

Ten Chairs of Global Inequality



1. You need 10 persons to participate in this simulation. Ask them to line up at the front of the room, seated in 10 chairs facing the rest of the group, if there are more persons present.
2. Explain that each chair represents 10% of the wealth in the world and each person represents 10% of the people in the world. So, when one person is in each chair the wealth is shared equally.
3. Explain that wealth is what you own:
 - Your toys—child and adult-types
 - Your TV, Walkman, iPod, computer
 - Your clothes
 - The food in your cupboards
 - Your family's apartment or house and all the furniture in it
 - Your family's car or cars
 - Your cash, bank accounts, and savings—in piggy banks or banking institutions
4. Explain that wealth like this helps us get other things in life like
 - An education
 - A trip to the doctor when we are sick and the medicine we need to get well
 - Trips to see relatives far away
 - Vacations
 - And other things we need or like to have in our lives.
5. Explain that although there is a lot of wealth in the world, it is not distributed very evenly at all. Some families, even some countries or continents, have a lot and some families and countries or continents don't have enough for everyone to have enough food to eat, good health care, homes that don't leak when it rains and are warm in winter, a chance to go to school, a good job, and more. Now we are going to see how the world's wealth is really divided up.
6. Ask for volunteers. Who wants to be from the richest continents in the world? Choose two persons. Tell them they represent North America, Europe, and Japan.
7. Ask the class to guess how many chairs belong to the richest continents of the world.
8. After they have guessed, apologize to the other 8 persons and tell them they will have to move over because these two persons need more space—in fact, they get eight chairs! Encourage the

- two wealthiest persons to stretch out or even lie down on their chairs and make themselves comfortable.
9. Then tell the remaining eight persons that they represent the rest of the world—the poor continents of Central and South America, Africa, the Middle East, Asia (except for Japan), and Oceania (Australia, New Zealand, etc.). Invite them all to get comfortable on the two chairs that are left for them.
 10. Once they are settled (some on laps, some hanging over the back, some on the floor at others' feet) ask the “poor” members of the class crowded around their two chairs what life is like at their end of the line.
 11. Ask the class if, in real life, they have ever seen or known of people who are very poor. Of people who are crowded into the bottom one or two chairs of the world, and what that's like.
 12. Ask the “wealthy” persons what it feels like to be where they are looking over at those who are all jammed together on just two chairs.
 13. Ask the group if they have every known or seen super rich people—perhaps on TV or when traveling in a big city. What is life like for them? How do they spend their extra money?
 14. If you are dealing with older students (e.g., junior high or high school students or adults), you can ask, "What do those in power tell us about how to justify this huge inequality in the distribution of the world's wealth? (e.g., if you worked harder you could be rich too, if you owned a business that gives others jobs you would deserve to make more for yourself, if your government weren't so corrupt there would be more money for you, etc.)
 15. Next tell them there is another way to get a feel for the difference between the rich and the poor in the world.
 16. Bring out two plates of graham crackers. Tell the group that this represents the wealth of the world also. Give a plate with eight graham crackers in one high stack to the two persons on the eight chairs. Give the plate with only two graham crackers to the two chairs with eight persons.
 17. Ask the two groups to count their crackers. Ask them how many crackers there are for each person
 18. Ask the poor group how it feels to know they don't even have enough crackers for one each when they can see the rich people at the other end with four crackers each.
 19. Ask the rich persons how it feels to have so much when they see the big group with only a little?
 20. Ask the whole group what we could do to make things different—to make more space for those who are crowded? To make sure everyone has at least one cracker apiece?
 21. Tell them that Quakers, from their very beginning, have always believed in equality for all. Ask if they know any things that Quakers are doing in the world right now to try to make things better for those who have very little.
 22. Tell them about Right Sharing as one Quaker program that is working to make a difference in the world. Tell them a little about it and tell them we will be learning more about Right Sharing and its work in the world in the next few weeks. Then read a profile of one recipient of a Right Sharing micro-enterprise loan and how it has changed her life.

Adapted from “Ten Chairs of Inequality: A Classroom Simulation on the Distribution of Wealth” developed by United for a Fair Economy, to dramatize the increasingly unequal distribution of wealth in the United States. Some of the directions and questions above are from Polly Kellogg, an assistant professor in the Human Relations and Multicultural Education Department at St. Cloud State University, St. Cloud, MN. The exercise has been adapted to simulate the disparities in global wealth distribution and has been revised for use with younger students or with an intergenerational group.