

Ship Rekt

In this 60 minute whole class simulation, students roleplay as shipwrecked survivors who must secure essential resources to “survive” a week on a desert island. Using playing cards to represent tools and supplies, learners begin with pure barter, practicing negotiation while encountering common trade barriers such as surplus, scarcity, and the coincidence of wants. A timed “Shell Hunt” then introduces commodity money, as students collect tokens that can be used to simplify exchange. With shells in circulation, the class enters a guided marketplace where students set prices, respond to supply and demand, and experience price discovery. The activity culminates in budgeting and a structured auction or trade round for “treasure” wishlist items, bridging to why money exists.

 ACTIVITY TYPE Simulation · Role-play · Game	 DURATION 60 min	 PARTICIPATION Whole class
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OBJECTIVES

- Students experience barter, the “coincidence of wants,” scarcity, supply/demand, price discovery, budgeting, and auctions.
- Bridge to money: commodity money (shells) and why money helps trade.

MATERIALS

- Playing cards
- “Shells” (physical tokens: paper circles, buttons, craft shells)
- Treasure chest (Small box/enveloppe)
- Gift card (expired or fake \$100 gift card)
- Blank flash cards (or slips of paper)
- Visual aids (See Appendix A & B), Treasure map, Reward stickers — [A · Story visual aides](#) (*nice to have*)
- Timer/phone stopwatch
- Whiteboard or screen
- Marker pen
- Whiteboard/markers, projector, bell/signal for time, music (optional for treasure hunt) (*nice to have*)

PROCEDURE

OPENING

3 minutes

- **Hide** the commodity money (shells) around the classroom before students enter the room
- **Review** vocabulary as a warm-up: Trade, money, price... etc
- **Review** call-back signals and time rules.

Objective In Student’s Words

- Trade objects to survive a week on the desert island.

PRE-ACTIVITY

5 minutes

1. **Narrate** a back-story explaining how students are shipwrecked. Use visual aids if necessary. (*See Appendix A*)

For example...

"You live in a small coastal town and work as a fisherman. One day, you head out to sea with your crew in search of the day's catch. All is calm and the boat gently chugs along a glassy ocean with gulls flying overhead. As you lose sight of the shore and the boat heads into deeper and deeper water, there on the horizon, a storm is brewing. You see dark clouds gathering and heading towards the boat. The captain decides to head to shore and makes a u-turn towards port, but it's too late. The storm is closing in fast and it's chasing the crew faster than the boat can carry them - there's no escape.

Within minutes the ocean's swell is breaking over the bow of the ship. The wind is whirling, there's spray whipping through the air and the boat starts to rock violently from side-to-side. As you look over your shoulder, you see a giant wall of dark clouds heading from the ocean up to the heavens - the storm is coming for you and the crew..."

1. **Ask students** to name objects they would need on the desert island to survive. **Elicit** the four objects chosen for the activity (i.e. a machete, a fishing rod, a tent and matches) and show them to the class using *visual aids*.
2. **Explain** that the *playing cards* will represent the object they need to survive.
3. **Rephrase** the objective and purpose in the student's words.

DAY 1 - BARTER

10 minutes

Setup

1. **Distribute** several cards to each student several cards of the same suit.
 - Student A = Diamonds, Student B = Hearts etc.
1. **Explain** that the suit of the card represents the objects they have found
 - Diamond = Machetes, Hearts = Fishing rods, Clubs - Tents, Spades - matches
1. **Ask** each student what they would do with that object. When they explain how they would use their object, **take a card** from the student and place it on a 'used' pile in the middle of the group.
2. Once each student has used one of their objects, **ask** what they will do with the surplus objects - **elicit** that they will have to trade what they HAVE for what they NEED (See *Appendix B*)

Model

- Teacher demos a simple trade with a student (offer ↔ counteroffer ↔ deal). Write sentence frames on board, if required: "I have _____. I need _____." / "I can trade _____ for _____."

Trade

- Explain the trade grid (See *Appendix B*)
- Students have **5 minutes** to barter what they HAVE for what they NEED.
- When the time is up, use call-back to end.

Checkpoint & Debrief

- Thumbsup : met all needs / almost / not yet
- Discuss: What was easy/hard? Who had too much? Too little? Introduce **scarcity** and **supply & demand**.

Reflection

- Prompt students: "One thing that helped me trade was _____."

DAY 2 - BARTER... again

10 minutes

Setup

1. **Review** the suits of the cards and the objects they represent
 - Diamond = Machetes, Hearts = Fishing rods, Clubs - Tents, Spades - matches
1. Once again, **ask** each student what they would do with their newly acquired object. When they explain how they would use their object, take a card from the student and place it on a 'used' pile in the middle of the group.

2. Once each student has used one of their objects, **ask** what they will do with the surplus objects - **elicit** that they will have to trade once again what they HAVE for what they NEED.

Model

- Teacher demos a simple trade with a student (offer ↔ counteroffer ↔ deal). Write sentence frames on board, if required: “I have _____. I need _____.” / “I can trade _____ for _____.”

Trade

- Explain the trade grid (*Appendix B*)
- Students have **5 minutes** to barter what they HAVE for what they NEED.
- When the time is up, use call-back to end.

Checkpoint & Debrief

- Thumbsup : met all needs / almost / not yet
- **Discuss**: What was easy/hard? Who had too much? Too little?

Mini-Lesson

- Day 2 should be harder than Day 1 of trading.
- Students quickly discover it’s **hard** unless two people want what the other has (**coincidence of wants**).
- Name the problem: “I want A, you have B... trading is stuck.”
- Bridge: “People invented **money** to fix this problem.”

DAY 3 - SCARCITY & EFFORT: “Shell Hunt”

10 minutes

Setup

- If the tokens (shells) haven’t already been hidden around the classroom, take some time to complete this now.
- **Explain**: “Shells are special on this island. They can be used as money. Collect as many as you can.”
- **Establish** rules of respect and safety - no stealing, no pushing etc.

Treasure Hunt

- 5-minute **shell hunt** (hide 2–3 times class size around room/hall; vary difficulty).
- Remember to count how many shells you hide around the room.

Count & Record

- Teams/pairs count shells. Quick bar graph on board (who has many/few).
- Discuss **scarcity** and **effort**.

Mini-Lesson

- Define **commodity money** (a thing people use as money).
- Use *visual aides* to **illustrate** examples of money in the past.
- **Ask**: “Could shells be money here?”

Reflection

- “If shells become money, what might the **price** of items be? Why?”

DAY 4 - COMMODITY MONEY & PRICES: “Shell Market”

10 minutes

Setup

1. **Review** the suits of the cards and the objects they represent

- *Diamond = Machetes, Hearts = Fishing rods, Clubs = Tents, Spades = matches*

1. **Ask** each student what they would do with their newly acquired object. **Listen** to their usage and **discard** a card to the ‘used’ pile.

2. **Elicit** that they will have to trade once again what they HAVE for what they NEED but this time they can also use the commodity money - shells.

Model

- Teacher demos a simple transaction with a student (offer ↔ counteroffer ↔ deal). Write sentence frames on board, if required:
“I have _____. I need _____.” / “I can trade _____ for _____.”
- Emphasise that the students can decide on the price of the items

Trade

- Explain the trade grid (*Appendix B*)
- Students have **5 minutes** to trade what they HAVE for what they NEED.
- When the time is up, use call-back to end.

Checkpoint & Debrief

- Thumbsup : met all needs / almost / not yet
- **Discuss:** *What was easier/harder with money? What prices did you pay? Did you end up with more or less shells? Was this fair?*

DAY 5 - BUDGETS & AUCTIONS: Treasure Chest

15 minutes

Prep

- **Hide** a treasure chest somewhere in the classroom when students are completing the Day 4 trade.

Story Hook

- The stranded crew look around and find some treasure
- Include a \$100 Amazon/Walmart etc. gift card (fake)

Treasure hunt

- Student search the desert island (classroom) for the treasure chest
- Once it has been found, explain the bounty and how it will be used.

Wishlist

- Students can use the giftcard to place one luxury item each on to the wish list.
- Take a pen and paper and list each item requested by the students and write their name next to the item.
- The order is placed and the next day, the items arrive.

DAY 6 - WISHLIST

For this penultimate activity there are two options to carry out:

OPTION 1 – Random distribution and Trade (SIMPLE)

The wishlist items can be randomly distributed to the students. This can be explained through a creative story. For example, there is no landing strip on the island, so the items were airdropped by parachute and strewn across the island. From this point, students can trade the luxury item that they HAVE for the item they WANT. They can use their remaining shells to find what they want.

Trade Prep

- Explain to students, that as when trading the playing cards, they can decide on price and trade what they HAVE for when they NEED.

Trade

- Students have **5 minutes** to trade what they HAVE for what they NEED.
- The objective is to secure the luxury item they requested.
- Shells and other items (playing cards) can be included in trades.

- When the time is up, use call-back to end.

OPTION 2 – Auction (ADVANCED)

- The person who found the gift card shipped the items to their shelter on the island. They now own all the items and can sell them off to the highest bidder.
- The teacher now sells items back via **auction**. Students use their shells to compete in the auction and try and win their luxury item.

Auction Prep (5 min)

- Explain an **English auction** (prices go up; last hand wins). Practice paddle up/down.
- Budget rule: never bid more shells than you have; plan ahead.

Auctions (10 min)

- Auction items one by one to students.
- Students bid on the items using their shells.

Auction Debrief (5 min)

- What is a **budget**? How did prices show **demand**? Was it fair? How could rules change outcomes?

FOLLOW-UP (2 min)

- What items were **expensive**? Why? Where did **supply** feel low? What strategies worked?
- “Money made trading easier because _____.”
- Barter was hard → shells helped (commodity money) → money solves coincidence of wants.
- Bridge to Bitcoin – discuss that Bitcoin is a money that helps people exchange goods and services.
- Discuss some of the differences between Bitcoin and the shells they were using.

DAY 7 - FREEDOM

- Using all of the objects they have, see if they can create a way off the island.
- Ask students to THINK-PAIR-SHARE to find the key ideas.
- As a class, formulate a plan to escape the island and find their way back to safety.

FOLLOW-UP

- Quick write or drawing: “One thing I learned about **trade** or **money**.”
- Gallery walk of price tags & auction results; discuss fairness and markets.
- Optional challenge (older kids): Design a new island money (rules, supply cap, how to prevent cheating).

CLOSE

- Gather all materials
- Verify all playing cards have been returned to ensure equal distribution between all suites for another activity.

NOTES

Classroom management

- Set “Marketplace” boundaries; use a call-back (eg. “Bit, block... BOOM!”).
- Trading rules posted: 1) Be kind, 2) Offer/Counteroffer, 3) No grabbing, 4) Finalize by handshake/high-five, 5) Return to places on call-back.
- If required, assign roles (Banker/Pirate helpers, Market Monitors) to channel energy and support younger learners.

Extensions & Sponge Activities

- **Draw your island store** and price three items in shells.
- **Mental math:** If you have 12 shells and win an auction for 9 shells, what’s left?
- Make a **venn diagram** to show what kids value at home and on the island - are there objects which fall into both?

- **Top 10 Wishlist** - ask students to write a list of the top 10 items they would pack if they were going to a desert island.

Differentiation

- Younger students trade fewer categories (just Food/Water); older students handle more complex needs and dynamic pricing.
- ELL/Accessibility: Provide picture cards; sentence frames for offers; assign peer buddies.
- Safety: Movement is walking only; clear boundaries; timed rounds.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- **B • Trade Table**

<https://cdn.sanity.io/files/vje9ehw2/staging/9795b3d20cb777d64f352b1748de836574c0789b.pdf>