Free lesson plan · Goal 1 · No Poverty

1 What actually works against poverty?

Ages 14–17 · 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.

Written by Ricardo Alcántara · Illustrated by Noemí Villamuza

Discussion question

Wangari says, 'It is the small acts that make the difference.' Do you agree? When are small acts not enough?

Learning objectives

- Explain how a cycle of poverty can pass from one generation to the next, using at least 3 linked causes.
- Evaluate two real anti-poverty programmes (cash transfers and microcredit) against agreed criteria.
- Propose a realistic 3-point local plan to reduce poverty and identify who might resist it.

You need

- Two printed programme fact cards (Bolsa Família, Brazil; Grameen Bank, Bangladesh)
- Criteria grid (cost, reach, impact on children, fairness, risks)
- Sticky notes in two colours
- Board

Key words

cycle of poverty — when poverty causes problems that then make it hard to escape poverty, often across generations

conditional cash transfer — money given to families if they meet conditions, such as children attending school

microcredit — very small loans for people who cannot borrow from ordinary banks

policy — a plan of action by a government or organisation

evidence — facts or data that show whether something is true or works

trade-off — giving up one thing to gain another

social protection — public support such as pensions, child benefits or unemployment payments

Curriculum links

Science: Health, nutrition and child development; how poor health affects learning.

Geography: Development indicators and global inequality; case studies from Brazil and Bangladesh.

Citizenship: Role of government, charities and citizens; policy design and evaluation.

Maths: Interpreting percentages and rates; comparing the cost and reach of programmes.

Language: Persuasive speaking and structured argument (point, evidence, explanation).

UNESCO ESD competency: Strategic competency

Lesson steps

The cycle on the board · 10 minutes

Teacher

- Write ‘low income’ in a circle on the board and ask: what can low income lead to? Build a cycle with arrows: poor nutrition → illness → missed school → lower-paid work → low income.
- Share: about 1 in 5 children worldwide live in extreme poverty (UNICEF and World Bank), and children are hit hardest because early years shape the rest of life.
- Ask: where in this cycle could we break it?

Pupils

- Suggest links for the cycle.
- Mark with a sticky note where you would try to break the cycle.

Programme evaluators · 22 minutes

Teacher

- Hand out the two fact cards. Bolsa Família: Brazil gives regular cash to low-income families if children attend school and have health check-ups; it reaches millions of households. Grameen Bank: founded by Muhammad Yunus in Bangladesh, it lends small amounts without collateral, mostly to women; Yunus and the bank shared the 2006 Nobel Peace Prize.
- Groups score each programme on the criteria grid (1–5) and must give evidence or a question for each score.
- Point out that evidence can be mixed (for example debates about microcredit interest rates) and that this is normal in real policy.
- Each group shares its strongest argument for and against one programme.

Pupils

- Read both cards and underline facts that show impact.
- Score each criterion and justify it in one line.
- Decide which programme would break the cycle at the most points, and why.

The mission: 🏛️ Mayor for a Day · 18 minutes

Teacher

- Introduce the mission and set a 12-minute limit for the Do step: one cause of local poverty and a 3-point plan.
- Remind pupils to use ideas from the evaluation (conditions, targeting, cost) and to think about who might resist.
- Choose two groups to pitch their plan in 60 seconds.

Pupils

- Read the Spark and choose one local cause (for example housing costs, lack of jobs, transport).
- Write a 3-point plan.
- Pitch it ‘as the mayor’, or listen and ask one challenging question.

Who resists, and why? · 10 minutes

Teacher

- Run the mission's Reflect question aloud: who might resist this plan, and why?
- Set the exit ticket.

Pupils

- Name one group that might resist and one way to win them over.
- Answer the exit ticket.

Exit ticket

Choose one anti-poverty programme. Give one strength and one limitation, with a reason.

Model answer: Bolsa Família: a strength is that cash linked to school attendance tackles income and education at once; a limitation is that it depends on schools and clinics being available nearby, so it reaches fewer people in remote areas.

At home

Pupils ask an adult at home what support existed when they were young (school meals, child benefit, health care) and whether it made a difference — and share one finding next lesson.

Differentiation · Support

- Provide a partly completed cycle diagram and a criteria grid with sentence starters.
- Pair pupils for the pitch so one presents and one holds the notes.

Differentiation · Stretch

- Find out what 'targeting' means in social policy and whether universal or targeted support is fairer.
- Compare the World Bank's international poverty line with your country's own poverty measure.

Success criteria

- I can explain a cycle of poverty with linked causes.
- I can evaluate a programme with evidence, not just opinion.
- I can propose a realistic plan and anticipate opposition.

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/
- UNICEF — Child poverty — https://www.unicef.org/social-policy/child-poverty
- World Bank — Poverty overview — https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/poverty/overview

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