Free lesson plan · Goal 1 · No Poverty

1 Poverty is more than money

Ages 11–13 · 60 minutes



Illustration by Noemí Villamuza, from The Tree Woman · © Noemí Villamuza

The story · *The Tree Woman*

Abril, a girl who slips into her secret hideaway, closes her eyes and lets her imagination run wild, builds this story around Wangari Maathai. A woman steps off a bus at the edge of a Kenyan village where the trees have gone: the ground is dry and bare, the ponds are empty holes, the women walk further every day for firewood and water, and the children are skin and bones. Wangari will not stand by. She walks to the forest of the oldest trees, asks the earth for permission and digs up seven sprouts to plant in her garden. First the old woman across the road joins her, then the village women, who sew tents from rags to germinate seeds while the men mock them. Wangari then knocks on the door of the sawmill owner and the local authorities. Can a handful of sprouts change a whole village? The book closes with the real Wangari Maathai and the Green Belt Movement she founded.

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Discussion question

Wangari's list for the local authorities asks for housing, adult centres, medical check-ups and cooperatives as well as trees. What has each of these got to do with poverty?

Learning objectives

- Explain why poverty is 'multidimensional', using at least 3 dimensions (income, health, education, living conditions).
- Use simple data from a family profile to decide which needs are not being met.
- Identify 3 local services or places that help people who are struggling and describe what one of them does.

You need

- Four printed fictional family profiles (one per group, see main activity)
- A3 paper and coloured pens
- Board
- Optional: local map or printed map of the school area

Key words

extreme poverty — living on less money than the international poverty line set by the World Bank

multidimensional — having many parts or sides, not just one

income — money a person or family receives

welfare — help from the government for people who need it

safety net — support that stops people falling into deeper hardship

deprivation — not having something important that you need

Curriculum links

Science: Human health and the needs of the body; clean water and nutrition.

Geography: Development around the world; comparing places and living conditions.

Citizenship: Rights and responsibilities; how communities and governments support people (welfare, free school meals, health care).

Maths: Reading tables and simple statistics; '1 in 10' as a fraction and a percentage.

Language: Reading for information; explaining a point with evidence.

UNESCO ESD competency: Systems thinking competency

Lesson steps

Rich in what? · 10 minutes

Teacher

- Write on the board: 'Two families have exactly the same income. Can one still be much poorer than the other?'
- Give pupils 2 minutes to discuss in pairs, then take ideas (one lives far from a clinic, one has no clean water, one child cannot go to school).
- Share the fact: about 1 in 10 people in the world live in extreme poverty, and many more lack basics like health care or safe water.

Pupils

- Discuss the question with a partner.
- Note down one idea about what else, apart from money, people need.

Family profiles: spot the gaps · 22 minutes

Teacher

- Give each group one fictional profile, for example: 'The Amaro family: two adults, three children. Parents work long hours for low pay. The nearest clinic is two hours away on foot. The oldest girl collects water each morning and often misses school. The house has electricity.'
- Ask groups to draw a 'dashboard' with 5 dials: Money, Health, Education, Water and food, Safety. They colour each dial green, amber or red, with evidence from the profile.
- Ask: which ONE change would improve the most dials at once? (For example a nearby water point frees time for school.)
- Groups report back in 60 seconds each; record the 'one change' ideas on the board and point out how the dimensions connect.

Pupils

- Read the profile and highlight evidence for each dimension.
- Colour the 5 dials and write one reason for each.
- Agree on one change that helps most, and explain why.

The mission: 🗺️ Community Helpers Map · 18 minutes

Teacher

- Explain that poverty is beaten by communities, not just individuals.
- Work through the mission's Spark together, then let pupils start the Do step in class using a map of the school area.
- Agree that the Prove step (finding out what one helper actually does) will be finished at home or in the next lesson.

Pupils

- Read the Spark and discuss it with your group.
- Draw your neighbourhood and mark 3 places that help people in need (for example a food bank, clinic, library, charity shop or community centre).
- Write one question you will ask to find out what one of them does.

One sentence, three dimensions · 10 minutes

Teacher

- Ask pupils to complete the sentence: 'Poverty is not just about money; it is also about…'.
- Take 3–4 answers, then set the exit ticket.

Pupils

- Complete the sentence using at least two dimensions.
- Answer the exit ticket.

Exit ticket

Why might two families with the same income not be equally poor? Give an example.

Model answer: Because poverty is multidimensional: one family might live far from a clinic or school, or lack clean water, so they are deprived in health or education even if they earn the same.

At home

Pupils finish the Prove step of the mission at home by asking a family member what one local helper (for example a food bank or community centre) does, and add it to their map.

Differentiation · Support

- Provide the profile with key sentences already highlighted and the five dials pre-drawn.
- Use a word bank: health, school, water, money, safety.

Differentiation · Stretch

- Compare two profiles and decide which family is 'poorer' — then explain why it depends on what you measure.
- Research the UNDP Multidimensional Poverty Index and list the indicators it uses.

Success criteria

- I can name at least 3 dimensions of poverty.
- I can use evidence from a profile to judge which needs are not met.
- I can name local helpers and what they do.

Handle with care

Some pupils in your class may be living with little money right now. Never ask pupils to describe their own home, income or belongings; use the fictional character instead. Keep the message that poverty is about unfair chances, not about people being lazy or less clever, and make sure no one is asked to say which group they belong to.

Free online, no account needed

- Watch the Goal 1 mission video: **eco-heroes.org/sdg/1/**
- Play the Goal 1 game chapter: **eco-heroes.org/game/**
- Play the Goal 1 trivia: **eco-heroes.org/trivia/?sdg=1**
- Read the free reading guide: **eco-heroes.org/library/the-tree-woman/**
- Goal 1 teacher pack: **eco-heroes.org/teachers/goal-1-pack/**

Sources

- UN — Goal 1: End poverty — https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/poverty/
- World Bank — Poverty overview — https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/poverty/overview
- UNICEF — Child poverty — https://www.unicef.org/social-policy/child-poverty

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