to identify the “language” of construction of different media forms and to analyze and evaluate the meanings of mediated messages about economics.
- To train students to understand and evaluate authorship, credibility and bias in different media sources and forms.
- To engage all students, but particularly those disengaged from traditional school work, in complex critical thinking and the development of reading, listening and visual decoding skills and attitudes that support life-long democratic citizenship.

Learning Standards:

This kit addresses standards of the **National Council for the Social Studies** (NCSS), including:

II. *Time, Continuity, and Change*: Knowing how to read and reconstruct the past. Drawing on their knowledge of history to make informed choices and decisions in the present.

VI. *Power, Authority, and Governance*: Confronting questions such as: What is power? Who holds it? How is it gained, used, and justified? How are governments created, structured, maintained, and changed?

VIII. *Production, Distribution and Consumption*: Knowledge of economic concepts and principles, using economic reasoning processes in addressing issues related to the four fundamental economic questions: What is to be produced? How is production to be organized? How are goods and services to be distributed? What is the most effective allocation of the factors of production (land, labor, capital, and management)?

This kit addresses standards of the **National Association of Teachers of English** (NCTE), including:

- applying a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate print and non-print texts
- applying knowledge of media techniques, figurative language, and genre to critique and discuss print and non-print texts
- participating as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.

This kit addresses core learning skills that have been identified as essential skills for the 21st Century Literacy, specifically:

- information and media literacy skills: analyzing, accessing, managing, integrating, and evaluating information in a variety of forms and media
- critical thinking and systems thinking: exercising sound reasoning in understanding and making complex choices, understanding the interconnections among systems

Finally, the activities in this kit foster group discussion skills, and can be adapted for use in other disciplines including art, art history, economics, and multicultural studies.

Accessing the materials

All print and media materials for these lessons are available for free download at www.projectlooksharp.org. Educators will need access to a computer and projector so that the class can identify key details in each slide. Teachers will want to print and review the lesson and make copies of student histories and assessments prior to instruction. Educators may purchase a bound copy of the entire teachers guide (with student handouts) and a DVD (with all video and PowerPoint files) from the Ithaca College Bookstore. Visit the Project Look Sharp website www.projectlooksharp.org for details.

OVERVIEW OF THE KIT

Media Literacy and Democratic Citizenship

The founders of the United States articulated the need for a literate citizenship as core to the development of a deep and enduring democracy. We live in an age when the most influential messages about pressing social issues and events are delivered through mass media, such as television, magazines and the Internet. Most students use the Internet as their primary source of information, yet few have any formal training in assessing the credibility of information in Web sites. It is essential to the success of our democracy that young people consciously and consistently analyze and evaluate media messages. They need to be taught to seek out current, accurate, and credible sources of information; they need to understand the influence of media messages on their understanding of the world; and they need training in identifying and using various techniques for communicating messages in different media forms. Without these critical skills, we risk losing the diversity and freedom of thought that underpins a culture of true democracy.

Collective Reading of Media Messages

This curriculum is based on the classroom practice of collective reading, in which the teacher leads the class through the process of decoding images, sounds and text as a way of developing a range of critical thinking skills while teaching core knowledge. This constructivist approach encourages the development of moral reasoning as students clarify their own interpretations, listen to the analysis of their peers, and discuss ethical issues. Decoding of the documents in this curriculum will help train students to distinguish fact from opinion, analyze point

of view and identify bias, interpret historical documents, and use evidence to back up a thesis. The classroom decoding process is particularly effective in involving students who rarely share their opinions about print-based material, including students with reading disabilities, visual learners, and students for whom English is a second language. The teacher should consider calling on students or going around the room to ensure participation by all students in the collective reading process.

Encouraging Multiple Readings

Although the Teacher Guides for each lesson include possible answers to the probe questions, the teacher should encourage multiple readings and a diversity of responses for most of the questions posed in the teacher guide. It is important that students give evidence in the document to explain their conclusions. Occasionally a question has only one right answer (e.g., “who created this video?”), and students should learn to distinguish between objective and subjective questions. The suggested answers given in the scripts are intended to reflect typical responses that address key historical and media literacy concepts and information. However, it is important that students recognize that all people do not interpret media messages the same way. Depending upon each reader’s background, including life experience, age, gender, race, culture, or political views, he or she may have very different interpretations of a particular text. The collective reading experience provides the opportunity to explore these differences and discuss the important concept that readers interpret messages through their own lenses.

Reading Bias

A major theme of these materials is the recognition that all media messages come from a particular point of view and have a bias that reflects the intent and perspective of the producer and sponsor. With these materials, teachers can train students to recognize bias and point of view. The teacher should encourage students to ask critical questions about any media messages encountered inside or outside the classroom using the *Key Questions To Ask When Analyzing Media Messages* found at www.projectlooksharp.org.

Bias in this Curriculum and in the Classroom

This series of lessons, like all media, also has a point of view and a bias. As teachers use the lessons, they may identify opinionated language, selective facts, missing information, and many other subjective decisions that went into constructing this view of history. The same questions the curriculum applies to other documents can be applied to this media construction: Who produced this curriculum for what purpose and what is its bias? Teachers and students could and should be asking critical questions about the editorial choices that went into constructing these lessons. For instance, why did we choose to focus on certain topics (e.g., environmental justice, green marketing and GMOs), but not others (e.g., risk/benefit analysis, the precautionary principle and chemical body burden)? And, what is your evidence for these conclusions? When using these materials teachers will make their own decisions of what to include and to edit, what questions to use and what issues to avoid. All of these decisions, both by the creators and users of the curriculum, will influence the view of history that students receive. Teachers should encourage students to thoughtfully analyze and discuss the stories, the perspectives, and the biases celebrated and criticized within our own classrooms. Those skills and practices are core to an educated democratic citizenship.

Additional Resources

For more information about media decoding download these documents from the project Look Sharp website:

- Key Questions to ask when analyzing media messages
- Tips for Media Decoding
- Core Principals for media literacy education

Fair Use of Media Documents

The classroom critique of political and cultural documents (e.g., paintings, TV news clips, excerpts from films, web pages) is essential to the development of core literacy skills in our media saturated democracy. To enable educators to fulfill the mission of teaching these core civic objectives, Project Look Sharp has created media literacy integration kits using a variety of different media documents for critical analysis in the classroom. The documents in this curriculum are presented for the purpose of direct critique and solely to be used in an educational setting.

For more information about fair use in Media Literacy Education, go to the Media Education Lab at Temple University at www.mediaeducationlab.com.