

UNEQUAL RESOURCES

A Group Simulation by Jane Boston
(*Social Studies Review, Spring-Summer 1998*)

This activity has been adapted by Jane Boston from an article by Dr. Margit McGuire, which was first reprinted in the newsletter of the Washington State Council for the Social Studies in the Fall of 1983 and later in the February 1984 issue of California Council for the Social Studies Sunburst. To our knowledge the simulation was originally adapted from the 1972 Handbook for Group Facilitators. Appreciation is given [by Jane Boston] to the many teachers who have used this simulation over the years and helped refine these instructions.

INTRODUCTION

The interdependence on a global scale of many aspects of modern life has become increasingly clear as individuals, groups, and nations grapple with issues related to the environment, energy, international security, and human economic, political, and social institutions. As change occurs, there is a critical need for approaches to dealing with these issues, which reflect cooperation among the affected groups and nations. Most people will now agree that we are all a part of a complex set of multiple global systems. Culture and perception shape the cross-cultural communications involved in problem-solving across traditional boundaries. It should also be noted that these dynamics operate within local communities as well as among international groups and nation states. This simulation is designed to replicate many of these dynamics and to provide an experiential base from which students may discuss them. It is recommended that it be used as part of a larger unit of study which explores global systems, interdependence, change, conflict and/or cross-cultural communication.

OBJECTIVES

- Students will demonstrate an understanding of the concepts of interdependence, change, conflict, and cross-cultural communication by citing examples of each in the debriefing.
- Students will apply problem solving skills to a real task.

PHYSICAL SETTING

The space needs to be large enough to accommodate chairs and desks or table space for each group. If you are conducting this activity with more than one set of four groups, seat each set of four in the same part of the room (A's near A's, B near B's, etc.).

PARTICIPANTS

This simulation requires a minimum of twelve players and a maximum of forty-eight. Participants should be divided into sets of four groups consisting of four to six players. For example, twelve players would be divided into four groups of three. Thirty participants might be divided into eight groups of three or four players each. The total number of groups must be divisible by four.

MATERIALS

For each set of four groups, the following materials will be needed.

- Task Sheet (Handout 1) - one per group
- 4 large manila envelopes
- 20 paper clips
- 1 bottle of glue or 1 glue stick
- Construction paper (full 8-1/2 x 11 sheets):
 - 4 red
 - 3 white
 - 5 blue
 - 5 yellow
 - 3 green
 - 3 purple
- 2 pencils
- 3 pair of scissors
- 1 ruler
- 2 felt pens, crayons, or colored pencils
- Chart or butcher paper (one sheet per set of four groups will be needed for the activity and an additional amount will be needed to record comments during the debriefing)
- Masking tape
- Discussion Questions (Handout 2) – one per group

MATERIALS PREPARATION

Before you begin, assemble the materials for each set of 4 groups as follows:

Envelope #1: 2 scissors, 1 ruler, 20 paper clips, 2 pencils, 2 four-inch squares of red construction paper, 2 four-inch squares of white construction paper

Envelope #2: 1 scissor, 1 glue, 2 full sheets each of blue, white, and yellow construction paper

Envelope #3: 2 felt pens (or crayons or colored pencils), 2 full sheets each of green, yellow, blue, red, and purple construction paper

Envelope #4: 1 full sheet each of green, yellow, blue, red, and purple construction paper

Attach one task sheet to the outside of each envelope. Clearly label each envelope Group 1, Group 2, etc. If you are working with more than one set of four groups, label the envelopes Group A-1, A-2, A-3; B-1, etc.

Prepare one butcher paper chart for each set of four groups as follows:

Group #	Food	Clothing	Shelter	Industry	Education
1					
2					
3					
4					

Tear off 20 pieces of masking tape per set of four groups and place it near the chart. It will be used to attach the items each group will assemble.

TIME NEEDED

Allow a minimum of 45 minutes for this activity. It easily can be conducted in a standard class period. It is critical, however, to allow adequate time for debriefing within this period of time.

PROCEDURES

1. Tell the participants that they are about to begin an activity in which they will be asked to perform tasks to meet the needs and wants of a country (or culture).
2. Divide the participants into groups of 4-7. The total number of groups should be divisible by four. Assign each group to an area of the room and table or desk space.
3. Distribute one envelope to each group. Instruct the participants not to open the envelope until told to do so. Ask students to read the instruction sheet on the outside of the envelope.
4. Explain to the groups that resources vary from country to country (culture to culture) and that all countries must complete the same tasks.

Note: In the lesson developed by Margit McGuire, the facilitator is instructed to tell students that they may bargain between countries to obtain the needed materials. Many teachers currently using this activity do not include that instruction so as to leave the situation ambiguous enough to give the participants an opportunity to develop their own strategies for obtaining (or doing without) needed resources.

5. Ask each group to attach each item it develops to the wall chart as it is finished.
6. Give the signal to begin.
7. During the simulation, the facilitator should monitor the situation for the participants' safety and general welfare, but should not reinterpret the instructions or assist them in making decisions. Encourage them to consult with their group when questions arise. It is sometimes helpful to make a few notes on the interactions you observe for use during debriefing particularly those which reinforce the concepts and generalizations you are trying to build.

8. As groups begin to complete all their tasks, the facilitator should begin to verbally draw attention to those that are finished.
9. Distribute the lists of discussion questions (Handout 2) to those groups finish early. Ask them to begin talking together about those questions.
10. When all groups have finished their tasks, the facilitator should ask the participants to look at the wall charts and see if they can make any comments or generalizations from what they see. Participants generally will note the variations in "craftsmanship", size, and compliance. They may also mention the speed with which the task was accomplished and the resources available. During this discussion, the facilitator may want to begin to connect the students' comments to the "real world". For example, comments on variations in "craftsmanship" of certain items may be connected to the difference between folk arts and manufactured arts today.
11. Continue debriefing by asking students the questions on Handout 2. This part of the simulation is its most important aspect and adequate time should be allowed for a full discussion of the activity. It can be expected that the activity will sometimes generate strong thoughts and feelings and care must be taken to adequately explore these with the group.
12. As closure or as an assessment of the activity, the facilitator may want to ask participants to write (alone or in pairs) one of the following topics:
 - Describe how this activity monitors dynamics in the world today.
 - Describe which strategies were most effective in obtaining the materials your group needed to complete its tasks. Can these strategies be applied to a "real world" situation? If so, what might be the result?
 - What assumptions did your group make about the other groups' capacity for cooperation? What was the basis for those assumptions? Direct knowledge? Past Experience? Stereotypes? Other?
 - Complete the statement "The unequal distribution of resources in the world today....."
 - Based on today's activity, write a definition for the word "interdependent".

TASK SHEET

Your group has the responsibility of providing for certain needs and wants for your country. These needs and wants are met by completing the tasks listed below.

FOOD:

Make four strips of yellow paper, each 3" by 1"

CLOTHING:

Make a green "T" four inches high

SHELTER:

Make a 2" white square and attach a yellow triangle to one side of the square

INDUSTRY:

Make a four link paper chain, each link a different color

EDUCATION:

Make a four page book out of two different colors

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Could your group have completed the tasks without getting resources from another country? Why or why not?
2. How did your country adapt to not having all the resources it needed?
3. Were there any conflicts between groups? Why or why not?
4. Were there any communication problems when dealing with other groups? What may have contributed to those problems?
5. How did you feel when you realized that resources were unequally distributed?
6. What resources were in high demand? Describe the negotiations for these high demand items.
7. Can you give examples of innovative ways in which groups completed their tasks?
8. Are there any real life situations in the world that come to mind when you think of this activity? How are they similar? Different?
9. What new questions did this activity raise for you? How do you plan to investigate them?