

# Where's My Popcorn?

## Making Sense of Scarcity



GRADE  
11

This lesson introduces students to the topic of scarcity. Through an interactive popcorn activity, students consider individual choices and responsibilities concerning resource allocation and explain how scarcity impacts cost of living, personal income, and consumer decision making.



### Subject

CIC3E - Making Economic Choices  
CIE3M - The Individual and the Economy

### Suggested Timing

70 minutes

### Financial Literacy Objectives

At the end of this lesson, students will:

- use financial terminology fluently;
- analyze the correlations between income and factors such as education, economy, worker supply and demand.

### Curriculum Expectations

Canadian and World Studies, Grades 11 and 12 (2005)  
Making Economic Choices (CIE3E)

#### Economic Decision Making

- Distinguish between an economic choice (e.g., one that involves the use of a scarce resource) and other types of choices (e.g., moral, ethical, political).
- Describe economic choices they have made and will have to make as consumers and contributors and the trade-offs involved in those choices.

#### The Individual and the Economy (CIE3M)

#### Economic Decision Making

- Explain, using specific examples, the economic problem of scarcity and the choices and trade-offs that individuals and societies must make.



## Assessment

Use: Checklist (Appendix A)

## What You Need

- Brown paper lunch bags, at least one per student
- Large opaque bags (such as a paper shopping bag), two of each stapled shut, filled with popped popcorn (2 bags) OR small items (2 bags)
- Crumpled newspaper (2 bags - students should not be aware that these bags do not contain popcorn)
- Scoop or plastic cup to distribute popcorn
- Chart paper and markers
- Access to a computer lab

## Minds On

Explain that the school has donated snacks for the class and that students will be invited to the front of the room in an orderly manner to get the snacks.  
(Note: Instead of popcorn, you could use small items such as paperclips/chalk and the activity adapted accordingly.)

Call small groups of students to the front, giving each a small brown paper lunch bag in which to put their popcorn. Allow them to take as much popcorn as they want, and encourage them to take extra lunch bags if they wish. Continue calling groups of students to the front of the class until the large bags of popcorn are empty.

When the next group of students approaches and asks for the popcorn in the remaining opaque bags, open the two bags and act surprised to discover that they contain crumpled newspaper.

## Context for Learning

Bill Fold is a character who is constantly getting himself into financial scrapes. Use the scenario below to provide students with a context for learning.

Bill Fold is about to discover that money is a scarce resource. He goes into his local grocery store and finds that the price of apples has skyrocketed. The grocer explains that, due to a very dry summer, fewer apples were grown this past year, so the price has risen. "Scarcity," he tells Bill, "is a simple economic concept that can drive prices right up."



## Action

### Whole Class Discussion

Apologize to those students who did not receive a snack. Explain that everyone thought there was plenty of popcorn for the entire class. Ask the group:

- What would you have done differently had you known there was a limited supply of popcorn?
- What can we do to remedy the situation?

Note: If popcorn or a snack was distributed; redistribute so that all students have a snack.

Write the following words on the board: Scarcity, Allocate.

Encourage students to offer their understandings of these terms.

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. Use examples from current issues (e.g., the oil crisis) and encourage students to think about how scarcity and/or even perceptions of scarcity may be related to rising prices.

### Group Work

Have students work in small groups to generate 2 chart paper lists of scarce resources under the separate headings "natural" and "economic". Regroup and share the findings.

Emphasize that countries and communities have different levels of natural and economic resources. Have students pair up, select a scarce resource to research, use the computer lab for research, and report back on levels of that resource in Canada, how it is allocated, and its impact on the cost of living. Their research should answer:

- What is the resource?
- Where is it concentrated?
- Who makes decisions about its allocation?
- How is it allocated?
- What is the impact of scarcity on consumers?

Students' findings can be summarized on a display wall for comparison.

Have students respond to the following questions in their groups, or discuss as a class:

1. When regions or countries have different levels of available resources, who should decide how they are allocated?
2. Does a resource-wealthy region or country have any obligation to ensure fair allocation to others?
3. What criteria can we use for fair distribution?
4. Compare allocation of a natural resource (such as water) to an economic resource (such as wealth). Should different criteria be used to determine allocation? Why or why not?
5. How can scarcity affect your personal income and finances?
6. What can you do if you have scarce resources?

## Consolidation/ Debrief



# Assessment for Learning Observation Checklist

	STUDENTS' NAMES														
<b>Look for:</b>															
The student...															
Participates equitably															
Interacts with peers															
Offers reasonable hypotheses related to scarcity															
Contributes reasonable examples related to scarcity															
Demonstrates an understanding of economic choice															
Identifies relationships between scarcity and choice															
Relates the concept of scarcity to his/her own situation															