

The Paper Bag Game

How to play

Preparation

1. Prepare sample paper bags for each group to refer to. You could also prepare a demonstration set showing each step in the process using the How to make a paper bag instruction *How to make a paper bag* instruction card.
2. For each group make one photocopy of:
 - *How to make a paper bag*
 - *Family shopping list*
 - *Will you survive?* maths card.
3. Photocopy and cut out the chance cards (card 2b).
4. Prepare your room so that each group has paste, paper, a sample bag and photocopied sheets.
5. Ask an adult to act as shopkeeper. S/he will need to check each batch of ten bags to make sure they are properly made. Mark each bag clearly when checked to prevent the bag makers taking them back to resell. Pay the group one rupee for each batch of ten bags.

Preliminary discussion

1. Divide the players into groups of four or five. If possible, make sure that each group includes girls and boys.
2. Discuss the following questions (amend for adult groups):
 - How can children of your age earn money?
 - How many of you actually do so?
 - Is the money you earn for yourself, or is it for others (for example, for your family or for charity)?
 - If you were allowed to work full time, what sort of work would you want to do? What sort of work would you not be able to do? Why?
 - How many hours a day/days a week do you think it would be reasonable to work?
 - How much of your pay would you keep for yourself? How much would you give to your family?

Playing the game

1. Explain that each group represents a family living in a crowded and poor shantytown in Kolkata. There is a huge demand for paper bags, which are mainly made by women and children from the poorest families. Some bag makers buy their paper from warehouses, which are called *go-downs*. Others collect it free from local households. The glue is made by boiling water and flour, and adding an anti-fungal chemical.

In real life, paper bags are sold in batches of 22, called *gistas*. On average, one child makes 200 bags a day, earning up to 1.5 rupees per *gista* – that's 13 rupees (less than 18 pence) a day. For the purposes of this game, the figure has been rounded up to one rupee per batch of ten bags – meaning that however poor the players feel at the end of the game, the real-life situation for the bag makers is even worse.

2. Tell the groups that they have to survive for a day by making and selling as many paper bags as possible. They have 20 minutes.
 - Show the groups how to make a bag using a sample bag so everyone can see, then ask them to start making bags.
 - Each time a batch of ten bags is ready, a group member should take them to the shopkeeper to sell, while the others continue making bags for the next batch.
 - The shopkeeper checks that each bag is properly made, and pays the group one rupee (one washer) for each batch.
 - Hand out the chance cards randomly – they change the conditions each group is working under.
 - Each group keeps its own checked bags. With younger children it is easier if the shopkeeper keeps the bags and notes down how many each group produces.
- Note how the groups organise themselves. Some will operate a production line with each member specialising in one task; in other groups individuals will make their own.
- When they have finished making bags, don't let the children wash their hands immediately – point out that bag makers may not have the luxury of soap and water.

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Changing the conditions during the game...

Chance card

The shopkeeper has too many bags in stock and is therefore reducing the price he pays. You will now be paid one rupee for every 15 bags.

Chance card

There is a shortage of bags so the price per batch of ten has risen from one rupee to two rupees.

Chance card

The shopkeeper has changed the shape of the bags he orders – they now have to be half the size of the ones you've been making. Work out how to make them.

Chance card

The shopkeeper has changed the shape of the bags he orders – they now have to be tall and narrow. Work out how to make them.

Make the game more difficult by giving the groups one or more chance cards.

These represent some of the unpredictable and precarious conditions under which paper bag makers live.

At the end of the game

1. When time is up, ask each group to add up how much money they have earned using the *Will you survive?* maths card. Work out the answers to questions 1-4.
2. Ask each group to look at the *family shopping list* and decide what they would choose to buy first. How did they make their choice? What are their priorities?
3. Return to the *Will you survive?* maths card and answer questions 5-8.
4. Further activity: How many hours would your family group need to work to buy the essentials for the family for one week?