

5B – Comparing Economic Systems

MCCC SS060601, SS060602, and SS060604

6th Grade Social Studies Network – 2015-6
Part B of Unit 5 – Economic Geography

GLCEs: 6G221 human characteristics of places; 6E111 economic systems; 6C111 purposes of government

People in different places can “construct” different systems for producing and exchanging goods and services. At some time in middle school, students should become aware of differences and overlaps in the meanings of words like subsistence, nomadism, feudalism, mercantilism, market, capitalism, socialism, communism, command economy, protectionism, economic planning, etc. Teaching about these ideas is not easy – the terms are abstract, lists of distinguishing features tend to be simplistic, and it all can look like rote memorization to those who lack first-hand experience. Moreover, many adults have stereotypical ideas and also are willing to make a public protest if they believe the concepts are not being taught in the way they understand them. We therefore recommend a slow and carefully scaffolded approach rather than a term list or matrix to fill in.

1. Review/Scaffold Activity: What is a BIGJob?

A BIGJob is a Basic Income-Generating Job (also called economic base or basic activity). It is something people can grow, make, or otherwise produce in one place and sell to people in other places. Sounds simple – but here is why it gets complicated: relatively few people in a place may actually do the BIGJobs there. Most people do “OtherJobs” – the jobs that serve the people in a community but do not bring money into the community (OtherJobs include store clerks, mayors, street sweepers, plumbers, teachers, etc.) The *economic multiplier* is a measure of the otherjobs that can be supported by one person doing a BIGJob (or the total dollars of economic activity stimulated by an investment of one dollar in a BIGJob part of the economy). Teachers can introduce these ideas (and some of the terms listed above) while students are doing a straightforward activity that involves matching BIGJobs and places: finding out where people make a living by growing corn, drilling for oil, making movies, writing computer software, running the Kentucky Derby, etc.

6th 5Bx Farm Production as a BIGJob – Matching BIGJobs and places

6th 4Ax What Is a BIGJob activity

6th 4Ax What is a BIGJob presentation

<http://mentalfloss.com/article/56754/every-countrys-highest-valued-export>

2. Activity: Making economic decisions in a planned economy

Students decide where to put various economic activities on an electronic map. They get points that reflect the geographic suitability of their choices. Teachers can decide whether to announce in advance that the map shows Russia or to hold that information back for an after-activity “Aha.”

6th 5B Command economy activity 6th 5B Command economy interactive map (from TG CD)

6th 5B Command economy reading

6th 5B Command economy teacher notes

http://www.aag.org/cs/education/k12_and_teacher_education/teachers_guide_to_modern_geography

3. Supplementary Activity: Clickable map investigation of the constraints on economic activity

Teachers could use frames 21-23 of SS060603.Powerpoint to help guide this inquiry; we will also provide several alternative data forms that have more explicit Common Core links.

B16 Russia clickable miniAtlas

B16 Russia Big Idea presentation

B16 Chapter about Consequences of Size in Russia

Pages from MCCC

SuppMaterials.SS060602 has some good word cards. The economics pages, however, are quite abstract and have readability scores well above Grade 10. We also note that jumping directly to a comparison of the distinguishing features of 20th-century developed economies is a challenging task at any grade level – we will provide a “back-door” approach that has a regional focus on northern and central Eurasia and therefore can also help 6th-grade students improve their mental world map.

SS060601.Powerpoint – this step-by-step economics diagram is also useful here.

SS060603.Powerpoint – Frames 21-23 could guide an inquiry about constraints on economic activity

Takehome: People can organize economic activity in many different ways. Comparing the success of different economic systems is difficult, because no two countries have exactly the same resources or cultural attributes. Central planning is hard work, especially in a large area that has some serious environmental issues. “Job creation” is a complex process – most “sound-bite” statements about it are misleading at best.