

Communicating Economics - Tutorial Plan 3 'Simpsonomics'

Duration: 50 minutes



Tutorial description

The Simpsons is a long-running animated American sitcom about the adventures of a working-class family set in a fictionalised town of Springfield. Many episodes have an economic theme (Hall, 2014). Choose one and watch it ahead of the tutorial (see the [Economic Media Library](#) for examples). Summarise the economic issue in a single PowerPoint slide, and post this to the tutorial discussion on Canvas. Be prepared to give a 90-second presentation of your work, and to constructively criticise your peers.

Further reading

Hall, Joshua (ed.) (2014), *Homer Economicus: The Simpsons and Economics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press).

Learning outcomes

By the end of the tutorial, students should be able to:

1. Identify and explain an economic concept illustrated in popular culture.
2. Communicate an economic idea clearly and concisely using a single presentation slide.
3. Relate economic theory to real-world (or fictional) examples.
4. Critically evaluate peers' presentations and provide constructive feedback.
5. Reflect on the strengths and limitations of using popular media to communicate economics.

Student preparation

Before the tutorial, students should have:

- Watched one episode or clip from *The Simpsons* with an economic theme.
- Prepared a single PowerPoint slide summarising the clip.
- Uploaded their slide to the Canvas discussion board.
- Prepared a 90-second presentation explaining their slide.
- Read the further reading (optional).

Tutorial structure

Time	Activity	Purpose
0-5 min	Introduction and overview	Set expectations
5-10 min	Warm-up discussion	Economics in popular culture
10-40 min	Student presentations and peer feedback	Communication practice
40-45 min	Whole-class discussion	Comparing economic themes
45-50 min	Summary and reflection	Consolidate learning

0-5 minutes

Introduction and overview

- Display the opening slide with the tutorial description and briefly remind students of the exercise.
- Explain that today's tutorial is focusing on how economics is communicated beyond traditional audiences.
- Briefly remind students of the exercise requirements:

- Identify the economic issue
 - Explain the relevant economic theory
 - Assess whether *The Simpsons* portrayal is realistic
 - Communicate this clearly using a single slide
- Emphasise that the aim is clear communication rather than covering every detail.

5-10 minutes

Warm-up discussion

- Ask the class: "Why might economists want to use television programmes or films to explain economics?"
- Invite students to suggest ideas. Possible responses include:
 - Makes abstract ideas memorable
 - Easier to relate theory to everyday life
 - Increases engagement
 - Encourages discussion
 - Simplifies complex concepts
- Follow up by asking: "What are the dangers of using television to teach economics?". Possible answers include:
 - Oversimplification
 - Exaggeration
 - Unrealistic assumptions
 - Satire can be misunderstood
- Conclude: Popular culture can be an excellent teaching tool, but we should always be aware of its limitations.

10-40 minutes

Student presentations and peer feedback

- Aim for approximately 8-10 student presentations, depending on class size, with each student having 90 seconds to present.
- Each presenter is assigned another student as a discussant, who is to provide feedback at the end of the presentation on three aspects:
 1. What worked well in the presentation? For example:
 - Was the economic idea explained clearly and in an accessible way?
 - Was the economic concept correctly identified?
 - Did the presenter justify why the clip illustrated the chosen concept?
 - Was the slide easy to follow?
 - Did the presenter stay focused on communicating their main message?
 2. What could have been improved in the presentation?
 3. Do you agree on whether *The Simpsons* presented a realistic economic scenario?
- **Tutor role:** Chair session, encouraging feedback which is constructive and specific. Following each presentation, the main economic theme should be recorded on the board.

40-45 minutes

Whole-class discussion

- Ask students: "Which economic themes appeared most frequently?"

- Common themes may include:
 - Incentives
 - Market failure
 - Monopoly
 - Public goods
 - Externalities
 - Taxation
 - Behavioural economics
 - Labour markets
 - Asymmetric information
 - Game theory
- Then ask:
 - Why do you think these topics appear so often in *The Simpsons*?
 - Which economic concepts are easiest to illustrate through stories?
- This encourages students to think about how economics shapes everyday life and why these concepts lend themselves to storytelling.

45-50 minutes

Summary and reflection

Finish by highlighting four key messages:

1. Economics is everywhere, even in popular culture. Fiction often provides useful examples for explaining economic ideas.
2. Good communication requires simplification without sacrificing accuracy. The best presentations focus on one central message rather than trying to explain everything.
3. Economic theory helps us interpret familiar situations in new ways. Popular media can illustrate concepts, but we should always evaluate whether the portrayal is realistic.
4. Constructive feedback is an important academic skill. Being able to explain economics clearly, and to improve through feedback, is a core objective of the module.

Finish with a final question:

"What is one thing you learned today about communicating economics that you will use in your next presentation?"

Invite two or three students to respond before ending the session.