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# How Free Are You?

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Segment Length: 5:45 minutes

## **Lesson Description:**

Are we free? How free? Can freedom be measured? How? This segment looks at the annual Human Freedom Index.

## **Objectives:**

Students will be able to:

- list examples of economic and personal freedom.
- explain the impact of various government rules and regulations on a country's Freedom Index ranking.
- assess the importance to people of freedom and limited government.
- hypothesize about the relation between freedom and migration.

## **Preview Activity and Questions:**

Have students draw a line down the middle of a sheet of paper and put "Free" and "Not Free" headings on the paper. Then, use Think, Pair, Share to have students list features that demonstrate ways in which they are free and ways in which they are not free. After a few minutes, ask the students for examples.

## **Viewing Guide:**

It is recommended that teachers show the video segment twice: once to allow students to view the video and focus on the issues presented, and once to allow them time to complete the viewing guide. After they complete the viewing guide, allow students a few minutes to work in pairs sharing and verifying answers.

## **Answers to Viewing Guide**

1. economies
2. prosper
3. oppressed
4. rights
5. poor
6. getting better

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## Viewing Guide

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Class \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions:** As you watch the video, fill in the blanks with the correct words.

1. The United States used to have one of the freest \_\_\_\_\_ in the world.
2. A good ranking matters, not just because it's good to be free, but because freedom allows people to \_\_\_\_\_.
3. The most \_\_\_\_\_ people in the world are those who live in the countries at the bottom of the freedom ranking.
4. You can lead your life any way you want as long as you respect the equal \_\_\_\_\_ of others.
5. Ireland used to be \_\_\_\_\_, but now it ranks 4th on the Freedom Index.
6. Despite what we hear on the news, over several decades, the world has slowly been \_\_\_\_\_.

**Now, take a few moments to reflect on the video and answer the questions below:**

In the video, there were two categories of freedom discussed: economic freedom and personal freedom.

List some examples of economic freedom:

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List some examples of personal freedom:

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In your opinion, is one category of freedom more important than another or are they equally important? Explain. \_\_\_\_\_

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### **Discussion and Analysis:**

1. What does freedom mean to you? What would you weigh most heavily in judging whether a country is free or not?
2. What affects a country's ranking on the Freedom Index?
3. What are some examples of economic freedom? What are some examples of personal freedom?
4. Is one category of freedom more important than another or are they equally important or equally unimportant? Explain.
5. Will reducing regulations cause a country's Freedom Index ranking to go up or down? What about increasing government spending? What are some other policies that would be likely to earn a lower or higher ranking?
6. How do higher taxes, government spending, and regulation affect individuals' freedom to buy and sell what they want to?
7. John Stossel contrasted starting a business in Hong Kong with starting a business in India. What did he say was the biggest difference? How does that relate to economic freedom?
8. What, if anything, does the contrast between Hong Kong and India tell us about what policies America should follow?
9. How did Ireland improve its economic freedom ranking?
10. Why did Tanja Porcnik move from Slovakia to Austria? In which countries do people prefer to live? What explains the desire of people to emigrate? Explain.
11. What evidence does John Stossel cite to show that freedom leads to prosperity? Do you find this persuasive? Why or why not?
12. What does John Stossel mean by the "dignity of the individual"? How does this idea relate to the concept of freedom? How does it compare with other ideas, such as the view that individuals must sacrifice their own interests for the good of the group?
13. What is the future of America? Do you think we will become more free or less free? Give examples to support your position.

### **Discuss These Lines from the Video:**

1. Prosperity happened because Hong Kong's government puts few obstacles in the way of trying new things, like starting a business.
2. It [the United States] used to be 2, 3, or 4, and then government started to grow. It started to spend more.
3. Second-least free country Venezuela was once the richest country in Latin America. Then socialists promised they'd spread the wealth.

4. What's important in life? Those of us who revere freedom often say it's the dignity of the individual and a chance to live free from coercion.
5. You can lead your life any way you want as long as you respect the equal rights of others.
6. Freedom brings good things to countries that try it.
7. It's too bad that the U.S. is now only 17th in the rankings, but the good news is that we're 17th partly because, in recent years, other countries became more free.
8. Despite what we hear on the news, over several decades, the world has slowly been getting better.

### **Quotes for Discussion:**

None are more hopelessly enslaved than those who falsely believe they are free. – Goethe

A necessitous man is not a free man. – Aristotle

When buying and selling are controlled by legislation, the first things to be bought and sold are legislators. – P.J. O'Rourke

If the government is big enough to give you everything you want, it is big enough to take away everything you have. – Gerald Ford

Progress is precisely that which the rules and regulations did not foresee. – Ludwig von Mises

The knowledge needed to generate prosperity is not contained in a single mind, it is dispersed among many minds. The free society creates the incentives for each individual to utilize his or her own particular bits of knowledge. – William Easterly

The natural progress of things is for liberty to yield and government to gain ground. – Thomas Jefferson

Liberty is liberty, not equality or fairness or justice or human happiness or a quiet conscience. – Isaiah Berlin

In a free society the state does not administer the affairs of men. It administers justice among men who conduct their own affairs. – Walter Lippman

Every time that we try to life a problem from our own shoulders, and shift that problem to the hands of the government, to the same extent we are sacrificing the liberties of our people. – John F. Kennedy

### **Activities:**

1. Research and write a report explaining how Hong Kong or New Zealand became so economically free. (For Hong Kong, it will be helpful to study its history under British control, and its relationship with China since China's government gained sovereignty over

Hong Kong in 1997. For New Zealand, you will want to focus on the country's 1984 economic reforms.)

2. Research Venezuela's recent economic collapse. Then, either write a report or prepare a slideshow explaining the causes and results of their economic struggles. Be sure to cover such questions as: When did Venezuela implement socialism? What socialist policies did it implement? Did socialism cause Venezuela's economic crisis? If so, how? What other factors might have contributed?
3. Working in groups, research and debate the proposition that the United States should try to improve its Human Freedom Index ranking.
4. Research and create a slideshow about what features are included in the personal freedom category and the economic freedom category in the Human Freedom Index, and why those features are important.
5. Using the 2017 Country Profiles <https://object.cato.org/sites/cato.org/files/human-freedom-index-files/2017-hfi-country-profiles-2.pdf> of the Human Freedom Index <https://www.cato.org/human-freedom-index>, and this list of countries by projected gross national product (GDP) <http://statisticstimes.com/economy/countries-by-projected-gdp.php> as resources, complete one or more of the following small-group activities:
  - A) Choose five countries not mentioned in the video. Answer the following questions: How has each country's ranking changed over time? Which countries have improved in both economic and personal freedom? Do any countries rank significantly higher in either economic or personal freedom? If you had to choose one of these countries to live in, which would it be, and why?
  - B) Choose five countries of widely varying freedom index rankings. List each country's ranking along with its projected GDP. Then display your data on a graph, with economic freedom on the x-axis and GDP on the y-axis. What relationship, if any, do you observe between economic freedom and GDP? Does this fit with your expectations based on what you learned in the video? Why/why not?
  - C) Among countries that are all relatively free, near the top of the freedom rankings, do differences in freedom still matter? List the projected GDP for the countries ranked 6-10 on the Freedom Index. Present your data in graphic form. How well does freedom correlate with prosperity among those five countries?
  - D) The Freedom Index breaks economic freedom down into five categories, each with multiple subcategories. Which of these factors do you think are most closely correlated with prosperity? Choose five countries at random, and pick one or more categories or subcategories to focus on. Create a graph showing the correlation of these factors with GDP.
6. The following quotations (A and B) present different views of what freedom means and what kind of economic policies it requires. Write an essay contrasting the ideas below.
  - A) The citizen of the United States who is compelled by law to devote something like 10 percent of his income to the purchase of a particular kind of retirement contract, administered by the government, is being deprived of a corresponding part of his personal

freedom. How strongly this deprivation may be felt and its closeness to the deprivation of religious freedom, which all would regard as "civil" or "political" rather than "economic," were dramatized by an episode involving a group of farmers of the Amish sect. On grounds of principle, this group regarded compulsory federal old age programs as an infringement of their personal individual freedom and refused to pay taxes or accept benefits. As a result, some of their livestock were sold by auction in order to satisfy claims for social security levies.

A citizen of the United States who under the laws of various states is not free to follow the occupation of his own choosing unless he can get a license for it, is likewise being deprived of an essential part of his freedom. So is the man who would like to exchange some of his goods with, say, a Swiss for a watch but is prevented from doing so by a quota. So also is the Californian who was thrown into jail for selling Alka Seltzer at a price below that set by the manufacturer under so-called 'fair trade' laws. So also is the farmer who cannot grow the amount of wheat he wants. And so on. Clearly, economic freedom, in and of itself, is an extremely important part of total freedom....

– Economist Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*, 1962

- B)** This Republic had its beginning...under the protection of certain inalienable political rights—among them the right of free speech, free press, free worship, trial by jury, freedom from unreasonable searches and seizures. They were our rights to life and liberty. As our nation has grown in size and stature, however—as our industrial economy expanded—these political rights proved inadequate to assure us equality in the pursuit of happiness. We have come to a clear realization of the fact that true individual freedom cannot exist without economic security and independence.

We have accepted, so to speak, a second Bill of Rights under which a new basis of security and prosperity can be established for all.... Among these are:

- The right to a useful and remunerative job...
- The right to earn enough to provide adequate food and clothing and recreation;
- The right of every farmer to raise and sell his products at a return which will give him and his family a decent living;
- The right of every businessman, large and small, to trade in an atmosphere of freedom from unfair competition
- The right of every family to a decent home;
- The right to a good education....

– President Franklin Roosevelt, 1944

7. Read the article “Sadly, America's Not the Freest Country in the World” by John Stossel (below), and summarize it or develop a slideshow that summarizes it, using current pictures to help demonstrate the information in the article.
8. Write an essay on one of the following topics:
  - A) What would it be like to live in a country with little or no economic freedom? You might describe a country suffering civil war, or one where armed bandits compete for control of territory, or a country with a government so powerful it controls access to jobs and food, and doesn't recognize private property.
  - B) Would it be possible for a country to have very high levels of personal freedom, but very little economic freedom? Explain your reasoning.

9. Watch “They’ ve Got Tech,” [http://izzit.org/products/detail.php?video=got\\_tech](http://izzit.org/products/detail.php?video=got_tech) about New Zealand’s economic reforms, especially its elimination of farm subsidies. Write an essay relating the ideas to those in the Stossel video about economic freedom and prosperity. How does the policy change described in the izzit video help explain New Zealand’s ranking ahead of the United States on the Freedom Index? (This may require brief research on U.S. agricultural policy).
  
10. Research migration throughout the world. What factors explain why people move? Does this relate to the Freedom Index? What can you conclude about the importance people place on freedom?

# Sadly, America's Not the Freest Country in the World

The U.S. used to come in second or third in rankings, but according to the latest Human Freedom Index it's at 17.

By John Stossel

Is America the world's freest country? Sadly, no.

When researchers first started doing detailed international comparisons, the USA came in second or third. This year, however, we ranked 17th.

The comparison I cite is the newly released Human Freedom Index, compiled by the Fraser and Cato Institutes. They compared economic freedoms such as freedom to trade, amount of regulations and tax levels, plus personal freedoms such as women's rights and religious freedom.

Their new report concludes that the world's freest countries are now:

1. Switzerland.
2. Hong Kong.
3. New Zealand.
4. Ireland.
5. Australia.

"The United States used to have one of the freest economies in the world," Index co-author Ian Vasquez says. "It used to be a two, three or four, and then government started to grow (and) spend more."

Republicans and Democrats, under Presidents Bush and Obama, voted for increases in spending and regulation. Obama tried to make tax increases sound harmless. "Those who are more fortunate are going to have to pay a little bit more."

The result was that we fell farther from the top of the freedom ranking. Switzerland now takes first place. It has comparatively little regulation, low taxes, a free press and personal freedoms such as same-sex marriage.

A good ranking matters, not just because freedom itself is a good thing, but because economic freedom allows people to prosper.

Consider the story of Hong Kong, No. 2 on the overall freedom list (but No. 1 in economic freedom). In just 50 years, people in Hong Kong went from being among the poorest in the world to among the richest.

Prosperity happened because Hong Kong's government puts few obstacles in the way of trying new things. It took me just a few hours to get legal permission to open a business in Hong Kong. In New York, it took months. In India, I didn't even try -- it would have taken years.

That's a reason India stays poor. Bureaucrats have the power to review and reject most any new idea. Fewer new ideas get tried.



The absolute worst places to live are countries that lack both economic and personal freedom.

Those are the places at the bottom of the freedom ranking:

155. Egypt.

156. Yemen.

157. Libya.

158. Venezuela.

159. Syria.

(Totalitarian North Korea wasn't ranked because the researchers couldn't get accurate information.)

Syria ranked so low mostly because of the war. You aren't free if you worry you might be killed.

Second-to-last place Venezuela was once the richest country in Latin America. Then socialists promised to spread the wealth.

The next three: Libya, Yemen, Egypt -- well, the Arab Spring didn't turn out as well as some hoped.

On the top of the list, I wasn't surprised to see New Zealand and Australia. They always do well.

But Ireland? I associate Ireland with poverty. For 150 years after English rulers caused the Potato Famine, Irish people left Ireland to search for a better life.

But Ireland recently changed, says Vasquez.

"They reduced taxes ... spending, reduced regulations. They opened up to trade."

Now people want to live there.

You can read the full freedom rankings on the Cato Institute's and Fraser Institute's websites. If you plan to move or start a business in another country, the Freedom Index is a good guide.

Greece is beautiful, but it ranks 60th, mostly because the country lacks economic freedom. China got richer, but because personal freedom is so limited, China ranks 130th.

How do you summarize a free country? I asked Vasquez.

"You can lead your life any way you want as long as you respect the equal rights of others, he answered. You (decide) what job you want to take, what kinds of things you want to do, who you want to marry, what you want to do on your free time, where you want to live."

I suggested that countries don't regulate your free time, but Vasquez set me straight.

"They do." Some countries, he says, "*regulate everything!*"

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Class \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher \_\_\_\_\_

## How Free Are You? Cloze Activity

**Directions:** Read the entire passage first. Then fill in the blanks with words from the box.

poverty	prosper	lack	fortunate
regulations	religious	obstacles	comparisons
personal	richest	government	regulate

Is America the world's freest country? Sadly, no.

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# ANSWER SHEET FOR CLOZE ACTIVITY

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