

## FAST FACTS



10+  
People



60  
Minutes



\$0 - \$10



Low Risk  
Level

## The Penny Game: Wealth and Power

Written by Sherry Kempf and David Shiman, Center for World Education, University of Vermont. Adapted from S. Lamy, et al, *Teaching Global Awareness with Simulations and Games*, (Denver: Center for Teaching International Relations, University of Denver, 1994).

**Purpose of Activity:** The purpose of this activity is for students to gain a better understanding of the distribution of wealth and power within society.

**Objectives/Learning Outcomes:** By participating in this activity, students will examine how wealth and power affects a person's opportunities to succeed.

### Materials Needed:

- Open space
- 100 pennies
- Large piece of butcher paper
- 3-5 pairs of gloves/mittens (depending on group size)

### Ground Rules:

- Be fully present and participate at your own comfort level – challenge by choice.
  - Follow up - What does it mean to be “fully present”?
  - Follow up - What does “challenge by choice” mean?
- Push yourself outside of your comfort zone – the most learning happens when we are a little bit uncomfortable.
- Listen respectfully, share air time, and encourage others to participate.
- It's ok for us all to be at different places with the things we discuss today.
- Show respect for one another's beliefs, values, and experiences.
- Respect and maintain privacy.

### Disclaimer:

- If as facilitators you/your family are not low SES, be sure to acknowledge that. Frame the conversation that you do not understand what it means to come from a background with limited financial resources from personal experience, nor are you an expert because this is the topic of the program. You are simply trying to be an ally to those that are of a lower socioeconomic background by doing education on the topic.
- If someone DOES attend the program who is of low SES, be sure not to single them out for the “lower socioeconomic background perspective,” stare at them to judge their reaction, or basically put them on the spot. They should be treated like every other student, and invite everyone to share/participate as much as she/he/ze is comfortable.

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### Facilitation Guide:

#### PART A: The Scramble

1. Explain to participants that in this activity they will distribute the wealth and power of the world among themselves. This wealth is represented by the 100 pennies. There is only one rule: no participant may touch another member of the group at any time.

2. Arrange the room so that participants have a fairly large area to play the game. Have participants stand or sit in a circle and scatter the pennies evenly in the middle of the circle. Withhold three participants from this part of the activity. Distribute mittens for some participants to wear but postpone discussion of reasons for this until debriefing.

Note: To emphasize that some start off with more than others, consider giving three or four participants five extra pennies to begin with.

At the order of GO, have participants (except the three withheld) gather as many pennies as possible without touching one another.

3. After all the pennies have been collected, have participants report their wealth to the class. Record participants' names and number of pennies on a board or chart paper under three categories:

- GREAT WEALTH AND POWER (those with six or more pennies—the smallest group);
- SOME WEALTH AND POWER (those with three to five pennies—the middle group);
- LITTLE WEALTH AND POWER (those with two or fewer pennies—the largest group).

4. Remind the group that these pennies represent their wealth and power in the world. The amount they possess will affect their capacity to satisfy their needs (e.g., basic education, adequate food and nutrition, good health care, adequate housing) and wants (e.g. higher education, cars, computers, toys, television and other luxury items). Those participants with six or more pennies will have their basic “needs” and most of their “wants” met; those with three to five pennies will have their basic needs met, and those with two or fewer pennies will have difficulty surviving due to disease, lack of education, malnutrition, and inadequate shelter.

5. Tell participants that they may, if they wish, give pennies to others; however, they are not required to do so. Tell them that those who do share will be honored as “DONORS,” with their names placed on the board. Allow a few minutes for participants to redistribute the pennies if they wish. Then ask for the names of those who gave away pennies and the amount each gave. List them on the board or chart entitled “DONORS.” Ask if anyone changed category as a result of giving or receiving pennies and record these shifts on the chart.

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6. Explain that some people in their country (and perhaps in their community) and in every country around the globe lack adequate necessities, such as food, education, health care, and shelter. Point out that others, often in the same community or country, are able to acquire almost everything they need and want.

### PART B: Creating Economic "Fairness"

1. Divide participants into groups according to the number of pennies they have. Distribute those three participants withheld from the original "scramble" randomly among the different groups. Make note of their reactions to being placed in one group rather than another but save discussion of their placement until the debriefing session.

2. Give each group the task of creating a plan for the fair distribution of the pennies (the world's wealth). Each group should prepare to: a) show why their plan is fair, b) explain what needs to be done (if anything), and c) describe what the group plans to do and why. Give the groups ten minutes to devise their plans.

3. Ask each group to appoint a spokesperson to explain their plan to the others and answer questions. After the plans have been presented and discussed, announce that a vote will now be held on which plan to adopt.

4. When participants are ready to vote, announce the following: Participants with six or more pennies have five votes, those with three to five pennies have two votes, and those with two or fewer pennies have one-half vote. This strategy reinforces the fact that the distribution of power often reflects that of wealth.

Have participants vote and tabulate the results. Announce which plan is to be implemented. Carry out this plan, redistributing the wealth if necessary.

### **Processing Questions:**

Debriefing is an essential step in this process. Draw on the following questions to promote a productive discussion. Be sure to devote time to a discussion of changes needed and changes undertaken.

- How did you feel about the way in which the pennies were acquired and distributed?
- Were you treated fairly?
- Did some people give pennies away? Did you give away or receive pennies? Why or why not? How did this feel?
- What determined whether or not people gave away pennies? Knowing what the pennies represented? Having one's name displayed? Feeling guilty? Something else?
- What aspects of this game represented how the world's wealth and power are distributed?

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- What about the three participants assigned to groups? Were they fairly treated? Is what happened to them similar to what happens to people around the globe? What sorts of people? Is it just chance where we end up?
- What about the participants with mittens? What kinds of people do the mittens represent? What group did they end up in?
  - Note: The mittens do not represent disability, but rather are intended to highlight issues of access.
- How did the members of the different groups feel about their situation? Did the recommended plan for fair distribution reflect whether the group had more or fewer pennies?
- After playing this game do you have a better understanding of the situation or attitude of poor people/nations? Of the situation or attitude of wealthy people/nations?
- Why were some people given more votes than others? Was this an accurate representation of those with more or less power in the world?
- Who are the “haves” and the “have nots” in the world today? Which countries are the “haves” and the “have nots”? Who are the “haves” and “have nots” in our country today? In our state or community? Why?
- Should the “haves” be concerned about the situation of the “have nots?” For what reasons? economic? moral/religious? political? Why might the “haves” give money or resources to the “have nots”? Is this a way to solve the problems of poverty?
- What might the “have-nots” do to improve their situation? What are some actions that “have-nots” have taken around the globe and at home to address the inequalities of wealth and power?
- Do you think there should be a redistribution of wealth and power throughout the world? Why or why not? If yes, how would you propose to accomplish this? What principles would guide your proposals for change?
- Do you think there should be a redistribution of wealth and power in this country? Why or why not? If yes, how would you propose to accomplish this? What principles would guide your proposals for change?

### Discussion Questions:

- How did this activity make you feel?
- What did you observe as you were doing the activity?
- Did anything surprise you?
- What have you learned from this activity?
- Has this activity changed your perspective of others?