

# Just Transition to Sustainable Economics

## School Lesson Plan (1.5-2 hours)

### Rational:

One's teenage years serve as an introduction to the broader economic system we currently live in. Students may experience getting their first formal jobs, saving for important milestones (a car, prom night, etc.), and taking on significant debt such as loans for college. This presents an opportunity to introduce other economic systems traditionally practiced by indigenous communities and introduce the concept of sustainable economics and its relevance on a personal scale and system-wide.

### Terms:

- **Sustainable economics** – a theory the economy exists to support society and enhance human well-being. It is the system within a society where limited resources (land, labor, and capital) are managed fairly and sustainably. \*
- **Cumulative Disadvantage Theory** – proposes that inequality increases over time due to the compounded effects of inequity. For example, the children of advantaged groups will gain an additional advantage, while the disadvantaged group will experience the opposite, creating a widening gap in opportunity, justice, and outcomes.
- **Just transition** - a vision-led, unifying, and place-based set of principles, processes, and practices that build economic and political power to shift from an extractive economy to a regenerative economy. This means approaching production and consumption cycles holistically and waste-free. \*
- **Wendigo economics** - named after the cannibalistic monsters in Great Lakes legends, this term references the fact that a good portion of the world's most profitable sectors are derived from the destruction of the land. \*

\* Third-party definitions

### Overview

Part 1- Exponential Inequality	Part 2- Wendigo Economics	Part 3- Sustainable Economics
Activity – “\$1 Difference”	Activity – “Two Fishers”	Activity – “Forest Game”
Explanation of CDT	The Story of the Wendigo	Explanation of sustainable eco
Discussion Questions	Discussion Questions	Discussion Questions

## Part 1 - Exponential Inequality

### Activity “\$1 Difference”

1. Ask for two volunteers. Explain that you’re going to give each participant some (imaginary) money to invest in a very profitable venture that will double their money every year. There is one small difference, though. Rather than give both \$5, you’re going to take one dollar from one of the students and give it to the other (one starts with \$4, the other \$6). Explain that it’s not that big of a difference (hint: it really it).
2. Using a chalkboard or dry erase board, create a chart showing both students’ initial funds with columns representing years:

Name	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	etc...
Student 1	\$4				
Student 2	\$6				

3. Start calculating each year’s doubling of funds with help from the class. Plot the chart out to 10 years. Comment on how taking one dollar from one student and giving it to the other creates a huge difference in the final amounts.
4. Thank the two participants for their investment and invite them to return to the group.

Adapted from a game this author developed during her Peace Corps service

### Instruction

Explain the concepts of exponential growth and how it can also work in reverse to drive increasingly adverse outcomes. This concept, known as Cumulative Disadvantage Theory, applies to the opening game’s two investors and larger groups. Beyond money, it also holds true: education, criminalization, social value, and many other attributes suffer from generationally compounding issues.

### Discussion

- What are some examples of groups that faced past disadvantages? How has that past affected their current social, economic, and educational outcomes?
- Aside from the monetary investment example, in what other parts of society is Cumulative Disadvantage Theory evident (educational outcomes, policing and criminalization, stereotyping).
- If these effects are exponential, how can we stop them from growing? Is it easier to correct an imbalance at the beginning or later (refer to the game for an example)?

## Part 2 – Wendigo Economics

### Activity “Good Fisher, Bad Fisher”

1. Designate 25 “fish” using material on hand (pencils, sheets of paper, etc) and place them in the center of the playing area (the “lake”). Set up 2 containers on each side of the area to represent each fisher’s boat.
2. Ask for two volunteers (or two teams). Select one as the Sustainable Fisher(s) and one as the Unsustainable Fisher(s). Explain that each fisher needs at least 3 fish each season to stay in business. Each season you’ll add 3 new “fish” to the “lake”. At the start of the game, each ship can hold a maximum of 6 fish. Explain that for every fish caught over 3, that fisher will be able to upgrade their ship’s carrying capacity by one fish.
3. Instruct the Sustainable Fisher to only take the amount they need and not overfish (only take 3 fish per turn. Tell the Unsustainable Fisher to take as much fish as their boat can carry every turn.
4. Start the fishing! Each season/turn, the fishers collect their fish from the lake. After each season, return 3 fish to the lake and award extra fish capacity to the Unsustainable Fisher. Repeat until there are no longer at least 3 fish for each fisher and they “go out of business”.

Adapted from a game this author developed during her Peace Corps service

### Instruction

When a resource is used faster than it’s replenished, we call it “unsustainable” because eventually, it will run out. It doesn’t matter if only one fisher breaks the rules- both will lose. Some Native American traditions from the Plain and Great Lakes speak of a (cannibalistic) mythological monster called the Wendigo that consumed more than it needed to survive, driven by insatiable greed and hunger. Our current economy represents this Wendigo impulse- rewarding industries that deplete the environment and human life while devaluing responsible choices.

### Discussion

- Even though one of the fishers was behaving responsibly, both fishers went out of business. Why?
- Which fisher was rewarded with a bigger ship and more fish? The Sustainable Fisher or the one that was unrestricted? Did it matter in the end? (no)
- How would the game end if both fishers played by the same sustainable rules? (It wouldn’t, and both fishers would stay in business indefinitely.)
- What are some things that mimic the two fishers? (Local businesses vs multinationals, long-term thinking vs short-term profitability, mining/drilling conglomerates vs local communities, etc)

## Part 3 – Sustainable Economics

### Activity “Forest Game”

Follow the instructions located at:

<https://gamesforsustainability.org/2016/04/28/forest-game-for-educators/>

Developed by Peace Corps Thailand, Arizona State University, and the International Food Policy Research Institute

### Instruction

When we don't take more from the environment or other people that it/they can cope with, we call the system “sustainable”, because it can sustain itself indefinitely. Natural sustainable systems surround us: water moving from the oceans to rain over land, and return to the sea; bees and pollen-producing plants depend on each other; etc. People can be a part of these sustainable systems and many indigenous communities traditionally lived in a sustainable manner. We need to move from our current Wendigo economics to sustainable economics. This process is referred to as a Just Transition. This means approaching production and consumption cycles holistically.

### Discussion

- Why was it so hard to balance the tree harvest in the game? Would the ability to communicate make it easier? (big yes)
- How important do you think communication is in building a Just Transition? Should transparency be a part of the solution?
- How should we bring about a Just Transition?
  - How does society need to adapt?
  - What changes do businesses need to make?
  - What can we do individually, starting right now?
  - Are there any moves towards a Just Transition that you can see already happening?
  - What makes you worry we won't change in time?
  - What makes you hopeful that we will?
- What do you think a sustainable world would look like? (Visionary question)

### Extra Reflection (optional)

For younger participants:

Draw what you would like the world to look like when you grow up.

For older participants:

Write a short essay, story, lyrics, or poem about the journey to a sustainable world.