

The Colonial Workers Web

OVERVIEW

Students will participate in an activity to explore how workers, both today and in colonial times, worked within their societies to produce specialized goods and services and became interdependent.

ECONOMICS CONCEPTS

Goods, services, producers, consumers, self-sufficiency, specialization, interdependence, barter

OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to:

- Explain how people became less self sufficient in their economic lives as they became more specialized.
- Identify specialization and interdependence and give examples of each.
- Explain how specialization leads to interdependence.

RELATED SOCIAL STUDIES STANDARDS

The students will:

- 7.6 Explain the structure and operation of the United States economy, with emphasis on the concept of markets.
- 4.3 Explain the economic life of the Virginia colony.
- 3.7 Describe the economic specialization and interdependence involved in the production of goods and services in various types of communities in the past.
- 2.6 Explain the interdependence of producers and consumers in a market economy in the past and the present.
- 1.10 Explain the difference between goods and services and describe how people are both consumers and producers.
- 1.12 Simulate the exchange of money for goods and services.
- K.5 Match simple descriptions of work that people do and the names of those jobs with examples from the local community and historical accounts.

MATERIALS

- One piece of cardstock for each student (approximately 4" x 11")
- Masking Tape
- Markers in two different colors

PREPARATION

Make enough worker cards for each student to have one. Write the name of a contemporary worker on the front of each card. You may want to have students help with the construction of the cards, and add illustrations. Choose workers from the following list and/or add others as necessary.

Hair Stylist	Webmaster	Grocer	Florist
Caterer	Airline Pilot	Interior Decorator	Librarian
Bus Driver	Reporter	Computer Programmer	Policeman
Dressmaker	Dentist	Real Estate Sales	Carpenter
Nurse	Baker	Architect	Computer Repair
Car Mechanic	Travel Agent	Farmer	Insurance Sales
Doctor	Photographer	Chef	Truck Driver
Accountant	Artist	Weather Forecaster	Teacher

PROCEDURE

1. The Workers Web Activity

- Distribute one prepared worker card to each student. Give students small strips of masking tape and instruct them to tape the cards to their clothing, so that others can identify them. The teacher also needs a worker card.
- Have students sit in a circle on the floor.
- Explain that we all use goods and services, both in our career roles as producers and in our roles as consumers. Instruct students to look around the circle and choose two or three workers that produce a good or service that they might need.
- Model the process for the game. While holding onto the end of a large ball of yarn, roll it to someone in the circle who produces a good or service that your worker uses, either on their jobs or at home, and explain the use. The person who receives the ball of yarn, selects another worker who produces a desired good or service, and explains how this new good or service will be used. Then holding onto the yarn, he or she rolls the ball to that worker.
- Continue rolling the ball of yarn until a nice "web," is formed and all students have had a turn. This activity is called the *Workers Web*.*

2. Exploring the Workers Web Activity

Use the following questions to explore this activity:

- What does it mean to be self-sufficient? (*to be able to raise your own food and to produce the other products you need, and not depend on other people for trade*)

* The original *Workers Web* activity was developed by Patricia Bailey Patterson in 1978 in an economics institute at the University of West Florida. She adapted it from an environmental activity she had used in her classroom. Sadly, two months later, she died in a tragic accident, but her creativity lives on, as other teachers use her idea. We would like to acknowledge that this lesson is an adaptation of her original idea for use in teaching history and is used with permission.

- What is specialization? (*the situation in which people produce a narrower range of goods and services than they consume.*)
- What are some of the benefits of specialization? (*Workers become more skilled and people get to specialize in work they really enjoy.*)
- What are some of the disadvantages to specialization? (*Sometimes people get bored doing the same thing all the time. Each person does his or her part, but has to count on others to do theirs.*)
- What is interdependence? (*people's dependence on each other for work, goods, and services*)

3. The Colonial Workers Web

- a. When appropriate, extend this lesson to compare today's economy to the Colonial period. Have students brainstorm a chalkboard list of colonial workers and compare and contrast them with workers today. The list might include any of the following:

Blacksmith	Cotton Farmer	Surveyor	Printer
Fur Trapper	Fruit Grower	Tobacco Farmer	Merchant
Postmaster	Glassblower	Milliner	Crafts person
Fisherman	Flour Mill Owner	Wheelwright	Lamplighter
Merchant	Cooper	Livery Stable Owner	Coachman
Lumberjack	Governor	Green Apothecary	Post Rider
Rice Farmer	Vegetable Farmer	Sheriff	Tanner
Carpenter	Wigmaker	Dress Maker	Fish Monger
Cobbler	Cotton Gin Owner	Postmaster	Knife Grinder
Silversmith	Hunter	Glass Blower	Shepherd
Mason	Coal Miner	Wig Maker	
Lawyer	Sharecropper	Ice Cart Man	

- b. Either make a new set of cards for the colonial workers, or have students write the colonial workers on the back side of the contemporary worker cards. (To help the students know which side to have showing, the colonial worker titles can be written with a different color marker.)
- c. Repeat the Activity creating a Colonial Workers Web.

4. Exploring the Colonial Workers Web

Debrief the activity by asking questions and discussing with students to bring out the following points:

- In colonial times, families were much more self-sufficient. Often they produced their food, clothing, and shelter, trading only for things they could not produce.
- People who are self-sufficient are not as interdependent. If the grocery does not open for a week, they still have food they have grown.
- People in today's society tend to specialize and become much more interdependent than in colonial times.

- In colonial times many workers performed jobs that were similar to those found in today's society. However, the jobs of many others are no longer needed today.
- Money (coins and currency) was often in short supply; so many times people had to barter (trading without money) to get what they needed. People did not have credit cards.

5. Other Workers Webs

This activity can be used with other historical groups such as an Indian Workers Web or a Gold Rush Workers Web.

EXTENSION

- a. To help students learn more about workers in colonial times, have them read the following:
 - *If You Lived in Colonial Times*, by Ann McGovern, (I SBN: 059045160X)
 - *If You Lived in Williamsburg in Colonial Days*, by B. Brenner (I SBN: 0590929224)
- b. Explore this website about trades in colonial times:
<http://www.history.org/life/trades/tradehdr.htm>