

# BUILDING A GOOD LIFE: MIDDLE YEARS

## Classroom activity

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 activity, students will learn about poverty as a systemic failure, rather than an individual issue. Framing poverty as a lack of opportunities instead of a lack of basic needs allows students to consider the complexity of the issue and promotes empathy in lieu of judgment. The lesson aims to challenge common misconceptions about poverty and encourage students to imagine a more just world. Students will reflect upon their own values how their view of “the good life” intersects with human rights and the Sustainable Development Goals.

### AUDIENCE:

Grades 5-9  
15-40 participants

### LENGTH:

30-60 minutes

### MATERIALS:

- Building blocks (MEGA bloks or DUPLO bricks work best). We recommend 30 blocks per group (3-5 students/group).
- Block labels (included)
- Random Chance Event cards - print and cut them out. Organize Event cards into their respective groups.
- Dice - a large foam die that you can roll in front of the group could be fun!

### GLOBAL COMPETENCIES

*Ways of knowing, being, doing, and becoming in consideration of the learner as a whole. The competencies are multi-faceted, interdependent, transdisciplinary, and develop over time throughout one's life.*

**This activity addresses all six global competencies:**

CRITICAL THINKING	CREATIVITY	CITIZENSHIP
CONNECTION TO SELF	COMMUNICATION	COLLABORATION

[Learn about the global competencies](#)

### SET UP:

- Print block labels and tape them to the blocks (one label per block); have a complete blocks set ready for each group.
- Arrange work areas for groups with large flat surfaces (desks, tables, the floor, etc). Students will need enough space to spread out their blocks and arrange them.



### 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/>.



## INTRODUCTION

- Ask students, what does “a good life” mean to you? What sorts of things do you need to have “a good life”? Create a collaborative list of what students say they need for a good life. There are no wrong answers! Include everything, big and small.
- Ask students, how many of the things on their list does someone living in poverty have access to?
  - What does it mean to live in poverty? Explain that poverty can be thought of as not having access to certain things or opportunities that you need for a good quality of life.

## PART 1: BUILD YOUR GOOD LIFE

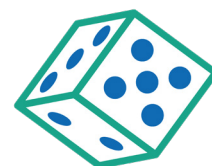
1. Organize students into groups and tell them that they will receive several blocks with labels on them. These blocks represent different aspects of our lives that may or may not contribute to a “good life”. Distribute the block sets to groups.
2. In their groups, ask students to rank, sort or arrange their blocks in order of “importance to a good life”.
  - This can be done in any way that makes sense to them and can look like towers, piles, a line, or other.
  - Remind students that this is a collaborative task and that all voices are of equal importance.
3. **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. Take note of all discussion opportunities to use in the debrief.
4. Ask groups to present their block structures to the rest of the class. Have them explain their rationale for their most and least important choices.
  - Prompt discussion with some questions:
    - Are there any similarities between groups?
    - Was there anything that was important to you but was less important to someone else?
    - Does everyone around the world need the same things for a good life?
    - Would your structure look the same if...
      - You lived in another country?
      - You were older or younger? (Children, teenagers, adults, elderly)

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

## PART 2: RANDOM CHANCE EVENTS

*Note: if you only have 30 minutes for this activity, skip the Random Chance Events.*

- Explain to students that sometimes in life things happen that we were either not expecting or not prepared for. These events can challenge individuals and their families and in some cases, can force them into poverty.
- To represent these life events, ask groups to roll a die and choose a Random Chance Event card.
- Ask one student from each group to read their Event card out loud to their group.
- Random Chance Events may impact their block structures; groups must work together to make any decisions. Remind students that all voices are of equal importance.



### Inclusive language

Why do we say “living in poverty” instead of “poor person”? This is called “person-first language” and should be used in situations to bring the focus to the individual while de-emphasizing their condition, illness or disability.

For more examples of inclusive language, check out Oxfam’s Inclusive Language Guide: <https://bit.ly/47i7Wnq>



Random Chance Events:

- If a group rolls a 1 or 2, they must **remove six blocks** from their structure.
- If a group rolls a 3 or 4, they must **remove four blocks** from their structure.
- If a group rolls a 5 or 6, then **no changes are required**.

Give students 5-10 minutes to complete this task.

**Roll 1 and 2 Events:**

- Medical emergency
- Natural disaster
- Job loss
- Discrimination in hiring (racism)
- Racial profiling (racism)
- Denied promotion (sexism)
- Educational barriers (ableism)
- Inaccessible facilities (ableism)

**Roll 3 and 4 Events:**

- Economic downturn
- Car needs repairs
- Flooded basement
- Gender pay gap (sexism)
- Bullying at school (homophobia)
- Missed work/loss of income (mental health)

**Roll 5 and 6 Events:**

- Good health
- Stable employment
- Good harvest
- Beautiful weather
- Host a birthday party
- New public library

- Ask groups to share what their random chance event was.
- Ask did you have control over the events that impacted your blocks? How does this compare in real life? What kind of societal barriers impacted your group's blocks?

**PART 3**

*Note: this last activity could be done in their groups or individually.*

- Explain to students that they need to pick 1-2 blocks that they consider the most important to them. Ask them to brainstorm ways to make these blocks more accessible to people, locally or globally, using their knowledge of systemic poverty.
- Give students 10 minutes to complete this task.
- Ask a few students to share their ideas with the rest of the class.

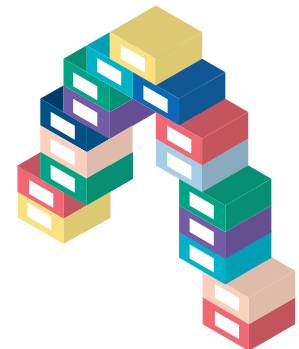
Examples for prompting:

Locally

- Explore volunteering at shelters,
- Holding food/clothing drives for community organizations,
- Mental health awareness campaign,
- Residential school education, 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 injustices in other countries.



### The impacts of residential schools on the cycle of poverty in Winnipeg

Providing people with opportunities and resources to meet their needs is an important part of working to end poverty. However, in Winnipeg, the legacy of residential schools continues to have lasting effects on many Indigenous people. Currently, schools are still not offering adequate, culturally appropriate resources and supports to Indigenous children. Additionally, a feeling of distrust in the education system can lead to poor attendance. The combination of these two factors can lead to Indigenous students falling behind on their education.

Lack of education can cause long-term challenges including unemployment, poor housing, food insecurity and discrimination. All these challenges make it harder for people to break the cycle of poverty.

**APPLY YOUR LEARNING:** As human beings, our well-being is linked to each other. Not everyone has the blocks they need to build a good life. It's important for us all to be active global citizens and get involved to help make that happen. 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, and speak up—use your voice.
- Raise awareness about injustices in other countries.



Fairtrade logo

### 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!



## LIST OF WORDS

We have provided 30 labels, but you could create your own “building blocks for a good life” depending on your classroom, needs or interests.

### Provided labels:

- (Have your) own bedroom
- Bike
- (Have a) birthday party
- Books
- Breakfast
- Cellphone
- Clean water
- New clothes
- Electricity
- Extracurricular activities (sports, music, lessons)
- Fast food
- Family pet (dog, cat, hamster, other)
- Family dinner
- Free time to relax
- Fresh, clean air
- Go to the doctor (access to medicine)
- Go to the dentist
- Headphones
- Internet
- Go to a Jets hockey game
- Library
- Save money, get an allowance
- Go to safe, welcoming school
- School supplies
- (Access to) shower or bath
- Swimming lessons
- Tiktok
- TV shows (Disney+,Netflix, etc)
- Go on vacation/trip
- Winter clothes

### Other examples could include:

- Nintendo Switch
- Animal Crossing, Minecraft, Roblox, other
- Go to the park/green spaces
- Disneyland
- Vegetable garden
- Walk to school
- Play sports (any extracurricular)
- Learn piano (other instrument)
- Go to the beach
- Brush teeth
- Candy, chocolate
- Sidewalk chalk, markers, pencil crayons
- A pool
- Fruit and vegetables
- McDonalds
- Have a backyard
- Trampoline
- Walk or bike to school
- (Go to) museum, art gallery, other
- Go to the zoo
- Have a play date with friends
- Have a sleepover

Remember we all have **needs** and **wants**. **Needs** are the things that must be met in order for us to live. Everyone must have water, food, clothes, shelter and safety. We also need to stay warm when its cold and cool when it's very hot out. Everyone has the same needs.



## BUILDING BLOCKS LABELS

Print this page and cut out the labels; tape one label on each block. You will need one set per group. We have provided 30 items here, but feel free to make your own or add different items for your class!

Your own bedroom	Headphones	Your own bedroom	Headphones
Have a birthday party	Internet	Have a birthday party	Internet
Books	Go to a Jets game	Books	Go to a Jets game
Healthy breakfast	Nearby library	Healthy breakfast	Nearby library
Cellphone	Save money	Cellphone	Save money
Clean water	Go to a safe, welcoming school	Clean water	Go to a safe, welcoming school
New clothes	School supplies	New clothes	School supplies
Electricity	Access to a shower or bath	Electricity	Access to a shower or bath
Music lessons	Swimming lessons	Music lessons	Swimming lessons
Fast food	TikTok	Fast food	TikTok
Family pet	TV Shows, Disney+, Netflix	Family pet	TV Shows, Disney+, Netflix
Family dinner	Go on vacation	Family dinner	Go on vacation
Free time to relax	Warm winter clothes	Free time to relax	Warm winter clothes
Fresh, clear air	Your own bike	Fresh, clear air	Your own bike
Go to the doctor	Go to the dentist	Go to the doctor	Go to the dentist

## RANDOM CHANCE EVENT CARDS - PAGE 1

Print this page and cut out all the cards.

Organize them into the three piles, (1) Roll 1 or 2, (2) Roll 3 or 4 and (3) Roll 5 or 6, face down.

### ROLL 1 OR 2: REMOVE 6 BLOCKS

#### Medical emergency

A family member suddenly falls seriously ill, requiring immediate medical attention. Your family must juggle work, school, and hospital visits, rallying together to support their recovery and manage daily responsibilities during this challenging time.

### ROLL 1 OR 2: REMOVE 6 BLOCKS

#### Educational barriers (ableism)

A family member faces significant barriers to access education due to their disability. Your family works to secure necessary accommodations and advocate for inclusive policies, ensuring they receive the education they deserve. However, it takes a lot of time and a lot of energy.

### ROLL 1 OR 2: REMOVE 6 BLOCKS

#### Natural disaster

A severe natural disaster strikes your community, leaving your house damaged. Your family needs to find temporary shelter, salvage your belongings, and begin the difficult process of rebuilding.

### ROLL 1 OR 2: REMOVE 6 BLOCKS

#### Inaccessible facilities (ableism)

A family member living with a disability encounters significant challenges due to inaccessible public facilities, impacting their choices and activities. The family advocates for improved accessibility, working with local authorities and organizations to bring about necessary changes.

### ROLL 1 OR 2: REMOVE 6 BLOCKS

#### Job loss

The primary earner in your family unexpectedly loses their job, creating financial uncertainty. Your family pulls together to cut expenses, support job searches, and explore new opportunities, but times are tough, and sacrifices must be made.

### ROLL 1 OR 2: REMOVE 6 BLOCKS

#### Racial profiling (racism)

During a trip to the grocery store, a family member is unjustly targeted and profiled because of their race. Your family stands united to address the injustice, seeking legal advice and raising community awareness to combat racism.

### ROLL 1 OR 2: REMOVE 6 BLOCKS

#### Discrimination in hiring (racism)

A family member faces racial discrimination during their job search, being unfairly overlooked despite their qualifications. Your family supports them in seeking justice and finding opportunities that value their skills, but it takes them months to find a stable job.

### ROLL 1 OR 2: REMOVE 6 BLOCKS

#### Denied promotion (sexism)

Despite their hard work, a family member is denied a deserved promotion due to their gender. Your family must deal with loss of income as well as the long-term negative impacts of sexist expectations and behaviours.

### ROLL 3 OR 4: REMOVE 4 BLOCKS

#### Economic downturn

The economy takes a turn and essentials like groceries, gas and clothing are more and more expensive. Together, your family gets through these tough times by cutting expenses and seeking out community supports.

### ROLL 3 OR 4: REMOVE 4 BLOCKS

#### Flooded basement

After a severe storm, your family's basement floods, causing damage. Your family bands together to pump out the water, salvage belongings, and prevent mold, showcasing their teamwork and resilience.

### ROLL 3 OR 4: REMOVE 4 BLOCKS

#### Car needs repairs

The family car breaks down unexpectedly, requiring significant repairs. Your family rearranges schedules, uses public transport, and saves diligently to get the car back on the road, but some family members miss out on activities, sports and seeing friends.

### ROLL 3 OR 4: REMOVE 4 BLOCKS

#### Gender pay gap (sexism)

A female family member discovers they are being paid less than their male counterparts. They want to take legal action, or find another job, but ultimately, they can't afford the potential lost income and continue at their job with a lower sense of belonging and job satisfaction.

## RANDOM CHANCE EVENT CARDS - PAGE 2

Print this page and cut out all the cards.

Organize them into the three piles, (1) Roll 1 or 2, (2) Roll 3 or 4 and (3) Roll 5 or 6, face down.

### ROLL 3 OR 4: REMOVE 4 BLOCKS

#### **Bullying at school (homophobia)**

A family member faces bullying at school due to their sexual orientation and no longer wants to go to school because of it. Your family does their best to support them, but it is a challenging time.

### ROLL 3 OR 4: REMOVE 4 BLOCKS

#### **Missed work/loss of income (mental health)**

A family member is affected by mental health issues, leading to missed work and a loss of income. Your family provides emotional support, seeks professional help, and does their best to accommodate their recovery.

### ROLL 5 OR 6: KEEP ALL BLOCKS

#### **Good health**

Thankfully, your family is in good health, allowing everyone to focus on personal goals and shared activities! You enjoy hobbies, family outings, and achieve new milestones together, appreciating the gift of well-being.

### ROLL 5 OR 6: KEEP ALL BLOCKS

#### **Beautiful weather**

The community enjoys a period of excellent weather, perfect for outdoor activities and community events. Your family spends quality time together hiking, gardening, and participating in neighborhood gatherings, creating lasting memories.

### ROLL 5 OR 6: KEEP ALL BLOCKS

#### **Stable employment**

All working family members have stable jobs, providing financial security and opportunities for growth. This stability allows your family to plan for the future, invest in education, and enjoy a comfortable lifestyle.

### ROLL 5 OR 6: KEEP ALL BLOCKS

#### **Host a birthday party**

Your family comes together to celebrate your sibling's 10th birthday. You work together to organize a joyful party filled with laughter, games, and delicious food. This event brings friends and relatives closer, creating a sense of community and belonging.

### ROLL 5 OR 6: KEEP ALL BLOCKS

#### **Good harvest**

Your family's vegetable garden is full of fresh, healthy vegetables in the summer. You try new recipes, share with neighbours and enjoy the benefits of healthy food.

### ROLL 5 OR 6: KEEP ALL BLOCKS

#### **New public library**

A new library branch opened in your neighbourhood. Your family members enjoy discovering new books, joining clubs and attending events together.