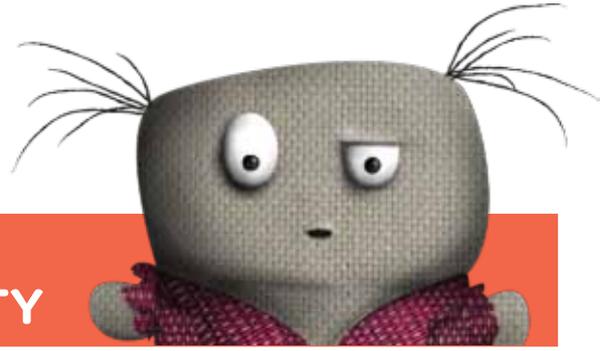


**HANDOUT 1:
THE WEALTHIEST IN SOCIETY**



**THE
WEALTHIEST
10%
IN IRELAND**



ACTIVITY: INCOME DISTRIBUTION EXERCISE

Instructions for conducting this lesson:

- ✚ Take 10 chairs and line them up across the room (optional to play with music).
- ✚ Ask for 10 volunteers among the students.
- ✚ Each chair represents 10% of wealth and each volunteer represents 10% of the population.
- ✚ One student will represent 10% of the wealthiest in society and should hold Handout 1.

Begin the exercise:

Get each volunteer to sit on a chair each.

Ask how each feels? Is it comfortable? Are they happy? How do they feel about the other students?

Explain to the class: In a fair and equitable society each person would get to sit on a chair for themselves. This represents each 10% of the population owning 10% of all the wealth.

Ask them: What do they think this might be like? What would society be like if the wealth was shared out evenly? Why do they think that? How different do they think it is to how it is now? How do they think it actually is?

Now ask them to move away from the chairs.

Ask the class: What percentage of national income do they think the top 10% of Irish society owns (get figures for this for most recent year)?

Based on the most recent figure, the students should be told what chairs to occupy. For instance, the wealthiest 10% own 60% of income then the student holding the A4 Card should take up six seats with the remaining nine students sharing the remaining four seats.

Ask students: How do you feel about this situation? Is it comfortable? Who would you like to push off from the seats in order to give you more room? (NOTE: If some students decide to sit on the floor,

they could represent the homeless and those who are unemployed.)

Ask students: What are your feelings toward the student with the most chairs? Angry? Envious? Do they need them all? Do you think they are making good use of them? Do they think this is fair? Where are your strongest feelings directed? What would make this fairer?

Ask each student to write down how they would like to see this scene change? Discuss the student's answers.

Based on the figures for the earnings of the top one per cent, ask students to rearrange the seating. For instance, if the top 1% owns 30% of the income then the student representing the top 10% should use an arm across three chairs.

Now write on the board:

The wealthiest 1% owns more wealth than the bottom 95% combined. (NOTE: please ensure these figures are up to date and can be found at www.cso.ie)

Questions for volunteers:

How did each feel in their respective position? Were they happy? Comfortable? Explain.

How are things at the bottom? Did anyone push or feel like pushing someone off?

Is the person at the top using the chairs well?

For the person furthest away from the person on the most chairs, can they see that student (this represents the bottom earners in society who sometimes can't see those with the most wealth)?

Who doesn't have a seat? Who do you think you represent? (NOTE: these students could represent the homeless, marginalized.) What do you think of your position?

Speak to those sharing chairs and suggest that it might be their own fault that they are there. Perhaps if they worked harder and stopped relying on welfare then they might get a chair of their own. What is their reaction? What do they say back? Is this right?

ACTIVITY: INCOME DISTRIBUTION EXERCISE (CONTINUED)

Continue the discussion with students by posing the following questions:

Do you think the wealthy have it easier in society?
Do the rules of society favour one group over another (wealthy can reinvest their asset income, money can provide more opportunities)?

Is it easier to make money, if you have money? Why is that do you think? Is it fair?

What do you think about the concentration of wealth in the hands of the minority?

(NOTE: During the chairs exercise watch the interaction between those sharing chairs. Do they fight with each other to gain space on a chair, direct their anger to the individual with more chairs or do they try to push people off chairs? Do they conform to your rules by doing as they are told and keeping to their 'original position'? Bring the behaviour to the attention of the students and liken it to the real world.)

Now highlight to students some of the behaviours that stood out and explain that sometimes in society we direct our anger towards those who are closer to us rather than those who have more of the wealth. Why do they think this is? Are those people invisible to us and so avoid these behaviours?

The reality for society is that the majority of people tend to have to battle for what is left to create more space for themselves.

Close of exercise discussion:

Discuss the "fighting amongst the 90%". What examples do you see of this? Who might we direct our anger towards (look for answers such as migrant workers, people on benefit, minority groups such as travelers)? Why do we focus on these people and not to those who hold the most wealth?

What could or should be done about this?