

# Your 2009 Action Plan for Teaching Economics in Middle School

You're hearing a lot about economics this year, and maybe you're wondering "What if my students understood economics? Would it make a difference in their high school studies? In college? In *life*?"

Absolutely. You can give your students an early start on making wise economic and financial decisions, with just a few activity-based lessons. It's a small investment today, that will make a big impact in the lives of your students.

Here is a list of tips and resources to help you infuse Economics into your curriculum...

*(Tip: You may want to print out this guide; it will save time and you can easily refer to it in the future).*

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## ***Action Step #1: Training, It's Good for You***

Top performers -- athletes, business professionals, artists -- are always improving their skills, so they can reach their peak potential.

Teaching is no different.

Make it a goal to attend an economics and personal finance professional development workshop in 2009. You'll not only expand your knowledge of economics and personal finance, but you'll also network with your peers and return to your classroom with new-found energy and enthusiasm.

## Where to Find Training

Not sure where to start?

Why not ask your department chair, principal, district curriculum director... a fellow teacher? Most likely, they will have advice on local, national and even online training opportunities.

Don't forget you can find economic and personal finance workshops through the Council for Economic Education's university-based network of [Centers for Economic Education](#). Just click on your state, find your nearest Center and contact them to get a list of workshops in your area.

Can't attend face-to-face training? With budget cuts and time constraints, it's a common challenge today.

You can also find [online teacher training](#) through the Council for Economic Education. These online training modules take you behind-the-scenes of the Council's most popular programs. You'll explore content and find out how to teach it to your middle school students. You'll watch videos of teachers using the lessons with their students. Plus, seasoned economic educators will show you how to deliver the lesson plans for maximum impact.

Call us toll-free at 800-338-1192 and our friendly staff will help you find the economic and personal finance training you need.

## ***Action Step #2: Get (Even More) Comfortable with Economics***

After you've received training, it's time to expand your knowledge base and keep your skills sharp.

Pay close attention to the economics in your daily life -- in the news, discussions among your students and friends, in your own household.

## Teach the World Around You

Economics is, literally, all around you, isn't it? Look at the daily news: economics dominates the headlines, day after day. And I'll bet your students are talking about economics... and their parents... and your fellow teachers... well, you get the picture. How can you use these headlines and once-in-lifetime events as teachable moments?



Handy Dandy Guide to Economic Reasoning, from the [Great Economic Mysteries](#) series, is a quick and easy way to introduce your students to economics.

With only 15-30 minutes of effort and using common "mysteries," you'll start building an economic foundation that shows your

students how economics plays a role in their daily lives.

There's even a 'Guide to Writing Your Own Mysteries,' which encourages you to monitor headlines and craft your own economic mysteries. It's pretty simple, give it a try.

*Teaching Tip: Think Like An Economist (It's Okay, Really)*

*Resource:* [The Great Economic Mysteries Book: A Guide to Teaching Economic Reasoning, Grades 4-8](#)

*Background Reading:* [The Handy Dandy Guide to Economic Reasoning](#)

*Sample Lesson:* [The Mystery of the Greedy Teenagers](#)

*What It Does:* Uses a labor and employment mystery -- babysitting -- to introduce students to economic reasoning.

*What Makes It Unique:* Your students **work together** in groups to **analyze** data, **discuss** alternatives and **defend** answers to common, everyday mysteries; you're introducing them to economics, in a fun context.

### ***Action Step #3: If You Buy One Resource, Make It Virtual Economics***

How would you like to have your own economics and personal finance coach on call, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week?



[Virtual Economics](#) is your private tutor -- mentor, coach, confidant, call it what you will -- for teaching economics and personal finance.

This CD-ROM (you didn't think it was an actual person, did you?) helps you understand how to:

- teach 51 economic and personal finance **concepts**
- build your **vocabulary** (which you can also use with your students)
- find **activity-based lesson plans** to demonstrate the concepts to your students, and
- correlate lessons to your **state economic standards**

### **Activity-based Lessons, From Planning to Delivery**

Imagine if you could attend a seminar and discover the latest strategies and techniques for teaching economics and personal finance to middle school students. [Virtual Economics](#) gives you on-going training, support and -- most importantly -- the tools to confidently teach economics and personal finance in your classroom.

You'll also leverage technology to make your lesson planning easier. [Virtual Economics](#)

makes it easy to plan, find and deliver a memorable lesson for your students.

*Teaching Tip: Be the Economics and Personal Finance Ace in Your School*

*Resource:* [Virtual Economics](#) CD-ROM

*Video Demonstration:* How a teacher uses [Virtual Economics](#) for lesson planning -- [Watch Video](#)

*What It Does:* [Virtual Economics](#) helps you plan, find and deliver economic or personal finance lessons.

*What Makes It Unique:* You use technology to build your economic and personal finance knowledge base, and search a database of lesson plans by keyword, publication and state content standard.

### **Action Step #4: Leverage the Grades 6-8 Economics Package**

What if you used activity-based lesson plans, simulations and group projects to increase student participation in your classroom? Chances are, your students would pick up the concepts quite a bit faster.



[The Grades 6-8 Economics Package](#) is the easiest, most affordable way to add economics to your curriculum. Best of all, you'll give your middle school students a basic foundation in the terminology and principles they will need to succeed in their high school courses... and in life.

You'll harness the power of three popular print-based programs:

1. [Play Dough Economics](#)
2. [Focus: Middle School Economics](#)
3. [Wide World of Trade](#)

### **Your Students Learn by Doing**

Here's something that's fun and easy to try: start teaching basic economic concepts with hands-on activities and role-playing exercises.

Your students will learn best by doing, right? And it takes some of the instructional burden off you, at the same time.

So, have them roll up their sleeves and jump start their economics learning with Play Dough.

Have your students create Play Dough products to sell and trade in the classroom. Watch while your students sculpt Play Dough baseball bats, Play Dough baseballs, Play Dough hats and Play Dough flowers... the possibilities are endless.

What else are they doing? They're thinking like producers, like entrepreneurs.

Next, have them walk around the classroom and purchase items from their fellow classmates (with play money, of course); you've just helped them understand their roles as consumers.

See how easy that was? And your students just mastered important concepts like production, opportunity cost, scarcity and natural resources.



A perfect guide for getting started with hands-on economic fun is [Play Dough Economics](#). These activity-based lessons are correlated to National Content Standards and are a way to seamlessly add economics principles to your everyday instruction.

You'll also find literature connections that reinforce concepts and strengthen your students language arts skills. Helpful pre-tests and post tests will help your students "Play" on track.

*Teaching Tip: Teach Economics with the Ultimate Hands-on Activities*

*Resource:* [Play Dough Economics](#)

*Sample Lesson:* [Opportunity Cost: Part I – Consumers](#) (PDF, includes recipe)

*What It Does:* Students use "capital" to produce a sculpture.

*What Makes It Unique:* Your students use sculpting clay to **create** a good, **trade** and **identify** their opportunity costs.

So now that your students rolled up their sleeves and have an understanding of basic economic concepts, how do they apply these principles to the real-world?



Challenge your students to take an in-depth look at economics with activities, simulations and projects from [Focus: Middle School Economics](#).

This helpful teacher guide explores the 6 roles your students will play in the economy (producers, consumers, workers, etc.). It shows them how to make decisions and choices, and infuses advanced concepts like supply and demand, trade barriers, and GDP into your instruction. Students even track their learning progress in a journal.

*Teaching Tip: Activity-based Lessons Make Your Life A Whole Lot Easier*

*Resource:* [Focus: Middle School Economics](#)

*Sample Lesson:* [What Does the Nation Consume?](#)

*What It Does:* Your students familiarize themselves with GDP.

*What Makes It Unique:* Your students **define** economic terms, **categorize** spending and **explain** the differences between types of goods.

After you've prepared your students for real-world decision-making, take them outside of the classroom and on a journey around the globe. (Don't worry, you won't *actually* be leaving your classroom...)

With an increasingly interdependent economy, it's important to understand how trade figures into the products we purchase and own.

Take a sweet and chocolatey Hershey Kiss: where does it come from? Your first instinct is probably "good ol' Hersey, Pennsylvania," but the Hershey Kiss is really a product of global exchange.



The Hershey Corporation trades goods from all around the world to produce just one Hershey Kiss. The cocoa beans come from tropical regions; the sugar comes from plantations in Cuba; and the aluminum comes from countries like Canada, China, Japan and even the US.

This is just one of the action-packed lesson plans you'll find in [Wide World of Trade](#). You'll not only give your students a global economics perspective, you'll also reinforce important skills like teamwork, problem solving and critical thinking.

*Teaching Tip: How Does Trade Impact My Students?*

*Resource:* [Wide World of Trade](#)

*Sample Lesson:* [Something's in the Way](#)

*What It Does:* Your students create postcards to demonstrate specialization and trade.

*What Makes It Unique:* Your students **create** goods, **define** concepts and **analyze** the results of a simulation.

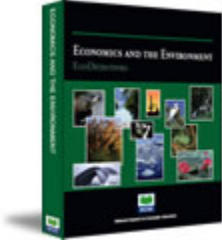
## ***Action Step #5: Infuse Economics Into Other Subject Areas***

You'd like to teach economics, but maybe you're wondering how you can fit it into your required courses.

A strong knowledge of economic concepts will help students become better decision-makers, giving them the ability to tackle tough decisions as business owners, consumers and producers.

But can this economic foundation also help them save our environment?

## Teach More Content, With Less Work



Explore hot-button environmental issues in your classroom with an easy-to-understand teacher guide like [Economics and the Environment: Ecodetectives](#). This resource is packed with mystery-based lesson plans and activities that give your students a whole new perspective on the environment around them.

*Teaching Tip: Use Economics to Explore the Environment*

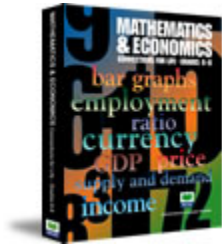
*Resource:* [Economics and the Environment: Ecodetectives](#)

*Sample Lesson:* [Why Do We Have So Few Whales and So Many Chickens](#)

*What It Does:* Your students explore the principles of the tragedy of the commons and property rights using a simulation.

*What Makes It Unique:* Your students **participate** in a simulation, **gather** data and **suggest** an answer to a mystery.

Beat the time crunch during the year and combine two important subject areas into one: give your students a solid understanding of economics through mathematics problems and equations.



Create a math and economics curriculum with [Mathematics and Economics: Grades 6-8](#). This lesson plan teacher guide applies mathematical problem solving in the context of economics, using real-world scenarios.

*Teaching Tip: Why Do Twice the Work? Combine Multiple Disciplines Into One Lesson*

*Resource:* [Mathematics and Economics: Grades 6-8](#)

*Sample Lesson:* Could You Earn a Million Dollars

*What It Does:* Your students explore the relationship between earnings and education.

*What Makes It Unique:* Your students **analyze** and **organize** data, **calculate** earnings and **make** correlations.

You're probably wondering at this point... how many other subjects can possibly involve economics? Well read on, because geography is no longer just about "where is the Sahara Desert, and what is its climate and vegetation?"

Next time you look at a map, make sure the first thing your students see is economics.

After all, resources, climate and location are essential to understanding the economy. Geography establishes a location's resources, which in turn dictates what goods and services are produced.

Geography also plays a role in why people move, and how the different rules and laws of each region affect economic freedom.

Use [Focus: Middle School World Geography](#) to sprinkle your geography curriculum with economics. This helpful classroom guide is filled with reproducible maps, data, charts, graphs, tables, documents and more.

*Teaching Tip: There's More to Geography than a Map*

*Resource:* [Middle School World Geography](#)

*Sample Lesson:* [Why Do People Move?](#)

*What It Does:* Students use U.S. Census data to analyze why people move.

*What Makes It Unique:* Your students **read** and **analyze** data, **weigh** costs and benefits and **draw** conclusions.

## ***Action Step #6: Avoid the Financial Mistakes of the Past***

It's never too early to start teaching key personal finance skills. When your students learn personal finance skills at an early age, they are more likely to understand concepts quicker; learn healthy spending and saving habits from the get-go; and prepare for a sustainable financial future.

### **Start with the Basics**



Financial Fitness for Life is a complete personal finance program that covers:

- Earning an income
- Saving
- Spending and Credit
- Money Management and Budgeting

You can use the program to pick-and-choose select lessons, or you can use all the lessons as a comprehensive curriculum.

*Teaching Tip: Don't Just Invest in the Market, Invest in Student Success*

*Resource:* [Financial Fitness for Life Teacher's Package, Grades 6-8](#)

*Sample Lesson, Teacher Guide:* [Stocks and Mutual Funds](#)

*Sample Lesson, Student Worksheet #1:* [Stocks and Mutual Funds](#)

*Sample Lesson, Student Worksheet #2:* [An Interview with Mr. Stock](#)

*Sample Lesson, Student Worksheet #3:* [Juanita's Decisions](#)

*What It Does:* Combines a brief introductory teacher lesson, two student worksheets to reinforce the content.

*What Makes It Unique:* Your students **read** background content and **build** their investing vocabulary, "interview" a stock during a **role-play**, and **solve** a case problem.

## ***Action Step #7: Grab Some Face Time in the Computer Lab***

Okay, so far you've used technology to plan, find and deliver in-class lessons (with [Virtual Economics](#)), and you've looked at a number of supplemental, print-based lesson plans (everything from [the Grades 6-8 Economic Package](#) to science, mathematics and geography, to [Financial Fitness for Life](#)).

But your students are pretty "wired," aren't they? Chances are they spend a lot of time online, or at least they're itching to. Here's your chance to supplement your print-based lessons with computer-based activities...

### **Find Free Lessons at EconEdLink.org**



With [EconEdLink.org](#), you'll have access to over 95 **free** middle school economic and personal finance lesson plans.

And your students will always be "doing" things, like:

- Reading articles
- Analyzing online data sources
- Listening to audio
- Watching video

Some teacher highlights you'll find on [EconEdLink.org](#) include:

- [Find lessons](#) by keyword or [state content standard](#)
- Stay on top of [current events](#) with lessons that help you teach the latest news headlines
- Use fun [interactives](#) to keep your students involved

These lessons will not only give you practical, interactive online lessons, they will also help your student build and fine-tune their computer-literacy skills. And because the students are working at their own pace, EconEdLink.org gives you a chance to spend one-on-one time with your students... not to mention stake your claim in the computer lab.

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You don't need to use all of these resources, just find the one -- or ones -- that fit your teaching style and meet your instructional goals.

If you have any questions about these resources, give us a call and we'll explain them in more detail: 800-338-1192.

Good luck, we hope 2009 is your best teaching year ever!

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**About the author:**

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