

# BUILDING BLOCKS FOR A GOOD LIFE



NO POVERTY

Manitoba Council for International Cooperation

## INTRODUCTION

In this simulation, students will explore poverty as a ‘lack of opportunities’ rather than a ‘lack of basic needs’. Framing poverty this way allows students to appreciate the complexity of the issue, and promotes empathy in lieu of judgement. **The lesson focuses on the themes of equality vs. equity, poverty, and basic needs with the option to address more specific topics in the debrief session.**

## AUDIENCE

- Grades 3-9
- 15-40 participants

## LENGTH

- 15-45 minutes

## MATERIALS

- Labels (Avery 5160/address labels)
- Building blocks (megablocks or duplo blocks work best)
  - o There should be 30 blocks per group of students (3-5 students/group works well)
  - o In lieu

## SET-UP

- Print labels and place on blocks.
  - o There should be 30 blocks per group of students, 3-5 students/group works well
- Set-up work areas with a flat surface (desks, tables or the floor)

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Ask students what they know about the word poverty?
  - a. What does it mean?
  - b. Where does poverty exist?
  - c. Does poverty look the same everywhere?
2. Explain to students that poverty can be thought of as ‘not having a good quality of life’.
3. Separate students into groups of 3-5 and tell them they’re going to receive some of the building blocks for a good life.



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4. In their groups, students should rank/sort the blocks in order of ‘importance to a good life’ in any way that makes sense to them.
  - a. This could look like towers, piles, a line, etc.
5. Give students approximately 10-15 minutes to work on this and try to listen in on the conversations they have and which pieces are controversial.



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## DEBRIEF

1. Have students present their tower

Have students discuss the following questions as a whole

1. Have students present their tower and answer the following:
  - a. Explain how they organized their structure
  - b. What they decided was most important
  - c. What they decided was the least important
2. Are there any blocks that seem out of place?
3. What block did everyone agree were the most important?
  - a. Least important?
4. Was there anything that was important to you, but was less important to someone else?
5. Does everyone need the same things for a good life?
  - a. Children vs. adults
  - b. People in different parts of the world
  - c. People of different cultures/religions

Challenging the student's answers:

1. Why might a cell phone actually be important? Emergencies, access to the internet, to get a job, etc.
2. Is electricity important?
  - a. What if we had asked this 100 years ago?
  - b. Over 1 billion people around the world still don't have access to reliable and long term electricity
3. Time to play (leisure time) is fundamentally important to child development, maybe almost as important as some basic needs.
4. Freedom to speak your language, or practice your culture/religion will be more important to those who do not identify with the culturally dominant practices

## Understanding Poverty

Sometimes poverty isn't just a lack of basic material needs it can also look like a lack of some of the nontangible blocks. For example, a lack of access to community services (libraries, a functioning justice system, etc.). One way to consider poverty is as a "lack of opportunities." If we consider poverty as a lack of basic needs, it is easy for students to question why those living in poverty don't just find ways to achieve those needs ("why don't they get a job?" etc.). If we



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consider poverty as a lack of opportunities, it opens up the door for discussion around societal barriers (lack of cultural expression, lack of loving support systems, or lack of equality could all contribute to the inability to access basic needs).

In Winnipeg, Siloam Mission calls our local poverty “broken heart poverty” as opposed to “needs poverty”. Needs poverty is the type of poverty that can be solved by simply providing resources. Broken heart poverty requires provision of basic needs in addition to resolution of deeper societal inequalities. A result of the residential school legacy, much of Winnipeg’s poverty stems from losses in cultural expression, social structures, safe spaces, and freedom to speak one’s own language, rather than just a lack of tangible needs.

In small groups, have students discuss:

Sometimes people will give up a physical need for a non-tangible need (i.e. hunger strikes to demand justice, fleeing their home in order to express sexual identity more freely in a new country, giving up personal safety for the right to vote, etc.).

1. What does this say about what is important in life?
2. Is there any right that you would defend even if it meant giving up some basic need?
3. In light of understanding poverty this way, what are some things we can do to improve the lives of those living in poverty (locally or globally)?
  - a. e.g.: locally: explore volunteering at shelters and holding food/winter clothing drives for organizations serving your community, raise awareness around mental health issues, learn about residential schools or visit an elder or residential school survivor, create safe spaces free from bullying; globally: support ethical purchasing which promotes development of sustainable economies and fair wages, learn about the effects of colonization, raise awareness about injustice in other countries



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## LIST OF WORDS

1. A Feeling Of Safety
2. A Library
3. A Peaceful Living Place
4. A Phone
5. A System Of Law And Order
6. A Television
7. Access To Art
8. Access To Clean Water
9. Access To Food
10. Access To Health Care
11. Access To Medicine
12. Access To Parks Or Green Spaces
13. Access To Reliable Transportation
14. Access To The Internet
15. An Education
16. Chocolate Bars
17. Electricity
18. Employment And Income
19. Exercise
20. Feeling Loved And Accepted
21. Free Time To Relax
22. Freedom To Practice Your Religion  
Or Culture
23. Freedom To Speak In Your  
Language
24. Gender Equality
25. Proper Clothing
26. Proper Shelter
27. Somewhere To Shower
28. Store-Bought Toys For Children
29. The Right To Vote For Your  
Government
30. Time To Spend With Friends And  
Family

