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IS WHAT'S GOOD FOR THE GDP GOOD FOR ME?

Grades: 8 & up

Time: 60–90 minutes

Materials: Black/white board and chalk/markers; a set of slips of paper for each group, with activities that affect the GDP & well being of the country – each set should have two copies of each activity paper clipped together (see below); copies of the playing board (see below); tape for each group; short definitions/explanations of the GDP and of alternative progress indicators; recent news blurbs about the GDP

Relevant Subjects: Social Studies, Economics, Language Arts, and, with modifications, Mathematics

This activity increases student awareness about the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and what it measures, introduces them to alternative indicators and encourages critical thinking about what factors contribute to a healthy, sustainable, stable economy.

1. Ask students to briefly share what they know about the GDP, what it is, what it measures, etc. Don't correct them or add information/facts of your own, but do help them clarify what they think. Write a summary on the board.

2. Share an "official," general definition of the GDP, such as:

"GDP is the market value of the goods and services produced by labor and property located in the United States. As long as the labor and property are located in the United States, the suppliers (that is, the workers, and, for property, the owners) may be U.S. residents or residents of other countries."

Source: National Center for Health Statistics (www.cdc.gov/nchs/dataawh/nchsdefs/gdp.htm)

3. Take an initial poll: "Is it a good thing when our GDP grows?"

4. Ask students to answer some initial questions, and to share how they think that activity affects the GDP. Examples might include:

- How many of you have purchased something that cost more than \$25 in the last week? What is the effect on the GDP? (positive? negative? neutral?)

- How many of you do volunteer work on a fairly regular basis? What is the effect on the GDP?
- How many of you know somebody in the military who's over in Iraq or Afghanistan? Does that have an effect on the GDP? What?
- How many of you know somebody's who's on a diet? What might be the effect on the GDP?
- How many of you shop at Wal-mart or Target or a similar "big box" store? What's the effect on the GDP?
- How many of you have been affected or know someone who has been affected by divorce? How might divorce affect the GDP?
- How many of you know someone who's been laid off from their job? What might be the effect on the GDP?

"We'll come back and revisit some of these in a minute. First, let's play a little game."

5. Pass out a playing sheet (see below), the sets of slips of paper (see below) and tape to groups of about four. Each pair of slips will describe an activity that has taken place. Examples might include:

- John goes to the Gap and buys two pairs of jeans.
- Shakirah buys a dress for the prom.
- Kavon spends 3 hours helping younger kids learn to read at the library.
- Letti babysits for her younger sister until her mother gets home from work.
- Mary purchases a hamburger and fries at McDonald's.
- Damien harvests vegetables from his family's organic garden and prepares dinner with them.
- Jordyn has outgrown her sweater and passes it on to a friend of hers.
- Corporation XYZ discharges toxins into the air, and many people in the area begin to complain of upper respiratory problems.
- Matthew maxes out his second credit card.
- Carlise buys a new bicycle from Wal-mart.
- Nick plants flowers in an urban community garden.
- Jason steals a pair of sneakers from a chain shoe store.
- Greg & Doris bake a loaf of bread for their new neighbors.
- A multi-vehicle accident results in 3 people being hospitalized.
- Mr. & Mrs. Kain finalize their divorce.
- Sarah, age 14, gives birth to a baby.
- Joe shoves snow for the elderly woman who lives next door to him.
- Dureti and her family rent DVDs from the video store and watch them several hours a day.
- A car bomb kills 12 people.
- Marie works two jobs in order to provide for her family.
- The ABC Company lays off 1,400 local people, allowing them to make record profits for the next quarter.
- DeShawn walks to school and work every day.

- Hurricane Bob causes millions of dollars of damage.
- Thefts in your neighborhood increase by 20%.
- Manuel spends time hiking in the woods with his family.
- BIGNET commercial fishing company fishes a region along the Pacific to unrecoverable levels.
- Teen obesity rates have increased by 32 percent.
- Tanisha's family maintains a wildlife-friendly habitat in their yard.
- The owner of the AAA company pays his workers a living wage.
- The United States engages in war with Country Q.

Pertinent Information: Depending on the number of students, time available and number of activities in a set, you may want to provide a playing board for each student, rather than one per group.

Each member of the group takes turns choosing a pair of slips with an activity on it. After choosing an activity, they must determine:

- Does this activity increase ("help") or decrease ("hurt") the GDP? Have them tape one copy of the slip in what they think is the appropriate column on the playing board (Helps/Hurts GDP).
- Does this activity help or hurt the health and well-being of others? (Others includes people, nonhuman animals and the planet.) Have them tape the other copy of the slip in what they think is the appropriate column on the playing board (Mostly helps others/Mostly hurts others).

Remind students that, when deciding where to place their slips, they should consider the long-term and broader effects of an activity, as well as its immediate effects. Invite group members to help each other decide where the slips should go, if someone feels stumped.

Alternative: You could also give each member of a group identical pairs of activities, have them play the game as individuals, and then compare results with their group members.

6. When all groups have finished their games, invite them to take turns sharing the results of their game (what activities went where) and discussing their initial thoughts.

7. Define the GDP using another source, such as:

"The GDP is simply a gross measure of market activity, of money changing hands. It makes no distinction whatsoever between the desirable and the undesirable, or costs and gain."

Source: ("If the GDP is Up, Why is America Down." *Atlantic Monthly* October 1995.)

Briefly talk about what the GDP does and doesn't measure (filling in what students didn't mention). Share one or more recent news blurbs about the GDP with students and ask them for their comments.

8. Discuss alternative progress indicators, such as the Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI) outlined by Redefining Progress (www.redefiningprogress.org) and the Sustainable Seattle Indicators of Sustainable Community (ISC) (www.sustainableseattle.org) and what they do/don't measure.

9. Invite students to share their thoughts about the different types of measurements, the GDP and the GPI/ISC. Have them relate the different indicator systems to the initial questions you asked them and to the activities in the game.

10. Ask: "What can we do with the information we've learned?"

Extensions:

1. Have groups of students develop a list of their own indicators that they feel are important for measuring economic health and well-being and then share them.

2. Have groups of students revisit the activities from the game and revise them so that they mostly help (or at least don't mostly harm) others.

3. Encourage students to share their own indicators with their government leaders at the local, state and national levels.

Activity by Stephanie Muzekari (M.Ed. Graduate) and Marsha Rakestraw (HECP Graduate)

This Activity "Helps" the GDP

This Activity (Mostly) Helps the Health & Well-Being of Others

This Activity "Hurts" the GDP

This Activity (Mostly) Hurts the Health & Well-Being of Others