Notable Trade Book Lesson Plan

Lawn Boy

Written by Gary Paulsen

Melinda Odom Staubs
Jacksonville State University

Using Lawn Boy by Gary Paulson allows teachers to address numerous economic ideas and principals. This lesson introduces various economic concepts while concentrating on opportunity cost, allowing students to think critically as they examine their own economic decisions. Students keep a journal as they explore the content of the trade book and discuss their readings with group members. Students expand their learning and apply critical thinking as they take part in a role play activity. Helpful grading rubrics and an economic concept guide are provided with the lesson.

About the Author

Melinda Odom Staubs is an Assistant Professor at Jacksonville State University in Jacksonville, Alabama. She has taught elementary and middle school in Oklahoma, Virginia, and Alabama. Her research interests include economics education, pre-service teacher training, thinking dispositions, and middle school learners. She can be contacted at mstaubs@jsu.edu.

Citation for this Article


Book Title


Ages 9-12. Recommended for grades 4-6. The lesson will require one to two weeks.
**Book Summary**

A 12-year-old boy has no idea what's in store for him when his grandmother gives him a lawn mower for his birthday. Needing some quick cash, he agrees to mow a neighbor's lawn with his new acquisition. Things immediately get out of control as one lawn turns into more lawns than he can cut on his own, prompting him to hire employees and even a stock broker. Readers will be introduced to various economic concepts as they make their way through this amusing adventure.

**NCSS Standards**

IV. Individual Development and Identity  
VII. Production, Distribution, and Consumption

**Materials**

- **ALL DECISIONS COME AT A COST** poster  
- Whiteboard and markers  
- Can of tuna, a candy bar, a small toy  
- Individual copies of *Lawn Boy* or teacher copy  
- *Lawn Boy* journals for each student  
- Three ring pocket folders  
- Notebook paper  
- Crayons  
- Outline map of United States  
- Journal grading rubric  
- Cause cards  
- One poster board per group  
- Newspaper articles  
- Markers  
- Computers and Internet access

**Objectives**

Overall Goal: To understand that there is an opportunity cost to every economic decision and that these costs come as a result of limited resources.

The student will:

1. Identify that all resources are limited.  
2. Determine that choices must be made because all resources are limited.  
3. Recognize that incentives are the rewards or punishments that affect people’s choices.  
4. Analyze that some opportunities are sacrificed when making choices.  
5. Identify that the highest-valued alternative given up is the opportunity cost of a decision.  
6. Identify and assess the opportunity costs found in *Lawn Boy* and in their own lives.  
7. Generalize the cost of making decisions.
Procedures
Exploration/Introduction

1. Write opportunity cost in the center of a word web written on the whiteboard. Display a poster with **ALL DECISIONS COME AT A COST** centrally located in the room. Explain the poster is going to be the title of their five day lesson.

2. Review scarcity and the need to make choices. *(Because all resources are limited and our economic wants are unlimited we are forced to make decisions about how to allocate those resources.)* Explain that all choices come at a cost and that they will be learning about opportunity cost. Working with the students input, complete a word web on opportunity cost using their prior knowledge of the concept. State they will return to the concept web to determine what they may need to add or change.

Development

3. Explain that people are forced to make decisions every day. *Throughout the day we decide what to wear in the morning, what to eat for lunch, to do homework or watch TV, what time to go to bed and so on and so on. When we choose one thing we pass up an opportunity to choose something else.* Write on the board: **opportunity cost is the highest valued alternative when making a choice.** Display a can of tuna, a candy bar, and a small toy. Have a volunteer student come to the front of the classroom and describe which item they would like to have the most, the next most, and the least. Write the three items on the board while the student is talking. Ask the student which item he/she wants the most and put a number one beside their response. Ask the student which item he/she would choose if they could not have their first choice and put a number two beside their response. Write a number three beside the remaining item. Remind the class that opportunity cost is the highest valued alternative. Ask, “Which of the three items is the opportunity cost?” Explain the opportunity cost is only the *highest valued alternative* (the second choice). Discuss with the volunteer student why, bringing in the concept of incentives. Write on the board: “incentives are the rewards and punishments used to encourage people to make good choices”. Discuss some of the situations mentioned earlier *(what to wear in the morning, what to eat for lunch, to do homework or watch TV, what time to go to bed)* and the incentives involved with each. Working with the students, form a working definition (in their words with an example included) of opportunity cost under the formal definition. Discuss some more examples of opportunity cost and the incentives involved with the students. Provide some examples and use student generated examples. Return to the concept map on the board and ask, “What needs to be added and what should be changed?”
4. Question the students: “How can receiving a gift cause you to give up something?” Tell them they will be reading about a 12-year-old who got an old riding lawn mower for his birthday and considering how it forced him to make many decisions. Ask: “What happens when we make a choice?” (An opportunity cost is made.) Display Lawn Boy and pass out individual copies to students. State: “We will be looking at the opportunity costs made by the narrator in this book and also look at opportunity costs you make in your own lives”.

5. Have students examine the cover of their books in order to make predictions about what they think the story is about and what happens in the story. Students write the title of the book on the first page of their journals and then list four or five predictions. With journals closed, read the first 12 pages of the book as students follow along. Discuss their predictions and how they changed or stayed the same after the reading.

6. Explain they will be doing journals which will help the teacher evaluate how well they understand the book. Hand out the scoring rubric and have students keep it in their journals. Show, while explaining, an example of a journal done by the teacher with a different section for:
   - chapter discussion questions
   - characters
   - economic concepts
   - idioms and interesting words or phrases
   - time line of events

7. Using the previously read 12 pages, model setting up the journal, journal writing, and what is expected for each section. Using pages 13-20, work with the students to scaffold how to record data in their journals. Break the remaining reading into sections according to the number of days you have decided to devote to the book. Students read those sections independently while generating data for the journal. During the last 30 minutes of the class, have them discuss their findings with the other members of their group. They should record information shared within the group. Each group should formulate a discussion question on the day’s reading section and write it in their journal. Review any economic concepts covered in that day’s reading section as well as any questions the students may have.

8. At the beginning of each class, choose one small group’s discussion question from the previous day for a whole group discussion. The class should write the question and record an answer to the discussion question in their journals.
Development

9. Debrief the entire novel with students upon completion of all readings, going over the content of the book and the economic concepts presented. Students take part in a role play activity. The teacher should select five students to represent the town council. Divide the remaining students into four groups, representing a particular interest group along with their cause. The scenario: the town council must decide what to do with a donated tract of land. Each group will be given a cause card, listing what their cause is and what they want to do with the land donated to the town. They will discuss their cause and come up with a reason explaining why the land should be used for that cause. The groups will select a spokesperson to argue why the land should be used for their particular cause. After each spokesperson has presented an argument, the town council will rank their choices from one to four, beginning with the cause that is chosen for the land. Ask and record what the first, second, third, and fourth choices were. Have the class discuss the decision making process and the opportunity cost and incentives associated with the making of this decision.

Causes:

- Youth Advocacy: This group wants to use the land to build a playground.
- Senior Awareness: This group wants to use the land to build a senior center.
- Health and Wellness: This group wants to use the land to build a hospital.
- Waste Disposal: This group wants to use the land to build an incinerator to dispose of waste generated in the community.

After the role-play activity, students will continue to work with their group researching an actual decision made by the local town council or the board of education. Provide the topic for each group along with the newspaper articles discussing the topic and the town council’s/board’s decision. (This can be at the state or national level looking at government policy such as health care or stimulus packages.) Have individual groups do a poster presentation that includes (a) the newspaper articles, (b) what decision had to be made, (c) the various alternatives that could have been chosen and the incentives for choosing each, (d) the opportunity cost involved in the decision, and e) the group’s thoughts about what other decisions will now have to be made because of this one decision.

Assessment

- Concept map
- Student journals
- Poster presentation
Suggested Extension Activities

- A lesson on how inventors and entrepreneurs are different.
- A lesson on how the geographic environment has an effect on life and the opportunity costs and incentives that guide where we live (students could examine living in Eden Prairie, Minnesota, compared to living in Georgia or the state where the student lives).
- Lessons could explore the stock market and various economic concepts involved. Students could then participate in the electronic version of the stock market game or follow the stock market using newspapers/internet. (See sample handout).

Additional Resources and Weblinks

**Lesson on inventors/entrepreneurs**

**Electronic stock market game**
Retrieved from http://www.stockmarketgame.org/

**Lesson on opportunity cost using The Three Little Pigs**

This document contains "Lesson 4: Opportunity Cost: Part I - Consumers" from the publication Play Dough Economics from the National Council on Economic Education (NCEE)

**Excellent resource for literature connections, kids econposters, and songs for teaching economic concepts**

**Elementary economics lessons for kindergarten through 6th grade**

**Online elementary economics lesson plans**
Retrieved from http://cob.jmu.edu/econed/Elementary.htm

Rubrics, concept guide, and stock worksheet provided
# Social Studies Journal Rubric

Developed by Melinda Odom Staubs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Level I</th>
<th>Level II</th>
<th>Level III</th>
<th>Level IV</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Language, Details, and Ideas</strong></td>
<td>Responds to vocabulary and concrete details, <strong>directly stated</strong> ideas of key points in the reading.</td>
<td>Responds to concrete details, <strong>strongly implied</strong> ideas, or key points in the reading.</td>
<td>Responds to more <strong>abstract or subtle</strong> language, details, and ideas in the reading.</td>
<td>Responds to elements of style, selections of detail, and matters of organization, as well as <strong>complex</strong> ideas presented in the reading.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Purpose, Content, and Relationships</strong></td>
<td>Makes <strong>judgments</strong> about the purpose, content, or relationships in the reading.</td>
<td>Makes <strong>supported judgments</strong> about the purpose, content, or relationships in the reading.</td>
<td>Makes <strong>informed and well-supported judgments</strong> about the purpose, content, or relationships among elements presented in the reading.</td>
<td>Makes <strong>insightful judgments</strong> about the purpose, content, or relationships among elements presented in the reading. Connects content to real life situations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quality of Information</strong></td>
<td>Entry shows <strong>no</strong> thought or connection to the economic concepts presented in the reading.</td>
<td>Entry shows <strong>some</strong> thought or connection to the economic concepts presented in the reading. Includes some inaccuracies such as details, conclusions, or predictions that are inaccurate or unsubstantiated.</td>
<td>Entry shows thought and connection to the economic concepts presented in the reading. Includes connections between the text and reader’s background knowledge (schema).</td>
<td>Entry shows <strong>great</strong> thought and connection to the historical events presented in the reading. Includes connections between the text and reader’s background knowledge (schema), their ideas and beliefs, or other resources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organization</strong></td>
<td>Information is <strong>not</strong> presented in any organized manner.</td>
<td>Information is <strong>not</strong> presented in any organized manner but <strong>little</strong> attention is given to construction of the written information or neatness.</td>
<td>Information is <strong>presented in an organized and neat manner.</strong> Attention is given to the construction of the written information.</td>
<td><strong>Great</strong> attention is given to the organization of the information, neatness of the journal, and construction of written information.</td>
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Guiding Elements for *Lawn Boy*

- Narrator tells the story.
- His father is an inventor (a lesson on how inventors and entrepreneurs are different would be appropriate), mother is a teacher.
- His family lives in Eden Prairie, Minnesota, about 12 miles southwest of Minneapolis (a lesson on the opportunity cost and incentives of living in Minnesota as compared to living in Georgia would be appropriate)

**Various economic concepts for inclusion or expansion:**

Page 8 and 9: Cost reflection of demand, production cost, profit

Page 10: capitalism

Page 11: expanding market economy (larger yards = more money)

Pages 14 and 15: opportunity cost (camp, baseball, swim, tennis, vacation, bike trips with Allen)

Page 18: barter, trade

Page 19: stock, shares, stock market

Page 23: supply and demand

Page 24: entrepreneurship

Page 29: investing

Page 31: production costs

Page 36: free market industry, capitalism, employees

Page 38: personal gross income, taxes, expenses

Page 43: penny stocks

Page 44: commission

Page 45: stock split

Page 49: stock, cash in, tax on capital gains, profit, diversified portfolios

Page 76: stockbroker

Page 87: merger
# Poster Presentation Rubric

**Name**  
___________________________________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
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<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
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<tr>
<td>Required Elements</td>
<td>The poster includes all required elements as well as additional information.</td>
<td>All required elements are included on the poster.</td>
<td>All but one of the five required elements are included on the poster.</td>
<td>Several required elements were missing.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Content - Accuracy</td>
<td>At least seven accurate economic concepts or facts are displayed on the poster.</td>
<td>Five or six economic concepts or accurate facts are displayed on the poster.</td>
<td>Three or four economic concepts or accurate facts are displayed on the poster.</td>
<td>Less than three economic concepts or accurate facts are displayed on the poster.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Graphics - Relevance</td>
<td>All graphics are related to the topic and make it easier to understand.</td>
<td>All graphics are related to the topic and most make it easier to understand.</td>
<td>All graphics relate to the topic.</td>
<td>Graphics do not relate to the topic.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use of Class Time</td>
<td>Used time well during each class period. Focused on getting the project done. Never distracted others. Worked well with all team members. Contributed to the overall finished product and presentation.</td>
<td>Used time well during each class period. Usually focused on getting the project done and never distracted others. Worked well with all team members. Contributed somewhat to the overall finished product and presentation.</td>
<td>Used some of the time well during each class period. There was some focus on getting the project done but occasionally distracted others or did not work well with the group. Contributed to either the finished product or the presentation.</td>
<td>Did not use class time to focus on the project OR often distracted others. Did not work well with team members. Minimally contributed to the overall product and presentation.</td>
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Multiply the number of shares by the price per share for each date to get the total price paid for all the shares. Take the total price we paid the first week and subtract the total from the last week to find out if we made money or lost money. Find out if you would make money or lose it by choosing a company to follow. Choose the company and fill out the information below.

<table>
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<th>Total Price of all Shares</th>
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Name of Broker (That is you!)   
Investment Firm (Your homeroom)