

Is Fair Trade *Fair*?



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Supporting Questions

1. What is fair trade?
2. If fair trade is so unique, what is free trade?
3. What are the costs and benefits of fair trade?

9-12th Grade Economics Inquiry

Is Fair Trade <i>Fair</i> ?	
Arkansas Standards for Social Studies	GE.7.E.2 Explain ways in which current trends in globalization affect economic growth, labor markets, rights of individuals, the environment, technological advancement, and resource and income distribution in different nations.
Staging the Question	Read How fair trade went from a crazy coffee shop to a global sustainability trend and discuss how fair trade become an economic phenomenon noting whether there are free trade trends in the community.

Supporting Question 1	Supporting Question 2	Supporting Question 3
Understand	Understand	Assess
What is fair trade?	If fair trade is unique, then what is free trade?	What are the costs and benefits of fair trade?
Formative Performance Task	Formative Performance Task	Formative Performance Task
Write a definition of free trade including the major ideas that constitute free trade.	Create a T-chart that compares and contrasts free trade and fair trade.	Participate in a Socratic Circle examining the costs and benefits of fair trade.
Featured Sources	Featured Sources	Featured Sources
<p>Source A: Fair Trade Association article: Fair Trade, Free Trade: Similar in Name Only</p> <p>Source B: World Fair Trade Organization: Ten Principles of Fair Trade</p> <p>Source C: Center for Global Development article: Fair trade sales in the United States Graph</p>	<p>Source A: Birdstock Coffee Infographic: Free Trade vs. Fair Trade Infographic</p> <p>Source B: Free Trade Organization article: Fair Trade Free Trade: Similar in Name Only</p>	<p>Source A: Center for Global Development article: Is My Fair Trade Coffee Really Fair? Trends and Challenges in Fair Trade Certification</p> <p>Source B: CQ Researcher article: Fair Trade Labeling</p> <p>Source C: Forbes article: Surprise! Fairtrade Doesn't Benefit The Poor Peasants</p> <p>Source D: Stanford Social Innovation Review article: The Problem with Fair Trade Coffee</p>

Summative Performance Task	ARGUMENT Is Fair Trade Fair? Construct an argument (e.g., detailed outline, poster, essay) that discusses the compelling question using specific claims and relevant evidence from disciplinary sources while acknowledging competing views.
Taking Informed Action	ACT Write a letter to a manufacturer to request they implement some of the fair trade tenets in their trade policies.

*Featured sources are suggested and links are provided. It may be that these links are broken and we apologize in advance for the inconvenience.

Overview

Inquiry Description

This inquiry leads students through an investigation of fair trade. By investigating the compelling question “Is Fair Trade Fair?” students evaluate the rise of fair trade as it relates to several specialty industries; such as the coffee industry. The formative performance tasks build on knowledge and skills through the course of the inquiry and helps students obtain a foundational understanding of fair trade. Students also examine differences between fair and free trade, and finally analyze the costs of benefits of free trade. Students create an evidence-based argument about the overall fairness of fair trade.

This inquiry highlights the following standard:

- **D2.His.5.9-12** - Analyze how historical contexts shaped and continue to shape people’s perspectives.

It is important to note that this inquiry requires prerequisite knowledge of historical events and ideas. Thus, students should have already studied the main concepts around trade, and general trade policies of the United States.

Note: This inquiry is expected to take 6 40-minute class periods. The inquiry time frame could expand if teachers think their students need additional instructional experiences (i.e., supporting questions, formative performance tasks, and featured sources). Teachers are encouraged to adapt the inquiries in order to meet the needs and interests of their particular students. Resources can also be modified as necessary to meet individualized education programs (IEPs) or Section 504 Plans for students with disabilities.

Structure of the Inquiry

In addressing the compelling question “Is Fair Trade Fair?” students work through a series of supporting questions, formative performance tasks, and featured sources in order to construct an argument supported by evidence while acknowledging competing perspectives.

Staging the Compelling Question

Students read the attached article, [How Fair Trade Went From a Crazy Coffee Concept to a Global Sustainability Trend](#), to begin the discussion of fair trade. Some students may have knowledge of fair trade from visiting their local coffee shops.

Supporting Question 1

The first supporting question—“What is fair trade?”—has students read the various sources about fair trade. The formative performance task asks students to write a definition of free trade including the major ideas that constitute free trade. The featured sources for this question give students a foundational understanding of the purpose and mission of the fair trade movement. Featured Source A is “Fair Trade, Free Trade: Similar in Name Only. This Fair Trade produced document defines the major tenets of the free trade movement. Featured Source B, “Ten Principles of Fair Trade”, delineates the guiding principles that the World Free Trade Organization prescribes to its farmers. Featured Source C is a graph produced by the Fair Trade Almanac. This graph illustrates the rise of fair trade within the United States, and depicts the goods that are traded.

Featured Sources:

Source A: Fair Trade Association article: [Fair Trade, Free Trade: Similar in Name Only](#)

Source B: World Fair Trade Organization: [Ten Principles of Fair Trade](#)

Source C: Center for Global Development article: [Fair trade sales in the United States Graph](#)

Supporting Question 2

For the second supporting question—“If fair trade is unique, then what is free trade?”—students will read the various sources comparing fair trade and free trade. In addition to the resources from the previous supporting question, the featured sources provide students with additional materials that allow them to create a T-Chart contrasting fair trade and free trade. Featured Source A is an infographic detailing the differences of fair trade and direct trade. Featured Source B is an article that contrasts the primary differences between free trade and fair trade.

Featured Sources:

Source A: Birdstock Coffee Infographic: [Free Trade vs. Fair Trade Infographic](#)

Source B: Free Trade Organization article: [Fair Trade Free Trade; Similar in Name Only](#)

Supporting Question 3

The third supporting question—“What are the costs and benefits of free trade?”—asks students to analyze the sources that describe the costs and benefits of free trade and then discuss their findings in a Socratic Seminar. In addition to the previous featured sources, the sources for this task allow students to examine how fair trade claims to help farmers and workers in developing countries. This is contrasted by additional sources that suggest that fair trade is not living up to all of its claims. Featured Source A is an article from the Center for Global Development. This article speaks to the requirements of fair trade and the underlying challenges of fair trade claims. Featured Source B is an article that contains information regarding the challenges of Fair Trade Labeling and the issues small farmers face in developing countries. This article also contains valuable maps and graphs to aid in student understanding. Featured Source C is an article that is based on research conducted in Fair Trade countries. The findings suggest that the assertions made by Fair Trade advocates are not correct, and few farmers are benefitting.

Similarly, featured Source D also discusses the lack of sufficient data in showing a reduction in poverty for farmers aligning with the fair trade movement.

Featured Sources:

Source A: Center for Global Development article: [Is My Fair Trade Coffee Really Fair? Trends and Challenges in Fair Trade Certification](#)

Source B: CQ Researcher article: [Fair Trade Labeling](#)

Source C: The Guardian article: [Harsh truths are necessary if Fairtrade is to change the lives of the very poor](#)

Source D: Stanford Social Innovation Review article: [The Problem with Fair Trade Coffee](#)

Summative Performance Task

At this point in the inquiry, students have examined documents that addressed the fundamental aspects of fair trade and how it differed from free trade. They have also examined documents that compared the costs and benefits of free trade.

Students should be expected to demonstrate the breadth of their understandings and their abilities to use evidence from multiple sources to support their claims. In this task, students construct an evidence-based argument using multiple sources to answer the compelling question “Is Fair Trade Fair?” It is important to note that students’ arguments could take a variety of forms, including a detailed outline, poster, or essay.

Students’ arguments will likely vary, but could include any of the following:

- *Fair trade is fair because it allows for farmers in developing countries to receive more profit from their product since the middle man has been reduced.*
- *Fair trade is not fair because consumers in the United States often pay more for the product, and there is some evidence that the farmers in the fair trade system are not paid much more than farmers involved in free trade.*
- *It is hard to say if fair trade is completely fair or unfair. While there is some evidence that suggests that more ethical food production and trading is occurring, there is not wide spread agreement that farmers are significantly better off because of fair trade.*

Students have the opportunity to Take Informed Action to draw on their understandings of fair trade and free trade explored during the inquiry. *Understanding* and *Assessing* the issue is embedded into the fabric of the inquiry. To *act*, students could write to their favorite manufacturers to determine if they adhere to fair trade policies.