

# BUILDING A GOOD LIFE

## Workshop and simulation

Please visit Manitoba Education & Early Childhood Learning for curriculum correlations with the SDGs, resources, school plans, related links, and many other resources. Explore [www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/esd/index.html](http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/esd/index.html) for more information.

**PURPOSE:** In this simulation, students will explore poverty under the lens of ‘**lack of opportunities**’ rather than ‘**lack of basic needs**’. This key distinction allows students to appreciate the complexity of the issue and promotes empathy in lieu of judgment.

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) or regular printer paper and tape to adhere to blocks
- Building blocks (MEGA bloks or DUPLO bricks work best)
  - We recommend 30 blocks per group (3-5 students/group)

**SET UP:**

- Print labels and place on individual blocks (last page)
- Divide all students into groups of 3-5
- Distribute sets of blocks to groups and organize them in work areas with a flat surface (desks, tables, the floor)

**INSTRUCTIONS**

1. As a class, ask students to think about the word poverty. Ask some probing questions:

- a. What does poverty mean?
- b. Where does poverty exist?
- c. What does poverty look like?
- d. 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 that they will receive several blocks with labels on them. These blocks represent different aspects of our lives that may or may not contribute to a “good life”.

4. In their groups, have students rank or sort their blocks in order of importance to what makes a “good life”. This can be done in any way that makes sense to them and can look like towers, piles, a line, etc. Groups must discuss the blocks and agree together on the order.

Give students 10-15 minutes to complete this task. As they work, try to listen in on their conversations and discover which blocks are controversial or challenging for groups to place.



## DEBRIEF

Have each group present their block structures to the rest of the class and discuss the following questions together:

- a. Have groups explain how they organized their blocks (tower, line, etc).
  - i. What was the most important building block to them and why.
  - ii. What was the least important building block to them and why.
  - iii. Are there any blocks that seem out of place?
- b. What block did most of the class agree was the most important? Why?
- c. What block did most of the class agree was the least important? Why?
- d. Was there anything that was important to you but less important to someone else?
- e. Does everyone need the same things for a “good life”?
  - i. Children, teenagers, adults, elderly
  - ii. People in different countries
  - iii. People of different cultures and religions

Depending on how the discussions go (they’re different every time!), try challenging some of the students’ answers:

- Why might a **cellphone** be important?
  - Emergencies
  - Access to information, the Internet, education
  - To get a job
- Is **electricity** important? What if we asked this 100 years ago?
- Did you know that **time to play** (leisure time) is fundamentally important to child development– it may be almost as important as some of our basic needs!
- Freedom to **speak your language and/or practice your religion** will be more important to those who do not identify with the culturally dominant practices.



### Is access to electricity important?

Access to electricity is an afterthought in most parts of the world, so it may come as a surprise to learn that 16% of the world’s population — an estimated 1.2 billion people — are still living without this basic necessity.

Lack of access to electricity (also known as “energy poverty”) is the ultimate economic hindrance as it prevents people from participating in the modern economy.

Check out *Mapped: The 1.2 Billion People Without Access to Electricity* to visualize the global access to electricity (<https://www.visualcapitalist.com/mapped-billion-people-without-access-to-electricity/>).



## No Poverty: Sustainable Development Goal #1

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are the blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. They address the global challenges we face (such as poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, peace and justice) and they are all interconnected. In order to leave no one behind, it is important that we achieve them all by 2030.

Learn more about SDG1 at <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/poverty/>.



## UNDERSTANDING POVERTY

Sometimes poverty isn't just a lack of basic material needs. Poverty can also look like a lack of some of the non-tangible blocks, for example a lack of access to community services such as 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 instead we 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 that can all contribute to the inability to access basic needs).

In Winnipeg, Siloam Mission (<https://www.siloam.ca/>) 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 Canada's Residential School system (1867-2000), 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 (example hunger strikes to demand justice; fleeing their home in order to express their sexual identity more freely in a new country; giving up personal safety for the right to vote, etc.).

- a. What does this say about what is important in life?
- b. Is there any right that you would defend even if it meant giving up a basic need?
- c. In light of understanding poverty this way, what are some things that we can do to improve the lives of those living in poverty (locally or globally)?

**APPLY YOUR LEARNING:** As human beings, our well-being is linked to each other. It's important for us all to be active global citizens and get involved. What can we do?

- Explore volunteering opportunities at shelters and other support services.
- Organize food or (winter) clothing drives for organizations serving your community.
- Raise awareness around mental health issues.
- Educate yourself about residential schools or visit an elder or residential school survivor.
- Create safe spaces free from bullying.
- Support ethical purchasing (look for the Fairtrade icon, pictured right, when you're shopping!), which promotes development of sustainable economies and fair wages.
- Learn about the effects of colonization that are still being felt today.
- Raise awareness about injustices in other countries.



### LIST OF WORDS

- A feeling of safety
- A library
- A peaceful living place
- A phone
- A system of law and order
- A television
- Access to art
- Access to clean water
- Access to food
- Access to health care
- Access to medicine
- Access to parks or green spaces
- Access to reliable transportation
- Access to the Internet
- An education
- Chocolate bars
- Electricity
- Employment and income
- Exercise
- Feeling loved and accepted
- Free time to relax
- Freedom to practice your religion or culture
- Freedom to speak in your language
- Gender equality
- Proper clothing
- Proper shelter
- Somewhere to shower
- Store-bought toys
- Right to vote for your government
- Time to spend with friends and family

### Stay in touch with MCIC!

Did you enjoy this workshop? Were your students inspired to take action?  
What ideas did they come up with? Do you need any extra support?

Contact us! We want to hear your feedback and suggestions. Email us at  
[youth@mcic.ca](mailto:youth@mcic.ca) or tag us on social media!



**A FEELING OF SAFETY**

**ACCESS TO MEDICINE**

**FREE TIME TO RELAX**

**A LIBRARY**

**ACCESS TO PARKS OR  
GREEN SPACE**

**FREEDOM TO  
PRACTICE YOUR  
RELIGION OR CULTURE**

**A PEACEFUL  
LIVING PLACE**

**ACCESS TO RELIABLE  
TRANSPORTATION**

**FREEDOM TO SPEAK  
IN YOUR LANGUAGE**

**A PHONE**

**ACCESS TO  
THE INTERNET**

**GENDER EQUALITY**

**A SYSTEM OF  
LAW AND ORDER**

**AN EDUCATION**

**PROPER CLOTHING**

**A TELEVISION**

**CHOCOLATE BARS**

**PROPER SHELTER**

**ACCESS TO ART**

**ELECTRICITY**

**SOMEWHERE  
TO SHOWER**

**ACCESS TO CLEAN  
DRINKING WATER**

**EMPLOYMENT AND  
FAIR INCOME**

**STORE-BOUGHT TOYS**

**ACCESS TO FOOD**

**EXERCISE**

**RIGHT TO VOTE FOR  
YOUR GOVERNMENT**

**ACCESS TO  
HEALTH CARE**

**FEELING LOVED  
AND ACCEPTED**

**TIME TO SPEND WITH  
FRIENDS AND FAMILY**