

# International Trade Game



\*This game is borrowed from The Economics Network International Trade Game,  
[http://www.economicsnetwork.ac.uk/showcase/slowman\\_game.htm](http://www.economicsnetwork.ac.uk/showcase/slowman_game.htm)

Goal: To understand the inequality that exists in international trade; to understand the lack of access that prevents many in the developing world from economic justice; to introduce the topic of unfair trade.

Materials: Scissors, pencils, rulers, paper (Enough for each group), large meeting space with tables and chairs.

Time: 45-90 minutes

Activity:

1. Prepare an envelope of resources for each of the 6 teams.

**Rich countries: 2 envelopes**

2 pairs of scissors  
2 rulers  
1 compass  
1 set square (the exact size of the large triangular shape)  
1 protractor (the exact size of the semi-circular shape)  
2 pencils  
1 sheet of A4 paper  
6 × £100 notes (or €100 or \$100).

**Middle-income countries: 2 envelopes**

2 pencils  
1 ruler  
10 sheets of A4 paper  
3 × £100 notes (or €100 or \$100)

**Low-income countries: 2 envelopes**

2 pencils  
4 sheets of A4 paper  
2 × £100 notes (or €100 or \$100)

2. Display posters on the walls showing the required shapes, their exact measurements and their initial values. (You decide what shapes and how big you'd like them to be) They should be large so that students do not just trace them.
3. Prepare an envelope for the commodity trader.

The trader is given an envelope with money and a [template of the shapes](#), so that he/she can check whether the shapes are the right size. The template also gives the opening prices for the shapes.

- Template of shapes with their prices
  - [Banknotes](#): 30 @ \$50, 60 @ \$100, 20 @ \$500, 40 @ \$1000
  - Pencil and rubber for marking changes to the prices of shapes
  - Large envelope for keeping completed shapes 'secure'
4. Divide students into 6 teams. Each team will act as a separate country. Assign the role of commodity trader to one person.
  5. Keep an envelope for yourself, the game facilitator:
    - Whistle
    - 6 small coloured sticky shapes per game
    - 10 sheets A4 paper per game
    - Pencil sharpener
  6. Instruct participants to leave all personal belongings away from realm of the game.
  7. Pass out envelopes to each country. BEFORE the students open their envelopes provide the instructions:

'Each of the groups is a team and represents a country. The goal for each country is to earn as much money as possible, using the materials in its envelope. No other materials can be used. Use the materials to manufacture paper shapes. You can choose to make any of the shapes shown on the diagrams on the wall.

All shapes must be cut with clean sharp edges using scissors and must be of the exact size specified on the diagrams. The shapes can then be sold to the trader in batches, who will check them for accuracy and exchange them for cash. Inaccurate shapes will be rejected. You can manufacture as many shapes as you like – make as many as you can to get rich. You must not cut up your envelope!

If you hear me whistle [demonstrate], you must immediately stop what you are doing and pay attention. If there is any dispute, I will settle it. My word is final! No physical force is to be used in the game.'
  8. Do not explain the purpose of the game to the participants prior to playing.
  9. Commence manufacturing. Tell students they have 40 minutes
  10. Participants may ask questions about their materials, and whether they can trade, loan, etc. Do not answer these questions. Each country must figure out what they must do. You may repeat your initial instructions. Begin the game, it will last 40 minutes.
  11. Most likely, countries will begin trading.

12. Observe the dynamics of the game. What happens to the scissors (do their owners form a cartel? Do they sell one pair? Do they hire out manufacturing? How are prices negotiated? Does cheating take place? What about alliances? Does malpractice occur (stealing paper, implements or shapes)? You may choose to issue punishments or let countries negotiate their own rules (i.e. punishment for stealing might be a 5 minute halt to production, a fine, loss of materials).
13. The commodity trader must be strict about compliance. Shapes should be the appropriate measurements. Any that have not been cut out must be rejected. A reduced price can be given for those that are carefully torn out with a ruler, or only slightly off the correct size. The commodity trader must be careful that her/his money is not stolen. Shapes that are sold should be put out of reach of participants.
14. Traders should not usually use loans; however, if they do, make sure the interest rate is high (about 50%). The trader should keep a record of loans. When totals are created at the end, any money owed plus interest is subtracted from a country's total.
15. The game facilitator keeps in contact with the trader. Find out which shapes are being sold in large quantities and those which are sold minimally.
16. The game facilitator may interrupt the game to announce that due to supply and demand, prices for shapes have changed. Dramatic changes are advised. Change prices infrequently. Note that the price of certain goods makes certain tools more valuable.
17. If paper runs out, you may hold a paper auction with one member from each country. Observe whether bidders collude to drive down the price, or whether the price at the auction will reflect the value of the shapes made from it.
18. Give a 5 minute warning prior to the end.
19. Countries will compete against each other to 'manufacture' paper shapes (circles, triangles, rectangles, etc) and sell them on the international market at posted prices. Prices change with supply and demand. Each country must seek to make as much money as possible.
20. In each game there are 2 rich industrialized countries, 2 middle-income countries, and 2 low-income countries. Students will not be told their income-status at the beginning of the game; they will discover this as they play.
21. Announce a 5 minute warning until the end of the game.
22. At the end of the game have participants return to their countries and answer"
  - a. What was in their envelopes to begin with?
  - b. What tools do they currently own?
  - c. How much money do they have?
23. Debriefing-Record the results where participants can see them.
  - a. Draw attention to similarities and differences in results.
  - b. Ask students how the game simulates the real world and to describe how it is unrealistic. (Resource inequality might be observed).
  - c. Plan the debriefing in order to facilitate discussions. Ask countries to discuss questions amongst themselves and then as a group.
  - d. Questions: What options did countries with fewer resources have? How did it feel scrambling to earn the most money? How did other countries help you? How did they hinder you? In what ways could a fair resolution have been created? How would you convince other countries to cooperate (especially when they are not obligated)?