
Rich and Poor

Videos:

“Why ONLY Some Can Get RICH - Socialist Professor Richard Wolff”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Q0B0eavHRU> (3:05 minutes)

“The Rich Get Richer and the Poor Get Poorer - David Schmitz”

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BJN_7NAWedQ (5:01 minutes)

Guide:

The questions below will help students achieve a better understanding of the arguments made on either side of a contentious topic. Because these questions often touch upon statements made briefly in the videos, we recommend reading the questions before watching each video.

Students are encouraged to take notes during the videos, and it may be helpful for students to break into groups, each taking responsibility for only a few questions, before coming together for discussion.

Analysis Questions:

1. What are the opposing ideas in these two videos?
2. Should one of the arguments we heard carry more weight than the other? If so, which one? Why?
3. David Schmitz said that the saying “the rich get richer and the poor get poorer” is based on the assumption that society is a “zero sum game.” What does “zero sum game” mean?
4. Richard Wolff compared the capitalist system of employers and employees to the slave system of masters and slaves, and the feudalist system of lords and serfs. Do you think that’s a reasonable comparison? Why/Why not?
5. David Schmitz said that one way to get rich is “by finding ways to play the kind of game where we win by making other players richer, too.” What did he mean by this?
6. Richard Wolff said, “[W]e live in a capitalist system where, by and large, the employers do really well—relatively—and the employees...not so much.” Do you agree with this statement? Why/Why not?
7. David Schmitz said, “Rising inequality is one thing, but the serious worry would be rising poverty.” What is the distinction between rising inequality and rising poverty? Which is more important and why?
8. Richard Wolff questioned whether it was reasonable to try to eliminate the gap between rich and poor while living under an economic system that produces that gap. What did he mean by this?

9. David Schmitz said, “There are places where economic growth over the past 200 years has led to a stage where poverty’s more like only being able to afford one car than only being able to feed one child.” If even the impoverished have a relatively high standard of living, should we be less concerned about inequality? Why/Why not?
10. Richard Wolff’s main point is that due to capitalism, it’s inherently impossible for everyone who wants to be wealthy to achieve that goal. Do you agree? Why/Why not?
11. At the end of the video, David Schmitz pointed out that no matter how you tax rich and poor people, it would result in some form of inequality, and asked, “What would be fair?” What do you think?
12. Did you have an opinion on this topic before watching these videos? If so, what was it? Has your opinion changed? If so, how? What did you learn from these videos that affects your views on this topic?
13. For more on this topic, check out these other Both Sides of the Issue entries:
 - “Debating Capitalism” <https://stosselintheclassroom.org/both-sides-debating-capitalism/>
 - “More on Income Inequality” <https://stosselintheclassroom.org/both-sides-more-on-income-inequality/>
 - “Digging Deeper on Income Inequality” <https://stosselintheclassroom.org/both-sides-digging-deeper-on-income-inequality/>
14. What else would you like to learn about this topic?