

The Trading Game

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How trade works – who wins, who loses?

Our planet is divided: industrialised countries such as the US, the EU states and Japan have a much higher standard of living than countries in Latin America, Africa and the rest of Asia. One of the things that maintains and increases the gap between rich and poor is a global trading system that helps strong, well-organised countries more than poor ones.

The Trading Game tries to show how trade actually works, who benefits and who loses. It aims to help players understand clearly how trade affects a country's prosperity. Although it can provide only a simple outline of some very complex relationships, one of its aims is to demonstrate the basic issues that determine them.

Summary of the game

- Participants role play different countries or country groups.
- Each group manufactures products from raw materials, which are represented by paper shapes of different values.
- Groups sell their products to the banker. Each group aims to make as much money as possible.
- While manufacturing and trading occurs, the game leader can change the terms of trade and create new trading situations, which reflect real-life situations.
- The new terms of trade affect the way countries trade, either by stimulating an increase in trading or restricting a country's manufacturing capacity.
- When manufacturing and trading is finished, the game leader should guide a crucial debriefing discussion. Players express their feelings and experiences, understand how their role reflected real-life world trading systems and explore the morality of international trade.

Who can play

The trading game is designed for players aged 14 years and older, although it can be adapted for younger children. It is suitable for a group of 15 to 30 players; if your group is larger, run two separate games simultaneously.

The rules and skills required are simple, so the game can be used with a wide range of abilities. It is suitable for schools (see www.christianaid.org.uk/learn for curriculum links) youth groups and adults.

When to play

The trading game can be played at the beginning of a programme, such as a series of lessons or a one-day conference, as a way of getting people interested in international trade issues. But it is also useful for a fun summary after a single session. It will help discussion after the game if the players have some background knowledge of the differences between rich and poor nations.

Aims of the game

- To illustrate how trade can benefit or hinder the economic development of different countries or trading blocs.
- To explain how trading relationships work.
- To enable players to experience the unfairness of unequal trading relationships.
- To generate interest and discussion about the world trading system in an enjoyable and non-academic way.

What you will need:

Time

- At least one hour for the game and discussion; for a well-informed group, allow up to 90 minutes.

Space and furniture

- A room large enough to accommodate a minimum of four and a maximum of six groups of between four and six players. Leave plenty of circulation space between the groups. Most classrooms are just about large enough if the desks or tables can be moved around, but ideally use a small hall.
- Each group needs a table or desk as a work surface; a chair or two would also be useful.
- The organisers need a table or desk, and a board or uncluttered wall surface for sticking up posters.

Equipment

For six groups you will require:

- 30 sheets of A4 paper – plain and all the same colour
- 20 home-made £100 notes (see additional info cards)
- 2 sheets of coloured, gummed paper, 10cm x 10cm
- 4 pairs of scissors
- 4 rulers
- 2 compasses for drawing circles
- 2 set-squares
- 2 protractors
- 12 lead pencils
- 1-2 large sheets of paper for diagram of shapes and rules (see *additional info cards*)

It is also useful for the organiser to have some spare equipment – especially extra pencils and paper for emergencies. The paper can be the same as the 30 sheets listed above or of a different colour for a discovery of a new resource situation (see item 2 on the *create new trading situations card*). It is also good to have paper on hand to use for passing messages.