

LESSON 7: IF THERE IS ENOUGH FOOD, WHY ARE PEOPLE HUNGRY?

Each small group of students examines the food supply as well as the infant mortality rate (a measure of hunger) in a particular country to learn that food scarcity is not a cause of hunger. As students discuss some of the forces behind each country's hunger problem, they discover that the forces creating hunger are the same worldwide.

TEACHER BACKGROUND READING

It has long been widely assumed that food scarcity is a major cause of world hunger, but United Nations statistics show that the world produces enough grain to provide **every** person on the planet with at least 2,700 calories everyday. This figure does not even include calories from abundant non-grain sources such as fish, legumes, fruits and vegetables. The **adult** recommended daily calorie requirements fall between 2,000 and 2,700 calories per day.

Enough food is often produced even in countries where people suffer from severe hunger. War and natural disasters can decrease food production in a specific region, but even during famine food is often available to those who can pay for it. In 1992 Niger, in sub-Saharan Africa, had the highest infant mortality rate in the world - for every 1,000 children under the age of five 320 died. Yet enough grain was produced in Niger that year to provide every person in the country with 2,230 calories worth of food everyday. In 1991 Somalia, a country Americans often associate with starvation, EXPORTED more than twice as much food as it imported. In Bangladesh, where some of the world's most fertile farmland can be found, enough food was produced to allow each person 2,100 calories worth of grain everyday. 3 out of 5 children under the age of five in Bangladesh suffered stunted growth caused by undernutrition. In most developing countries where enough food is grown, the majority of the populations consume fewer than 1,500 calories per day.

To understand that hunger exists alongside abundance we need only examine the United States' food supply and level of hunger. Millions of tons of grain are produced each year - most of it going to feed livestock. Despite an overflowing food supply, it is estimated that between 20 and 30 million Americans go hungry every month, 12 million of these are children.

* *The Center on Hunger, Poverty and Nutrition at Tufts University - 1993 study.*

Around the planet, as food production has increased so have the numbers of hungry people. WHY?

1. A small minority controls most of the world's farmland. In developing countries nearly 80% of the arable land is controlled by fewer than 3% of the people who own land. In the U.S. the top 5% of landowners own 75% of the land.*
2. The governments of developing countries allocate a very small percentage of their total expenditures to growing **local food staples**. Most of the money, attention and best land are used to produce cash crops (coffee, sugar, tea, cotton, tobacco, etc.) which are exported to people in industrialized countries.
3. Over half the grain grown in the world and half the fish caught are fed to livestock.†
4. In many countries the violence of war destroys crops and food supplies. Often food aid is deliberately blocked and starvation becomes a weapon of war.
5. Food costs money. Poverty, on the rise around the world, is a major cause of hunger. Causes of poverty include: unemployment, inadequate wages, unfair distribution of resources, lack of medical care, political disenfranchisement, discrimination and environmental degradation.
6. A lack of awareness and a lack of will are also at the root of the hunger problem. Many people who **could** make a difference in ending the injustice of hunger simply don't.

MATERIALS: One country card for each small group[§]
 (Enough copies for each student)
 World map

* Food and Agriculture Organizations's report on the World Census of Agriculture, Rome 1970. (Frances Moore Lappé in *Diet For a Small Planet* writes that since then landholdings in most countries have become even more concentrated.)

† Lappé, Frances Moore. *Diet For a Small Planet*, Ballantine Books, NY 1991 Edition.

§ Statistics for the country cards are from *The State of the World's Children*, 1994, UNICEF.

PROCEDURE:

1. Explain to students that most people have assumed that food scarcity is the major cause of hunger. (Students could interview family members first to find out what **they** think causes hunger.) Today students will investigate this assumption to see if it is true. Tell them that the world's food supply is measured by estimating the number of calories per ton of **grain** produced in each country. Remind them that this total does not include other sources of calories and nutrients such as fruits vegetables and legumes.
2. Tell them that the average **adult** needs between 2,000 and 2,700 calories every day to remain healthy. Children need fewer calories. (If your students have kept food diaries, they can add up one day's worth of food to find out how many calories they need each day to remain healthy and active.)

Review with students "How Hunger Is Measured - The Infant Mortality Rate" from Lesson 4. Remember, an IMR above 25 means serious hunger.

3. Divide students into small groups and give each group a country card. Students must discuss the facts on their card and answer the following three questions:
 1. Is enough food produced in your country to supply everyone with enough calories?
 2. Are there hungry people in your country?
 3. Why can't people get food?

Encourage students to discuss how the facts on their card prevent people from getting food. For instance, **how** does civil war create hunger? **How** do cash crops keep people within the country hungry?

4. After 20 minutes ask each group to make a presentation on its country. They must locate the country on the class map and explain some of the root causes of hunger in their country. List each cause that students discover on the board under a permanent title: **ROOT CAUSES OF HUNGER**. Are many of these causes the same worldwide? As your study proceeds, add to this list.

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY:

1. Have students create their own country cards based on their own research and current news reports.
2. Watch *Harvest of Hunger*, a video which demonstrates that food scarcity is not a cause of hunger, by Oxfam. See resource guide - videos.

* This lesson was inspired by a lesson in Sonja Williams' high school curriculum called *Exploding the Hunger Myths*. From Food First, 1987.

Group #1

RWANDA

Infant Mortality Rate - 122

You and your family must work the land in order to survive. Instead of using the best land in the country to grow food, the government uses it, as well as most of its money and farm equipment, to grow acres and acres of coffee which is shipped to industrial countries such as the U.S.

Families such as yours, who must grow your own food, are pushed onto rocky or weak land. Your family cannot afford fertilizers and irrigation systems that would improve the land, so the soil cannot produce enough food for you.

In a typical year enough grain is grown in Rwanda to provide every person with 2,000 calories worth every day, but most Rwandans cannot get their share of that food. Food costs money. There aren't many jobs here except for those in the coffee fields which is back-breaking work for very little pay. There is little chance of being trained for a better job since the average person here receives only one year of schooling during his or her lifetime.

Like most families in Rwanda, you would rather have sons than daughters. Strong sons can help farm the land. Because boys are valued over girls, girls receive less food, less health care and less education than boys. Half the children in your country suffer stunted growth because they do not get enough food.

68 Is there enough food?

Are there hungry people in Rwanda?

Why can't hungry people get food?

Group #2

SOUTH AFRICA

Infant Mortality Rate - 70

You live in the most highly developed country on the African continent. Enough grain is grown in South Africa to provide every person with at least 3,000 calories a day. That's a lot of grain! Many people, including you and your family, cannot afford to buy that food. Your skin is black and your country has had a long history of apartheid. You earn only 1/5 what white workers earn and this is not enough to live a healthy life. When you become sick it is nearly impossible to find a doctor who will care for you. Half the black children in your country suffer stunted growth because they cannot get enough food.

Many of your friends are having difficulty finding jobs. There just aren't enough to go around. Seasonal work can be found in the fields of large, wealthy landowners who grow tobacco, cotton, sugarcane or grapes (for wine). These cash crops are shipped to other countries. This work is hard and the pay is not enough to support a family. You would like to see more of the land that is used to grow cash crops used instead to grow food for hungry people.

It is unlikely that your friends or you will find work. There are few jobs available and there is little chance of being trained for a better job. The average South African receives only 3 1/2 years of schooling over a lifetime.

Is there enough food?

Are there hungry people in South Africa?

Why can't hungry people get food?

Group #3

RUSSIA Infant Mortality Rate - 31

Farmers in your country grew enough grain in 1992 to provide every person with 3,000 calories worth each day. Unfortunately, you and your family couldn't get much of that food.

Your country has experienced much political violence over the past few years. This has made it difficult to get food to the markets in your town. The little food that **does** get to the market is very expensive.

You have been unable to find a job so you cannot afford expensive food. The food you eat is cheaper and of poor quality. The environment and the food supply in your area have been contaminated by the overuse of chemical fertilizers, pesticides and toxic waste.

Even your friends who **are** working are not earning enough money to pay their rent, heating and buy enough food for their families.

One out of every four people in Russia lives in poverty and suffers chronic hunger.

Is there enough food?

Are there hungry people in Russia?

Why can't hungry people get food?

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Group #4

THE UNITED STATES Infant Mortality Rate - 11

There are miles and miles of farmland in your country. Enough grain is produced to provide every person with 3,300 calories worth every day. All across the nation "super" markets are stocked with food. There are restaurants in every city and town. Advertisements for all kinds of foods are found everywhere: television commercials, billboards, magazines and radio.

Unfortunately, many people like you and your family cannot get much of this food. Over half the grain grown in the U.S. is **exported** to other countries and fed to livestock. Fresh fruits and vegetables are not available in **your** area. You must eat cheaper foods that are low in nutrients.

Food costs money. You, like more and more people, cannot find a job. You must rely on special government food programs and soup kitchens for food until a job is available. If a job can be found, you hope it will pay enough money to cover your rent, heating and medical bills **and** buy enough food. Many of your working friends are earning inadequate wages and must buy less food each week.

While it is true that many people in your country suffer from diseases related to **over**-eating (obesity, heart disease, diabetes), between 20 and 30 million in the U.S. go hungry at some time during each month. 12 million of those hungry people are children.

Is there enough food?

Are people hungry in the U.S.?

Why can't hungry people get food?

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Group #5

HAITI

Infant Mortality Rate - 133

You and your family must grow your own food. This can be difficult because much of the best land, fertilizer, seeds and tools needed are given to the small group of people who can pay for them.

In a typical year in Haiti, enough grain is produced to provide every person with 2,100 calories worth everyday. People like you, with little money, cannot afford to buy that food. More food could be grown but the best land is used for growing coffee that is shipped to industrial countries such as the U.S.

In recent years, the government of your country has been accused of violating human rights. This has led to fighting within your country. Other countries have refused to trade with Haiti or send aid until your government stops violating its people's rights. Your people depend on these other countries for farm supplies for growing food. When these countries stopped trading with your government, you had no access to the things you need to grow food. As a result, less food is produced here. What little food there is can be very expensive and is found only in areas where people with enough money can buy it.

You have not been able to find a job that pays enough to cover your rent, medical care **and** buy enough food. There are few job training programs in Haiti. The typical Haitian receives 1 1/2 years of schooling. Nearly half the children under five in Haiti suffer stunted growth from insufficient food.

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Is there enough food?

Are people hungry in Haiti.?

Why can't hungry people get food?

Group #6

INDIA

Infant Mortality Rate - 126

Enough grain is grown in your country in a typical year to insure every single person 2,400 calories worth everyday; however, nearly 210 million people are too poor to buy their share of that food. In spite of all those hungry people, your country **EXPORTS** (!) three times as much food as it imports. Much of your country's best land, resources and money are used to grow "cash crops" such as rice, tea, cotton and tobacco which are shipped to industrial countries such as the U.S.

When so much food is sent **OUT** of your country, the food that stays in the country becomes expensive. Many people cannot find jobs and so do not have the money to buy food. Those who **do** work in the "cash crop" fields or factories are paid wages that are so paltry they cannot pay their rent, medical care **and** buy enough food for their families.

Most families prefer sons over daughters. Strong sons can help work the land or perform other jobs that might bring money for food. Because boys are valued over girls, girls receive less of the family's food, less health care and less education than boys.

Over half the children under five in India are underweight for their ages.

Is there enough food?

Are there hungry people in India?

Why can't hungry people get food?

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