

## Lesson 5: Human Creativity: The World's Greatest Resource

### PURPOSE

To introduce students to the idea that humans are a creative resource and to critically evaluate media depictions that present the human population as the problem.

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

1. Reaffirm that human creativity has the power to shape the world in which we live or want to live.
2. Understand that language and images can be used for social propaganda.
3. Understand that human creativity is the source of economic growth and a solution to population growth.

### MATERIALS & RESOURCES

- [Video](#): Population Explosion | NFB Canada Population Explosion
- [Video](#): Disney "Family Planning" (1968)
- Humanity's Creativity in Action
- Interim Quiz 1

### VOCABULARY

- Creativity: the human power to use one's imagination and ideas to shape the world
- Propaganda: communication based on biased or misleading information, which aims to deceive the audience to promote a certain, often political, agenda

### PROCEDURE

**Step 1:** Recall the previous lesson. Recall how coercion occurs in population control policies and how informed consent is important for making truly free decisions. Emphasize once more how the wrong understanding of freedom threatens human dignity and rights.

Review the definition of creativity:

Creativity: the human power to use one's imagination and ideas to shape the world.

**Step 2:** In this lesson, the students will examine how human creativity was used to promote population control policies around the world.

Recall that in Grade 9, the class discussed how art and creativity can have a strong persuasive power and influence how one thinks and feels about things. For this reason, art and creativity are sometimes used for propagandistic purposes, for example, to convince an audience to accept a certain agenda. Recall the definition of propaganda:

**Propaganda: communication based on biased or misleading information, which aims to deceive the audience to promote a certain, usually political, agenda**

In earlier grades, the class learned how different ideologies, such as Nazism and Communism, used art and creativity to promote their ideology. However, use of art and creativity is not just a thing of the past or limited to totalitarian regimes. Art was used to promote population control and is still promoted today.

Watch the [video](#) (1968) “Family Planning” (first 6:50 minutes) to see how art and creativity were used to promote population control through a collaboration between Disney and the Population Council. After watching the video, lead the class discussion by asking the following questions:


**Which economic theory (hint: it was discussed in the second lesson) underpins the messages in this video?**  
**What is the main thesis of this theory and how does it view the human person? Is this theory correct? Explain.**

After the students have given their answers, explain that the theory underpinning the messages in the video is Malthusianism. As discussed in the second lesson, Malthus’ theory claims that population grows more than it can produce goods for its subsistence and that this development should eventually result in world hunger. These theories view human persons as a burden to development.

The Disney video reflects this theory by saying that the population is growing at an astonishing rate, almost doubling in every generation, and that whatever is done to produce more goods, it will not be enough. To illustrate the problem of overpopulation they present a model in which there is a fixed amount of food to support a growing number of people. People are presented as “mouths to feed” instead as sources of creativity and innovation which bring economic growth.

But we have seen that this presupposition is wrong, since the productivity of producing food is increasing. Human persons and their ingenuity are the source of economic growth through creative finding new ways to increase efficiency of production. Malthus' predictions never came to pass since humans were always finding more efficient ways to produce food and other goods.

**Step 3:** Watch the animated [video](#): Population Explosion | NFB Canada Population Explosion (1968). Before watching the film, read the following quote aloud to the class, from the Fraser Institute Critical Issues Bulletin [Exploding Population Myths](#):

 *If there are too many people in the world, then each newborn is a threat to every other human being. If these babies are threats, then it would be acceptable to eradicate the threat. Now, this may sound harsh and unrealistic. [...] But many groups come very close to this view.”<sup>55</sup>*

Remind the class that in Grade 11, they learned about the “Kuleshov effect” which states that meaning is created by the special ordering of images. The meaning of the scene can be radically changed depending on the images that come together with another image. Then lead the class in a discussion through the following questions, using the Answer Key provided.

#### QUESTIONS FOR A DISCUSSION:

To what images and ideas is a growing population linked to in this video? Which meaning does this convey? Does this reveal or distort the truth?

How is the dichotomy between poor and rich countries displayed in the movie?

How is human procreation presented in the video? Does the portrayal respect the dignity of persons from other countries or does it offensively characterise?

<sup>55</sup> Jim Peron: Exploding Population Myths, in: *The Fraser Institute Critical Issues Bulletin*, 1995, available at <https://www.fraserinstitute.org/studies/exploding-population-myths> (last visited Dec 2, 2022).

**Answer Key for the teacher**

- 1. To what images and ideas is a growing population linked to in this video? Which meaning does this convey? Does this reveal or distort the truth?** The movie associates population growth with poverty, disease, famine and death. In this way, it evokes strong, negative feelings towards population growth. Even more surprising, the movie links war (“an unhappy accident!”), famine and epidemic to something positive – “restoring the balance” in population. The movie obviously distorts the truth, illustrating foreign population growth as a black swarm that will cause all kinds of catastrophe until a literal bomb is exploded in the video. The images and narration instill a sense of fear in the audience that having more than two children is so dangerous, that war and epidemics are (positive) necessary evils to combat the alternative.
- 2. How is the dichotomy between poor and rich countries displayed in the movie?** In several instances the movie portrays poor countries as incapable of achieving economic growth and social progress, without the help of the rich countries. In the very beginning, the narrator asks “Why are there too many people in the poor countries?” Implying that too many poor people are the problem, and obviously rich people are not the problem. It then goes on to say that the reason is that “there is no conscious, intelligent control over population”, implying that the reason poor people have “too many” children is their lack of consciousness and intelligence.  
On the other hand, rich countries are portrayed as noble benefactors. “Rich countries have tried to help”, the movie says, and then goes on to explain how the poor countries have misused the help. Later it also says that “poor countries cannot invest more, only the rich countries can help”, implying that poor countries are incapable of helping themselves and that they can only be helped by accepting the population control methods that rich countries bring to them.  
Obviously, this kind of thinking is radically incorrect and also classist since it implies that only the rich class is capable and intelligent, and the poor class is quite the opposite.
- 3. How is human procreation presented in the video? Does the portrayal respect the dignity of persons from other countries or does it offensively characterise?** One of the first scenes in the movies portrays human procreation almost as rape and thus creates a grotesque and offensive picture that distorts the idea of human procreation in other parts of the world. It offensively characterises procreation in foreign countries, describing “the production of people” as if foreign babies are objects being produced too rapidly. In the later part, the narrator uses phrases such as “they keep on multiplying” and “babies keep on coming”, which is the terminology more appropriate for describing animals and not human persons. The tone is intended to instill fear of the population in developing countries, broadcast for a North American audience.

All these are clear examples of treating people as objects and violating human dignity. Ideas have consequences and our idea of a person or certain groups of persons as ‘problems’, ‘mouths to feed’, ‘breeders’ or ‘dangerous’, leads to inexcusable comparisons of children to cancer, as stated by Paul Ehrlich in *The Population Bomb*: “We can no longer afford merely to treat the symptoms of the cancer of population growth; the cancer itself must be cut out.”

**Step 4:** To determine whether an artwork is used for propagandistic purposes, one should consider what *message* the artwork communicates and whether it respects human dignity. In the two previous examples, art and creativity were used to promote Malthusian theories about overpopulation. Malthusian theories have led to coercive population control policies which disrespect human dignity. Both videos use creative cartoon-making skills and techniques to convince the audience that new people are a burden. Of course, one should not necessarily assume that people who made these videos had bad intentions. Still, one can say that the videos are propagandistic. However, human creativity can also be harnessed as a solution to the world’s challenges. In his book, *The Ultimate Resource*, Julian Simon demonstrates that humans innovate their way out of scarcity, through greater efficiency, increased supply, or the development of substitutes. In other words, human creativity is the ultimate resource that makes other resources more plentiful.

To learn more about this, divide the students into groups and ask them to read the text: [Humanity’s Creativity in Action](#) and discuss the associated questions. After the groups finish discussing, ask them to share their conclusions with the rest of the class. Use the Teacher’s Answer Key provided with the text.

After finishing the discussion, highlight two case studies which show how human creativity serves as a solution for economic growth:

### 1. Hong Kong

The case of Hong Kong demonstrates that it is not the population or population density of a country that determines its success or lack thereof. For example, Hong Kong was extremely crowded in the 1950s, where “[d]ensity was at a rate of two thousand persons to an acre in single-story huts [with] no sanitation,”<sup>56</sup> yet it is now a symbol of economic development and opportunity. William McGurn states that “[t]he lesson Hong Kong teaches is that there is no fixed level of resources, no natural capacity, no predefined limit to what people might do if given the opportunity to exercise the real factors in development: enterprise, creativity, and risk.”<sup>57</sup>

56 Population and the Wealth of Nations by William McGurn, December 1996, in: First Things, available at <https://www.firstthings.com/article/1996/12/004-population-and-the-wealth-of-nations> (last visited Nov 29, 2022).

57 Ibid.

This combination – enterprise, creativity, and risk – is what has caused economists, rather than promoting population decrease policies, to recognize that “in an open economy individuals produce more than they consume.”<sup>58</sup> Economists recognize “the triumph of the human mind when given the freedom to innovate and respond.”<sup>59</sup>

## 2. Japan

Japan is another example of a country that attained very high levels of economic growth and development with a high population density, little arable land, and virtually no natural resources. The emergence of Japan as a global economic powerhouse is largely due to the success of the free market and minimal government intervention in the post-war period. According to economist and former Senior Policy Analyst for the Heritage Foundation, Katsuro Sakoh, the Japanese economy benefits from a high degree of individual freedom that is conducive to the maximization of human capital.<sup>60</sup> The flourishing of the economy in post-war Japan came about as a result of the fact that “[f]or the first time practically any Japanese, regardless of age, class, or family background could venture into business, and succeed if the elements of hard work, imagination, willingness to take risks, and luck were present.”<sup>61</sup> Sakoh notes that although favorable international conditions at the time were important contributors to Japan’s success, it was neither the low prices of raw material imports nor the existence of an open world market for Japanese goods that produced the economic miracle. He emphasizes that the success of Japan’s economy is not the result of any government action or external conditions, but is instead due to the efforts of thousands of private firms that aggressively set about importing raw materials and exporting finished products. Japan’s economy is thus a testament to the power of a well-educated and ambitious workforce that was able to take advantage of the free market to produce tradable goods to sell the world over.<sup>62</sup>

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58 Ibid.

59 Ibid.

60 Japan’s Secret by Katsuro Sakoh, Reason Magazine, 1986, available at <https://reason.com/1986/02/01/japans-secret/> (last visited Dec 1, 2022).

61 Ibid.

62 Ibid.

**Step 5:** Summarize. Recall Julian Simon’s finding that “[t]he most important economic effect of population size and growth is the contribution of additional people to our stock of useful knowledge”. Highlight that human dignity must always be respected and affirmed in art and creative outputs. Reaffirm that human creativity is a powerful and effective resource that can solve the challenges in our world.

**FOLLOW-UP & HOMEWORK**

Ask the students to Fill in [Interim Quiz 1](#) at home and bring it to the next class. Let them know that solving the Interim Quiz will help them in the Final Quiz which will happen during the last class.

## Humanity's Creativity in Action<sup>63</sup>

Julian Simon found that “[t]he most important economic effect of population size and growth is the contribution of additional people to our stock of useful knowledge. And this contribution is great enough in the long run to overcome all the costs of population growth.” When faced with population-related problems, “[w]e will respond to conditions, whether that will involve zoning to prevent overcrowding, or adding people – probably immigrants – where people are needed and wanted. We are a responsive species.” This basic theory – that humans are creators and problem-solvers and respond to challenges with their creativity, rather than continuing to “destroy” – highlights the incredible value of humanity. This human creativity can provide limitless opportunities to eliminate poverty and poverty-induced problems.

Human creativity is evident in many areas, and the pattern is the same: as the population increases, there are short-term negative effects as the existing resources are overtaxed. Then human ingenuity steps in and presents solutions. For example, in the area of food supply, a growing population drives up prices in the short run because of increased scarcity, but these higher prices attract potential entrepreneurs who create new solutions, which then causes prices to decrease. The supply of food has increased, despite Ehrlich's claim that “the world is rapidly running out of food.” This increase resulted from improvements in agricultural knowledge due to research and development and from a better transportation network that can deliver food efficiently and quickly. An increase in population also corresponds to an increase in agricultural output because of an increase in farmed land. The increase in the amount of land that is farmed is people's response to the need for more food as the population grows. This has occurred in Ireland, China, and Burma. The amount of available arable land is ever increasing because people improve poor land, including reclaiming wasteland. This is combined with increasing productivity of food per unit of land, with higher crop yields, resulting in less need for agricultural land.

Furthermore, when the population or the income level of a country grows, there is more demand for the invention and development of capital goods, such as machinery, tools, and factories. While demand increases due to a larger population, so does supply, because there are more potential inventors and developers of the needed capital goods. Since people need tools to create other goods, the introduction of capital goods facilitates the creation and provision of goods and services to the population.

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<sup>63</sup> Sustainable Development White Paper by World Youth Alliance, available at [https://www.wya.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Sustainable\\_Development\\_White\\_Paper.pdf](https://www.wya.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Sustainable_Development_White_Paper.pdf) (last visited Nov 23, 2022).



An increasing population also requires improved transportation infrastructure and networks, and it makes investment in transportation more cost-effective. When the population grows, the transportation system is overtaxed, causing problems in the short term. However, responding to these conditions, businesses, the government, and private citizens invest in and create new roads and facilities. While this is expensive, it ultimately leads to more economic growth and facilitates communications; transportation is critical to any economy because it carries products, people, and messages. For instance, an effect of improved transportation is a decrease in disease and famine since people have easier and cheaper access to goods. On the other hand, where the population is sparse, good transportation is not necessarily economical and thus transportation is consistently poorer in those locations.

**QUESTIONS FOR A DISCUSSION:**

According to Simon, how does population growth affect our stock of useful knowledge? Explain.

What are the short-term negative effects of population growth? What happens in the long-term and how is it connected to creativity?

What happens in the long-term with the invention of capital goods, such as machinery, tools and factories?

What happens with transportation as a population grows?

**Answer Key for the teacher****1. According to Simon, how does population growth affect our stock of useful knowledge? Explain.**

“Julian Simon found that ‘[t]he most important economic effect of population size and growth is the contribution of additional people to our stock of useful knowledge. And this contribution is great enough in the long run to overcome all the costs of population growth.’ When faced with population-related problems, ‘[w]e will respond to conditions, whether that will involve zoning to prevent overcrowding, or adding people – probably immigrants – where people are needed and wanted. We are a responsive species.’ This basic theory – that humans are creators and problem-solvers and respond to challenges with their creativity, rather than continuing to ‘destroy’ – highlights the incredible value of humanity. This human creativity can provide limitless opportunities to eliminate poverty and poverty-induced problems.”

**2. What are the short-term negative effects of population growth? What happens in the long-term and how is it connected to creativity? Simon discusses the short-term and long-term effects of population growth in an effort to reveal how human creativity generates solutions to some of the initial challenges that occur due to the growth of a population.**

“Human creativity is evident in many areas, and the pattern is the same: as the population increases, there are short-term negative effects as the existing resources are overtaxed. Then human ingenuity steps in and presents solutions. For example, in the area of food supply, a growing population drives up prices in the short run because of increased scarcity, but these higher prices attract potential entrepreneurs who create new solutions, which then causes prices to decrease. The supply of food has increased, despite Ehrlich’s claim that ‘the world is rapidly running out of food’. This increase resulted from improvements in agricultural knowledge due to research and development and from a better transportation network that can deliver food efficiently and quickly. An increase in population also corresponds to an increase in agricultural output because of an increase in farmed land. The increase in the amount of land that is farmed is people’s response to the need for more food as the population grows. This has occurred in Ireland, China, and Burma. The amount of available arable land is ever increasing because people improve poor land, including reclaiming wasteland. This is combined with increasing productivity of food per unit of land, with higher crop yields, resulting in less need for agricultural land.”

**3. What happens in the long-term with the invention of capital goods, such as machinery, tools and factories? Simon discusses long-term effects of population growth at length, saying:**

“When the population or the income level of a country grows, there is more demand for the invention and development of capital goods, such as machinery, tools, and factories. While demand increases due to a larger population, so does supply, because there are more potential inventors and developers of the needed capital goods. Since people need tools to create other goods, the introduction of capital goods facilitates the creation and provision of goods and services to the population.”

**4. What happens with transportation as a population grows?** Simon discusses the effects on transportation as a population grows, arguing:

“An increasing population also requires improved transportation infrastructure and networks, and it makes investment in transportation more cost-effective. When the population grows, the transportation system is overtaxed, causing problems in the short term. However, responding to these conditions, businesses, the government, and private citizens invest in and create new roads and facilities. While this is expensive, it ultimately leads to more economic growth and facilitates communications; transportation is critical to any economy because it carries products, people, and messages. For instance, an effect of improved transportation is a decrease in disease and famine since people have easier and cheaper access to goods. On the other hand, where the population is sparse, good transportation is not necessarily economical and thus transportation is consistently poorer in those locations.”

## Interim Quiz 1

**A. True/false questions**

1. T/F The Preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights says that human rights grant human dignity.
2. T/F If we reduce the number of people on earth, the wealth per person will increase.
3. T/F Our emotions are sometimes wrong, that is, not in accordance with reality.
4. T/F Skewed male-female ratio in some countries is a result of population control policies coupled with social preference for boys.
5. T/F Disney 1968 Family Planning video shows how art can be used for propagandistic purposes.
6. T/F Saying that cheating is wrong is just your opinion.

**B. Essay questions**

7. Is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights a Western construct? Explain.

**C. For each answer, make a correct question.**

*For example, if the answer is "The first letter of the alphabet", the question is "What is the letter A?". Or, if the answer is "A paste or gel used in conjunction with a toothbrush to help clean and maintain the aesthetics and health of teeth", the correct question is "What is toothpaste?"*

8. The policies which aim to alleviate poverty and achieve development by reducing the number of poor people instead of reducing poverty.
9. The bet whether the prices of the five selected metals would decrease or increase by the end of 1980's.
10. That which exists or is true regardless of what people think or feel about it.
11. Having information and education needed to make truly free and responsible decisions.

12. The human power to use our imagination and ideas to shape the world.

**D. Multiple choice questions**

13. Which one is correct:
- a) Human rights grant human dignity.
  - b) Human rights are a Western invention.
  - c) Human dignity is a Western construct.
  - d) Human dignity is the foundation of human rights.
14. Malthusian theories claim that:
- a) Number of people has the tendency to rise beyond the means of subsistence.
  - b) Efficiency in food production increases faster than population.
  - c) There is no correlation between poverty and population growth.
  - d) People are inventors and problem-solvers.
15. Which of the following statements are subjective:
- a)  $2 + 3 = 5$
  - b) All persons are equal in dignity
  - c) It is morally wrong to intentionally hurt an innocent person.
  - d) All conservatives are so narrow-minded.
16. What are some population control policies which violate human rights:
- a) Forced sterilization
  - b) Fertility Education
  - c) Abortion without consent
  - d) Ultrasound
17. The growth of population:
- a) Increases our stock of useful knowledge.
  - b) Brings short term negative effects.
  - c) Inevitably leads to mass starvation.
  - d) Requires improved transportation infrastructure and networks, and it makes investment in transportation more cost-effective.
18. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted in:
- a) 1938
  - b) 1946
  - c) 1948
  - d) 1952
19. Which of the following is among the seven forms of capital essential to the achievement of prosperity:
- a) Financial resources of a nation
  - b) Human capital
  - c) Gambling
  - d) Having rich benefactors

20. Which of the following statements is objectively right:
- a) Tigers are really big.
  - b) My hair looks ugly.
  - c) We should not cheat on tests.
  - d) People can have different opinions, but this does not mean they are all equally true.
21. Coercion in population control can arise through:
- a) Forced procedures
  - b) Psychological pressure
  - c) Economic pressure
  - d) Informed consent
22. Which of the following countries shows that economic growth can go hand in hand with population growth:
- a) Cambodia
  - b) Vietnam
  - c) Hong Kong
  - d) Japan

**Interim Quiz 1 – Answer Key for the teacher**

1. F – it says that human dignity is the basis for human rights.
2. F – this does not necessarily follow. This theory disregards the creative power of people to come up with new inventions and more efficient ways of producing things.
3. T
4. T
5. T
6. F – it is objectively so.
7. The UDHR is not a Western construct since participation by developing countries in the framing of the Declaration was important. At the U.N.'s founding conference, it was chiefly the smaller or less-developed nations who were responsible for the prominent position of human rights in the U.N. Charter. Some most prominent drafters not only contributed significant insights from their own culture, but each possessed an exceptional ability to understand other cultures, and to "translate" concepts from one frame of reference to another. The Declaration itself was based on extensive comparative study... Among the fifty-eight Member States which reviewed the near-final draft, there was even greater cultural and ideological diversity, including six members from Asia, four from Africa, plus the large Latin American contingent. Six of the "European" members belonged to the communist bloc; Islamic culture was strong in eleven; and four had large Buddhist populations. Of those nations which were not represented in drafting, most new nations adopted constitutions resembling the UDHR as soon as they gained independence. In 1993, virtually all countries in the world participated in the adoption of the Vienna Human Rights Declaration which reaffirmed the UDHR. Finally, the UNESCO group discovered that a few basic practical concepts of humane conduct elaborated in the UDHR were so widely shared that they "may be viewed as implicit in man's nature as a member of society."
8. What are population control policies?
9. What is Simon-Ehrlich wager?
10. What is "objective"?
11. What is informed consent?
12. What is creativity?
13. d
14. a
15. d
16. a and c
17. a, b and d

18. c
19. a and b
20. c and d
21. a, b and c
22. c and d