

The Paper Bag Game

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A quarter of the world's population live in severe poverty. Many work long hours in poor conditions just to earn enough to stay alive, often surviving on less than £1.30 per day. With this money they have to pay for everything – food, clothes, somewhere to live, school and medicines when they get sick.

Many workers have no employer or regular wage. Instead they work as street vendors: shining shoes, selling newspapers or recycling waste materials. In the Indian city of Kolkata, some people earn a living making paper bags out of recycled waste paper – such as old newspapers – and selling them to shopkeepers.

The object of the Paper Bag Game is to show how people work so hard, yet earn so little. Using real cost-of-living prices and wages, players can get an idea of how they would manage if they had to survive making and selling paper bags.

Summary of the game

- Participants form 'family' groups and imagine they are paper bag makers on the streets of Kolkata.
- Each group earns a living making paper bags from old newspapers. During the session, you will distribute chance cards among the groups, representing unexpected changes in the market, which affect their income.
- When they have finished making bags, give each group a shopping list of all the essential daily items they need to buy, and ask them to prioritise them.
- Each group needs to work out how much they earned and calculate whether they can afford all the essentials on the list.
- After the game, ask the groups how they felt during the game, and what they have learned about working together, the real-life conditions for paper bag makers in Kolkata and the economic systems that keep people poor.

Who can play

The Paper Bag Game is designed for players aged nine and older. It can be played by six or more players (split into groups) and adapted to suit any age group. It is suitable for use with a wide range of abilities and supports several school subject areas – see www.christianaid.org.uk/learn for curriculum links.

When to play

The Paper Bag Game provides a good introduction to issues of poverty, unfairness and inequality. It can be used at the beginning of a series of lessons, or at workshops or conferences to get people thinking about poverty and what they can do about it. It can also be used as a fun way to begin or end awareness-raising sessions at youth, fundraising or campaign events.

Aims of the game

- To reveal some of the pressures that force children into work.
- To understand the pressures of trying to survive in an economy with massive unemployment and no social security.
- To question our use of the world's resources.
- To look at and debate the ways in which work is organised and the economic systems that exploit vulnerable communities.

The Paper Bag Game

You will need:

Time

- At least 45 minutes

Space and furniture

- A room large enough to accommodate the number of groups taking part (a minimum of two)
- Plenty of floor or table space for each group

People

- More than six participants, split into equal 'family' groups
- Two organisers – one to lead the game, and one to act as shopkeeper, paying groups for the bags they make

Equipment

- Lots of newspaper, cut into half-tabloid sheet size. Prepare this for younger children; leave older ones to cut up their own paper during the game. Make sure there is enough newspaper to replenish groups as they run out
- A pot of wallpaper paste for each group. If making a mess is a problem, use a glue stick, though this is less authentic in style
- Sample paper bags
- 50 washers/buttons/curtain rings – each representing one rupee
- One photocopy for each group of:
 - *How to make a paper bag*
 - *Family shopping list*
 - *Will you survive?* maths sheet
- One set of chance cards (photocopy and cut out from card 2b), for the leader to give out during the game
- Damp cloths for wiping up at the end
- ICT option – download the Paper Bag Game PowerPoint presentation from www.christianaid.org.uk/learn for step-by-step slides to use with the game