



Time
Required:
20 minutes

Grade Level:
3rd-12th
grades

Skills for the 21st Century Marketplace Activity

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“Would You Rather” Activity

Infusionomics Themes, Keystone Economic Principles, and Skills for the 21st Century Marketplace:

•**THEME: CHOICES**

- **Keystone Economic Principle™ #1:** We All Make Choices.
- **Keystone Economic Principle™ #3:** All Choices Have Consequences

•**THEME: COSTS**

- **Keystone Economic Principle™ #2:** TANSTAAFL™ (There Ain't No Such Thing As A Free Lunch)
- **Skills:** 7. Critical Thinking; a. Reason Effectively; i. Use various types of reasoning (e.g., inductive, deductive, etc.) as appropriate to the situation

** For additional standards and content references, please see the [end of document](#).

Overview:

In the Would You Rather activity, students are posed with multiple “Would you rather...” questions. They must think through each option and use their critical thinking skills to come to a logical conclusion and defend their choice.

Objectives:

This activity helps students practice their critical thinking and decision-making skills by forcing them to decide between two hypothetical possibilities. After the exercise students will better be able to make logical, well thought out decisions.

Materials and Handouts:

Optional: Copies of Decision Grids for each group (<http://infusionomics.com/evaluations-tools/decision-grids/>)

Activity:

- Explain to students that you are going to pose a “Would you rather...” question to them and that they must instinctively decide one option or the other. Students who would rather choose the first option will stand on one side of the room. Students who would rather choose the second option will stand on the other.

- Pose the question (see [Appendix A](#) for list of optional “Would you rather...” questions) and have students go to one side of the room or the other.
- After the students are standing on two sides, ask them to talk as a team and decide on the best reasons why option A is better than option B (or vice-versa). The reasons must be logical and not merely opinion statements.
 - Optional: Explain the difference between positive and normative criteria (see [Supplement #1](#) for explanation on positive and normative statements) and ask the students to evaluate whether their decisions are positive or normative. Have the groups debate their best arguments.
- Tell the groups to write down their best arguments.
 - Optional: Allow the students to use Decision Grids (<http://infusionomics.com/evaluations-tools/decision-grids/>) to help them formulate their arguments.
- Allow students to change sides if they have been persuaded the other way.
- Repeat with another question as many times as is useful.

Writing Prompt or Class Discussion:

Here are some optional questions for writing prompts and/or class discussion.

- Questions on critical thinking and decision-making:
 - How did you initially decide upon which option you were going to choose?
 - How did your group agree upon the best arguments for why your option was the better choice?
 - In your discussion with your team, how did you decide upon which reasons were logical and which were merely personal opinion?
 - Were you ever persuaded to go to the other side? Why?
 - What kind of arguments helped you understand the other perspective? Why?
- Questions on how this exercise applies to real life:
 - What important decisions do you have to make in your life?
 - How do you decide what you are going to do in those situations?
 - How can we be better critical thinkers and decision makers?

Additional Standards and Content References

Voluntary National Content Standards in Economics:

- Standard #1 : Scarcity; Choice, Opportunity Cost, Wants
- Standard #2 : Decision Making; Benefit, Costs

Partnership for 21st Century Life Skills Concept:

- Learning and Innovation Skills > Critical Thinking and Problem Solving

National Content Standards for Entrepreneurship Education:

- Entrepreneurial Skills; B. Entrepreneurial Traits/Behaviors; Personal Management (B.19,21-22,25-27)

Economics Vocabulary:

- Assumptions** - Beliefs or statements presupposed to be true.
- Cost/Benefit Analysis** - A process of examining the advantages (benefits) and disadvantages (costs) of each available alternative in arriving at a decision.
- Non-monetary Incentive** - A factor not related to money, income or economic wealth that encourages people to do something.
- Opportunity Cost** - The second-best alternative (or the value of that alternative) that must be given up when scarce resources are used for one purpose instead of another.
- Scarcity** - The condition that exists because human wants exceed the capacity of available resources to satisfy those wants; also a situation in which a resource has more than one valuable use.
- Source: *EconEdLink.org* by the Council for Economic Education

Keystone Economic Principles™:

- For more information: http://infusionomics.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/Keystone_Cheat.pdf

Appendix A

Optional Would You Rather Questions

Feel free to use these questions or make up your own, depending on the age and experiences of the students in your classroom.

- Would you rather go to college or join the marines?
- Would you rather end hunger or end hatred?
- Would you rather always lose or never play?
- Would you rather be stranded on an island alone or with someone you hate?
- Would you rather take a math test or do a lab in science?
- Would you rather have a mansion in the middle of nowhere or an apartment with 10 friends?
- Would you rather buy an expensive pair of tennis shoes or take your friends out to dinner?
- Would you rather help a homeless person by giving him/her money or by giving him/her food?
- Would you rather there be limits on government aid to poor families or higher taxes on goods?
- Would you rather that a parent/guardian gave you more presents or spent more time with you?
- Would you rather have an identical twin or a fraternal twin?
- Would you rather be big and strong, or petite and smart?
- Would you rather be very poor and have parents who loved you and each other, or be wealthy and have parents who ignored you and were always fighting with each other?
- Would you rather hang around with a group of younger kids and be the boss but do things that younger kids do, or hang around with a group of older kids/adults and be the squirt but do things that older students/adults get to do?
- Would you rather be a rich and famous movie/rock/hip hop star/rapper or a great doctor who saves a lot of people but is not wealthy or well known?
- Would you rather have freedom of speech or freedom of religion?
- Would you rather spend one night all alone in an empty cabin in the woods, or to spend it with a friend outdoors in a violent thunderstorm?
- Would you rather your family loved one another and always showed how they felt -- sometime fighting and yelling, sometimes hugging and kissing -- or would you prefer they loved one another and hide their feelings whenever they were upset or angry?
- Would you rather be the tallest person in your class/grade or just be average in height?
- Would you rather receive a gift you really wanted, or given your mother/guardian a gift she would absolutely treasure?
- Would you rather be slender and athletic, but rather dumb, or fat and clumsy, but very smart?
- Would you rather have no rules at all or live with the rules you have now?
- Would you rather have a strict teacher who was fair and taught well or a teacher who was relaxed and fun but didn't teach very well?
- Would you rather be a snowman or a scarecrow?

** Many of these questions were taken from "The Kids Book of Questions" by Gregory Stock, Ph. D., (1988, Workman Publishing).

Positive and Normative

Economists make a distinction between positive and normative that closely parallels Popper's line of demarcation, but which is far older. David Hume explained it well in 1739, and Machiavelli used it two centuries earlier, in 1515. A **positive** statement is a statement about **what is** and that contains no indication of approval or disapproval. Notice that a positive statement can be wrong. "The moon is made of green cheese" is incorrect, but it is a positive statement because it is a statement about what exists.

A **normative** statement expresses a judgment about whether a situation is desirable or undesirable. "The world would be a better place if the moon were made of green cheese" is a normative statement because it expresses a judgment about **what ought to be**. Notice that there is no way of disproving this statement. If you disagree with it, you have no sure way of convincing someone who believes the statement that he is wrong.

Economists have found the positive-normative distinction useful because it helps people with very different views about what is desirable to communicate with each other. Libertarians and socialists, Christians and atheists may have very different ideas about what is desirable. When they disagree, they can try to learn whether their disagreement stems from different normative views or from different positive views. If their disagreement is on normative grounds, they know that their disagreement lies outside the realm of economics, so economic theory and evidence will not bring them together. However, if their disagreement is on positive grounds, then further discussion, study, and testing may bring them closer together.

Economists can confine themselves to positive statements, but few are willing to do so because such confinement limits what they can say about issues of government policy. Both positive and normative statements must be combined to make a policy statement. One must make a judgment about what goals are desirable (the normative part), and decide on a way of attaining those goals (the positive part). Economists often see cases in which people propose courses of action that will never get them to their intended results. If economists limit themselves to evaluating whether or not proposed actions will achieve intended results, they confine themselves to positive analysis. (You should realize that although economists can speak with special authority on positive issues, even the best can be wrong.) However, virtually all economists prefer a wider role in policy analysis, and include normative judgments as well. On normative issues economists cannot speak with special expertise. Put somewhat differently, addressing most normative issues ultimately depends on how one answers the following question: "What is the meaning of life?" One does not study economics to answer this question.

Most statements are not easily categorized as purely positive or purely normative. Rather, they are like tips of an iceberg, with many invisible assumptions hiding below the surface. Suppose, for example, someone says, "The minimum wage is a bad law." Behind that simple statement are assumptions about how to judge whether a law is good or bad (or normative statements) and also beliefs about what the actual effects of the minimum wage law are (or positive statements).