

Play the Graham Cracker Game!

This simulation game gives participants a feel for world inequity, both in terms of space and the distribution of world resources. The game is fun to play in a large group of any make-up. You can use it in older children's Sunday School classes, adult Sunday School classes, youth groups, and inter-generational groups. There should be at least 15 people in the group. It takes about an hour to play but could take longer depending on how involved the post-game discussion gets.

Space Preparation:

(This will take about 20 minutes.)

Before the class begins, lay out the game area. You can do this by making chalk lines or using tape or string to mark out the continents of North America, Latin America, Europe, Africa and Asia. Even though Japan is part of Asia, it should have its own space since its GNP is so much greater than the rest of Asia. (Oceania and Antarctica are not included because their population is so small that they would be represented by less than one person.) The outlines do not have to resemble the real outlines of the continents at all, but they should be proportional in size. Asia should be the biggest by a small bit, with Africa only slightly smaller and North America and Europe slightly smaller than Africa. Latin America should be the smallest, about $\frac{1}{2}$ the size of Asia. Japan should be a little circle just big enough for one person to stand on beside Asia. To decide how big to make your continents, consider how many people will be playing the game and consult the chart below for how many people will belong in Asia. Draw Asia so that the people will just fit, but will feel crowded. Then draw the other continents to Asia's scale.



Number of people who “live” on each continent, depending on the size of the group playing

# OF PEOPLE PLAYING	# IN AFRICA	# IN LATIN AMERICA	# IN JAPAN	# IN OTHER ASIA	# IN NORTH AMERICA	# IN EUROPE
15	2	1	1	8	1	2
16	2	1	1	9	1	2
17	2	2	1	9	1	2
18	2	2	1	10	1	2
19	2	2	1	11	1	2
20	3	2	1	11	1	2
21	3	2	1	12	1	2
22	3	2	1	12	1	3
23	3	2	1	13	1	3
24	3	2	1	14	1	3
25	4	2	1	14	1	3
26	4	2	1	15	1	3
27	4	2	1	16	1	3
28	4	2	1	16	1	4
29	4	2	1	17	1	4
30	4	3	1	17	1	4

To quickly decide who lives where, make slips of paper in advance with the names of the continents on them. As the group assembles and you know how many people will be playing, put the appropriate number of slips for each continent in a container, mix them up, and then have people draw out a slip to decide which continent they “live” on.

Once the participants are standing on their assigned continent, it is time to distribute the crackers. You should have between 30 and 60 graham crackers available (twice as many crackers as there are participants) and distribute them according to the table:

# OF CRACKERS	AFRICA	LATIN AMERICA	JAPAN	OTHER ASIA	NORTH AMERICA	EUROPE
30	1	2	4	4	10	9
40	1	3	5	6	13	13
50	1	3	7	7	16	16
60	2	4	8	8	19	19

(Of course, this does not take into account the fact that there is often much disparity of wealth within a region or country. However, the numbers of people playing the game would have to be very large in order to show this.)

Now give people a few minutes to look around and see what others have and don’t have. Then you can begin the discussion:



Discussion

Facilitator: *What is the most obvious thing that you notice about the distribution of the wealth (graham crackers) in the world?*

Obvious answer: It's not fair!

Facilitator: *How do you feel about the place where you have randomly been placed in the world?*

Go around the room and let people in different areas tell how they feel. This could range from "angry" to "sad" to "happy" to "embarrassed".

Facilitator: *What are some ideas to fix this unfair situation?*

Some common ideas are:

1. People can move from an area that doesn't have enough crackers to another area that has an over abundance.
2. People from "rich" areas should share their crackers with those in "poor" areas.

Facilitator: *Okay, let's try one of these ideas out. If you want to, you can move. Give people a chance to move around and then discuss the result.*

Some possible questions to pose are:

- How do the people who moved feel about their situation now?
- How do the people whose land received the new immigrants feel?
- How would things be different in real life? What are the pros and cons of people moving from a poor country to a richer one?

Facilitator: *Now, let's try another solution.*

Everyone go back to your original place and this time, anyone who wants to can donate some of your wealth (crackers) to anyone else. You don't have to donate if you don't want to, but if you do donate, you will get your name written on the chalk board as "donors".

Give people a chance to make their "donations" and then ask who donated and write their names on the chalkboard.

Some possible questions to pose are:

- How do the donors feel about making their donation?
- What was your motivation for making a donation?
Doing the right thing? Guilt? Recognition?
- How do the recipients feel about what they have received?
- How would things be different in real life? (Pick out a particularly generous donor and say: You gave away ½ of your wealth. Would you really be able to do that in real life?)
What are the pros and cons of trying to redistribute wealth voluntarily?

If the group is really into it, you can continue on and try out other solutions people may come up with.

After the game is over and everything is cleaned up, it would be good if the group could remain together for an informal time, such as a simple meal together, so that informal discussions could continue.

References:

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