Green Eggs and . . . . ECONOMICS??

<http://www.econedlink.org/lessons/index.php?lid=966&type=educator>

Economic concepts are often found in places students have never considered, like children’s literature. In this lesson, students will explore the various economic concepts addressed in five of Dr. Seuss' most popular books: The Cat in the Hat; Green Eggs and Ham; The Lorax; Oh, the Places You’ll Go! and Horton Hears a Who! This lesson assumes the students already have some knowledge of basic microeconomic concepts. Therefore, it would be best utilized as a review or unit summary to reinforce the concepts you have already covered.

**KEY CONCEPTS**

[Complements](http://www.econedlink.org/lessons/economic-glossary-definition.php?term=Complements), [Externalities](http://www.econedlink.org/lessons/economic-glossary-definition.php?term=Externalities), [Market Failures](http://www.econedlink.org/lessons/economic-glossary-definition.php?term=Market+Failures), [Opportunity Cost](http://www.econedlink.org/lessons/economic-glossary-definition.php?term=Opportunity+Cost), [Property Rights](http://www.econedlink.org/lessons/economic-glossary-definition.php?term=Property+Rights), [Specialization](http://www.econedlink.org/lessons/economic-glossary-definition.php?term=Specialization), [Tragedy of the Commons](http://www.econedlink.org/lessons/economic-glossary-definition.php?term=Tragedy+Of+The+Commons), [Utility](http://www.econedlink.org/lessons/economic-glossary-definition.php?term=Utility), [Wants](http://www.econedlink.org/lessons/economic-glossary-definition.php?term=Wants)

**STUDENTS WILL**

* Work in groups to identify key economic concepts contained in popular Dr. Seuss books
* Present their findings to the class during the next class meeting using a visual aid (poster or Powerpoint)
* Reinforce their understanding of basic microeconomic concepts
* Recognize that economics is not only found in the classroom or in textbooks, but in many other places such as children’s literature

**INTRODUCTION**

Most students should be familiar with Dr. Seuss from reading of his popular books during childhood. The author has found that students are very excited to link economics and Dr. Seuss based on their fond memories of his stories. This lesson provides an important teachable moments – economics is all around us, often in places we would have never considered!

**RESOURCES**

* Oh, the Economics You'll Find in Dr. Seuss!: This site is reccommended for teachers to read before the lesson
[http://ssrn.com/abstract=1364412](http://ssrn.com/abstract%3D1364412%22%20%5Co%20%22http%3A//ssrn.com/abstract%3D1364412%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank)
* Copies of The Cat in the Hat (1957), Green Eggs and Ham (1960), The Lorax (1971), Oh, the Places You’ll Go! (1990), and Horton Hears a Who! (1954) by Dr. Seuss.
* Oh, the Economics You’ll Find in Dr. Seuss!- Bibliography: This site provides bibliographical information on, Theodor Seuss Geisel (aka Dr. Seuss).
[http://ssrn.com/abstract=1364412](http://ssrn.com/abstract%3D1364412%22%20%5Co%20%22http%3A//ssrn.com/abstract%3D1364412%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank)
* Freakonomics: This is the offical movie site for the movie Freakonomics. It allows you to purchase the movie, view the trailer and special features, and explore the photo gallery.
[www.magpictures.com/freakonomics/](http://www.magpictures.com/freakonomics/%22%20%5Co%20%22www.magpictures.com/freakonomics/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank)
* Rubric: Use this rubric to score the students presentations
[Rubric](http://www.econedlink.org/lessons/docs_lessons/966_Seuss_Lesson_Plan_Rubric.pdf)
* 4 pieces of poster board and various colored markers, or access to computer(s) and Microsoft Powerpoint
* Oh, the Economics You'll Find in Dr. Seuss!, *The Journal of Economic Education,* 42: 2, 147-167: To understand the catalyst for this lesson, the interested teacher could read this article by Ben Miller and Michael Watts. However, it is not necessary to read this article in order to successfully implement this lesson plan. Available online at SSRN. [http://ssrn.com/abstract=1364412](http://ssrn.com/abstract%3D1364412%22%20%5Co%20%22http%3A//ssrn.com/abstract%3D1364412%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank)
* Additional Glossary Terms:

Asymmetric information: a situation occurring when all parties involved in a market transaction do not have access to the same relevant information. This is one potential source of market failure.

Leisure: a portion of a person’s time that is not being compensated for work

Economies of Scale: the property of long-run average total cost decreasing as quantity of output increases

Inefficiency: occurs when people are not receiving the most possible satisfaction from a given amount of resources

Shirking: when it is too costly or difficult to monitor an individual worker’s behavior, then worker’s will have incentive to do less work (or put forth less effort) than agreed

Collective Action: is the pursuit of a goal (or goals) by more than one person. In economics, it is often used in discussion of public goods and externalities.

Risk: the calculated probability of either a gain or a loss happening

Uncertainty: the possibility that any number of things could happen in the future. Usually discussed along with risk, which attempts to assign probabilities of a certain event occurring.

**PROCESS**

**Day 1 and 2**

* Split the students into 4 groups:
	+ Group 1: The Cat in the Hat and Green Eggs and Ham
	+ Group 2: The Lorax
	+ Group 3: Oh, the Places You’ll Go!
	+ Group 4: Horton Hears a Who!
* Have one student read each book aloud to the rest of their group.
	+ (Note: If you think your students will have trouble coming up with the concepts without help, there are two possible suggestions:
		1. If you have computer and Internet access for each group, direct them to the EconEdlink Glossary of terms. It can be found here: [www.econedlink.org/economic-resources/glossary.php](http://www.econedlink.org/economic-resources/glossary.php); or
		2. Prepare a ‘suggested answers list’ utilizing all of the terms in the answers provided below and pass it out to each group.)
* Ask the students to think about what economic concepts discussed so far in class are used in their assigned Seuss book.
* Have the students identify what economic concepts they find in the book and where (i.e. specific page numbers and cited text are preferred.)
* Encourage each student to discuss their thoughts with their group.
* Emphasize finding a role for all group members to discourage free riders.
* Once they are in agreement, have them outline their findings on the poster board (or Powerpoint) to present to the class the next day.
* Specify that the poster (or Powerpoint) should illustrate the following:
	+ Title of book
	+ Economic concept found
	+ Short definition of economic concept
	+ In what context it applies to the passage
	+ Page number passage appears on
* Ask students to work in groups, walk around the classroom gauge their discussion, see how they are working together, answer questions, etc.

*[NOTE: Suggested answers per Miller and Watts:*

* *The Cat in the Hat: asymmetric information, environmental issues, externalities, monitoring costs, recreation/leisure*
* *Green Eggs and Ham: complements, experience goods, interpersonal differences in preferences, utility*
* *The Lorax: economies of scale, endangered species, environmental externalities, property rights and enforcement, specialization and division of labor, tragedy of the commons, wants*
* *Oh, the Places You’ll Go!: personal beliefs in ability and luck, choices, competition, individual interests and abilities, information, leisure/recreation, migration, opportunity cost, risk, uncertainty, utility, waste/inefficiency*
* *Horton Hears a Who!: asymmetric information, collective action/demonstrations, discrimination, endangered species, public choice, shirking, specialization, skills]*

**Day 3**

* If necessary add an extra work day for students.
* Each group will present their findings to the class using their poster board (or PowerPoint) they created.
* Allow 15 minutes per group for presentations.
* Use the grading [rubric](http://www.econedlink.org/lessons/docs_lessons/966_Seuss_Lesson_Plan_Rubric.pdf) for each group as a way to grade each presentation.

**CONCLUSION**

As student answers will vary, go over any of the suggested answers that were not address. Additionally, prompt class discussion by asking the students where else economics can be found that they may not have considered. *[Answers will vary.]*

You could also bring examples of other children’s literature that illustrate economic concepts so the students realize economic concepts can be found in books other than Dr. Seuss.

Examples:

1. Benny’s Pennies by Pat Brisson (ISBN-13: 978-0440410164) *[scarcity, choice, goods, wants, consumers]*

2. Alexander, Who Used to be Rich Last Sunday by Judith Viorst (ISBN-13: 978-0689711992 *[money, opportunity cost, spending, saving, income, banks, interest]*

3. Saturday Sancocho by Leyla Torres (ISBN-13: 978-0374464516) *[barter, coincidences of wants, exchange, money]*

**ASSESSMENT ACTIVITY**

Ask the students choose one of the economic principles found in their assigned Seuss book and find a corresponding news article illustrating the same concept. Have them write a one-page paper summarizing the article, defining the economic concept in their own words, and explaining how the economic concept is illustrated in the article. Alternatively, instead of limiting to the medium to just an article you may allow the students to choose any contemporary medium such as an advertisement, song lyrics, poem, or movie.

**EXTENSION ACTIVITY**

[Freakonomics](http://www.magpictures.com/freakonomics/%22%20%5Co%20%22Freakonomics%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) the movie is available for purchase on iTunes or through their official movie site, and comes out on DVD 1/19/11. You could show this movie to illustrate how economics is all around us, even in places we would not expect.