The Cost of Coffee Lesson Plan

Students will examine the economic, health, and environmental risks of a one-crop economy in the developing world.

After studying the letters and engaging in classroom activities, students should be able to explain how or why

* It can be challenging for people of one culture to understand the lifestyle of a different society.
* Dependence on a one crop economy has inherent risks.
* It may be effective to bring about change through a small initiative.
* Factors such as gender and status may affect one's likelihood of adopting change.

Procedures

1. Review with the class the information they have learned from volunteer letters from Joan Heberger (see materials).
2. Ask students to name the kinds of businesses that employ people in their town or city. [Younger students will probably think of the industries or occupations of adults they know personally, or businesses that they have seen.] List as many as possible on the board.
3. Explain to the class that, instead of having many kinds of businesses, agricultural crops, and employment opportunities, many developing countries have regions with a one-crop economy, such as bananas, sugar, rubber, cacao, or coffee. Have students brainstorm ways that having a one-crop economy makes people vulnerable. Try to elicit:
   1. Environmental damage, such as soil depletion; an American example is the devastation of the soil of some Southern states because of tobacco cultivation before the Civil War
   2. Crop diseases; you might remind them of the Irish potato famine and the fact that at least a million Irish people starved to death in the 1840s as a result
   3. Fluctuations in the world price for a product. Explain a simple version of the law of supply and demand.
   4. Natural disasters; for example, a hurricane such as Hurricane Mitch in Honduras can devastate a single economy
4. Have students read Joan Heberger's second letter. As they read, ask them to notice which of the potential economic problems the students identified are faced by the people of Corquín. [Price fluctuations and environmental problems.] Have students underline the evidence in the text. When they have finished, discuss their conclusions. What other economic problems seem to occur as a result of the dependence on coffee? [Seasonal employment, since most workers are required only for the harvest; overcrowding and unsanitary living conditions at harvest time. Students may predict health problems as a result; remind them that health problems have many economic costs.]
5. In class discussion, address these questions:
   1. What did Joan Heberger see as potential projects to aid the environment in coffee-growing areas? [The mayor's office passed laws to improve water quality. Model farms used modern methods such as organic fertilizers, pesticides, and soil conservation techniques. (Students may need clarification of these terms.) Some people worked as educators in their communities to teach these techniques.]
   2. What projects did Heberger actually undertake to improve the environment? [She and her students had an environmental poster campaign and made art projects out of junk.]
   3. What are at least two reasons that working on sanitation issues is very difficult where Heberger is serving? [Understanding hygiene, lack of modern plumbing.]
   4. Why does Heberger think it would be particularly difficult for Juanita to make changes to improve sanitation in Corquín? From what you have read about Juanita, what general description could you propose about the role of women in Corquín? [Answers will vary, but you should try to help students understand Juanita's strength and dedication to her family as well as the hardships she faces.]
   5. What did Heberger learn from her volunteering experience described in this letter? Do you think that her community will eventually solve the problems they face?
   6. What issues in your community deserve or require attention? How can you make a difference in your school or community? [Try to elicit concrete suggestions rather than generalizations.]
6. Write on the board or overhead: How is the way you live influenced by where you live? Pair up students and give them three minutes to list five ways in which their location influences their lives. You may ask students to report or even draw pictures that illustrate their conclusions, depending on the time available.

Frameworks & Standards

Enduring Understandings

* Dependence on a one-crop economy leaves a community vulnerable to serious economic problems—from environmental degradation, price fluctuations, and crop diseases.
* Improving economic conditions is a complex task that depends on many factors, including climate, culture, and tradition.

Standards

National Science Education Standards  
Content Standard F: Science in Personal and Social Perspectives

REGIONS

Central America and Mexico

COUNTRIES

Honduras

GRADE LEVELS

6 - 8, 9 - 12

RESOURCE TYPES

Lesson Plan

RESOURCE TOPICS

Environment, Social Studies

RELATED MATERIALS

* [Story: A Rural Honduran Day](https://www.peacecorps.gov/educators/resources/rural-honduran-day/)
* [Story: The True Cost of Coffee](https://www.peacecorps.gov/educators/resources/true-cost-coffee/)