

5 Why do you work?

This section examines the role of children's work in rural and urban families in developing countries. Art prints, photographs, and activities show that the poor are not poor because they do not work hard, but rather because they do not earn enough to meet their basic needs.

Objectives

Students will:

- Define "work" and discuss types of wages
Compare their daily chores with those of children in developing countries
- Distinguish between rural and urban working conditions
- Recognize how work reflects culture and community values

Getting started

Ask students to list some of the jobs that they do around the house or in the neighborhood. What would happen if these jobs were not done?

Materials	
Arts Prints:	<i>My Family Sells Balloons</i> by Sushila Kumar, India <i>Fishing in the River</i> by Alhaji Sankoh, Sierra Leone
Photographs:	<i>Basket Weaving in Indonesia</i> <i>Carrying Water</i> (India) <i>Threshing Rice in India</i> <i>Drying Coffee Beans</i> (Honduras)
Chart:	<i>Daily Wages and Cost of Food</i> (Activity #5) <i>Common Chores of Children</i> (Activity #6)
Activity Sheets:	Why do you work? Activities #1 - #4
Maps, Globes:	

Use the art prints and photographs to raise questions about the kinds of work children in developing countries do to help their families.

What do you see?

What jobs are children doing?

What do you think would happen if they were not able to do them?

Compare the art prints from Sierra Leone and India.

What are some of the differences between work in urban and rural areas?

Teacher background information

RURAL FAMILIES make up the bulk of people in developing countries. They depend on farming, raising animals and fishing as means to feed themselves and earn income. Rural families must work hard to cover their expenses.

Many families do not own farmland. They rent land from landowners and, in Thailand, even rent the water buffalo to work the rice fields in exchange for a share of the crops. If the rains come on time and the harvest is good, the villagers might have a little extra to sell at the market.

The work day for rural people begins before sunrise. Water must be drawn, animals fed, children sent off to school and the work begun in the fields before the heat of the noon-day sun. The villagers may break during the hottest part of the day and then return to work until sundown.

Frequent drought and lack of irrigation result in infertile soil, poor harvests and food shortages. During the dry season many villagers leave their homes to find work elsewhere.

POOR URBAN FAMILIES are generally recent immigrants from rural areas who could no longer feed their families off the land. Although they are skilled as farmers, they do not have skills for jobs in urban areas. Many are further handicapped because they cannot read.

In the city, unemployment is high and jobs are low-paying. The poor find work wherever they can: in factories, as vendors and construction workers, or as taxi, bus and pedicab drivers. Many depend on their entrepreneurship to start small businesses like the balloon man in New Delhi.

CHILDREN'S WORK is indispensable to the family income. In fact, many children have to leave school in order to help support their families. A lot of children take care of younger siblings while parents work. Some work on the family farm or in their parents' business.

WOMEN'S WORK is labor intensive and time-consuming. There are few conveniences. For example, pounding and grinding the coarse grains that are the staple foods can occupy hours. In many cases, water must be carried by hand from a well or stream. Firewood needs to be collected. Dinner is cooked on an open fire. Care of children and household chores take up the little time that is left.

VOCATIONAL TRAINING can help break the cycle of poverty. Teaching adults and children alternative methods of food production - planting vegetables, cultivating mushrooms, raising chickens or fish - increases the variety of food sources available and helps sustain families during the off-season. Vocational training and loans to small businesses for marketing local handicrafts can also lead to financial independence.

TRADITIONAL FORMS OF COMMUNITY COOPERATION enable the poor to handle the heavy workload during harvest and planting time, and to survive the lean times. For example, in Thailand, farmers continue the tradition of contributing rice to a community rice bank so that in periods of drought they can borrow it back. Many rural communities form cooperatives including water buffalo banks, fertilizer banks and women's thrift groups.

The poor in the cities come from many different areas and it is more difficult for them to form cohesive community groups, because they lack a common background.

Activity Sheets: Why do you work?

#1. **Why do you work?:** Students complete a work chart analyzing the kinds of work that they do and the consequences of not doing the work.

#2. **Fishing in the River:** Students compare work in rural settings with work in urban areas.

#3. **Does a Full Day's Work Buy Dinner?:** Students interpret a chart to compare daily wages and the cost of food in selected developing countries.

#4. **Woman's Work is Never Done:** Students explore the role of an African woman and interpret a chart to compare common chores performed by women and children at different ages.

Developing critical thinking: questions for further exploration

- How do you think children in developing countries feel about the work they do? Support your answer with evidence from the study prints or other sources.
- What would it be like to use all the money you earned in a day to feed your family? How would you pay for other basic needs?
- Why do some families in developing countries remain poor despite long hours and hard work?

Multidisciplinary approaches

Language Arts/History. Students can compare the responsibilities of Laura and her sisters in Little House on the Prairie with their own chores and those of children in developing countries. Discuss similarities between life in developing countries and rural life in 19th century United States.

Music. Students learn different "work" songs and discuss how music, singing and group cooperation can make work go faster and also make working fun. Students can make up their own "work" songs and/or experiment with working alone and as part of a team. Which is faster? Which is more fun?

Science. Students research traditional work animals such as water buffalo, oxen, horses, and donkeys, then develop a chart comparing the efficiency of human, animal and machine labor. What are the advantages and disadvantages of different kinds of labor?

Social Studies. Students record in a "Food-Time" chart the number of hours spent in their household on food-related activities (shopping, cooking, washing dishes, etc.). Who does the work? What are the total hours involved? How does this compare to the number of hours spent in a developing country? What accounts for the differences? Make a list of all the labor saving devices that we take for granted.