

5D – Why Are Some Countries Rich?

MCCC SS060603

6th Grade Social Studies Network – 2015-6

Part D of Unit 5 – Economic Geography

(Note – this is moved after Part C because trade is one of the important things that make countries rich!)

GLCEs: 6G221 human characteristics of places; 6E311 imports and exports

This is a breathtakingly broad question to ask at any grade level, let alone in 6th grade, in what might be the first geography course a student has encountered. It is therefore unreasonable to expect a definitive answer. We should try to build a solid foundation of key geographic facts and an appreciation for the complexity of economic systems and the role of key causal connections. It is also important, as a citizenship objective, to help students evaluate the simplistic assertions that are often heard from all parts of the political spectrum, from “Every person deserves a free college degree” on the left to “High taxes are job-killers” on the right.

- 1. Review Activity:** What is a BIGJob? A BIGJob is a Basic Income-Generating Job (also called economic base or basic activity). It is something people grow, make, or otherwise produce in one place and sell to people in other places. To participate in the world trading economy, people must identify at least one BIGJob that is profitable *in the place where they live* (or can commute to!)

6th 5Ax What Is a BIGJob

6th 5Ax What is a BIGJob presentation

6th 5Dx Economic Multiplier activity – an extension that introduces the reason for many trades

- 2. Activity:** World patterns of GNI (Gross National Income) and related variables

Given a map with information about 44 important countries, students classify them into groups and color their symbols to make the geographic pattern easier to see. This lesson has Common Core extensions in both math and language arts.

6th 5D World Economic Map set

BI1 World Economic clickable maps

6th 5D World Economic Map Teacher Notes

- 3. Preview/Review Activity:** Students make (or study) maps of the top dozen countries as ranked by area, population, and dollars of national income. Is size or population more important in trying to predict which countries have large economies? In considering this question through a set of maps, students also learn/review the locations of two dozen countries that can serve as “anchors” in their mental maps of the world.

6th 5Dz Top Dozen Countries activity set

6th 5Dz Top Dozen Countries presentation

Pages from MCCC

SuppMaterials.SS060603 has a good big-idea page and useful word cards. We will provide a map that updates the information on the pages 12-14. We will also provide an alternative graphic organizer (pages 9-11) – rather than putting the abstract idea of invention in the “driver’s seat,” we suggest that it is more useful, geographically, to look at the BIGJobs that characterize the economy in particular places, and to examine how the income from those BIGJobs flows through a local economy (the “economic multiplier effect”). We propose moving the topic of imperialism to Unit 6. It is really a political topic, and this Lesson is already quite long and complicated.

Supp.Materials.SS060604 has some African success stories which can be examined from the perspective of BIGJobs and multipliers. These could be used as illustrations here or moved to the new Lesson about imperialism and colonialism.

SS060603.Powerpoint starts with a striking image of an economically divided city. This can be a good discussion-starter. The complex data tables and tiny world choropleth maps, however, are hard to use in a 6th-grade classroom – as we update the data, we will construct interactive maps and data forms that are more approachable.

Takehome: Economies grow when people have the skills needed to identify resources, work efficiently, and produce a surplus of something that they can sell to people in other places. AND, they should be able to do this in a place where they feel safe and secure, and where the rules of exchange are fair and obeyed. There is no shortage of theories about “what we need to do” in order to have a successful economy.

If economic development were easy, we’d all be rich!

As geographers, we would like to add one more sentence: “Notably missing from most public debates about job creation in the United States is an awareness of the simple fact that jobs are constrained by geographic conditions and connections – jobs that are successful in one place are not necessarily successful in another, and policies that work in one place do not necessarily work in another.”