

Economic Man vs Humanity: A Puppet Rap Battle



LESSON PLAN | VIDEO | TEACHING TOOL

A playful introduction to the limitations of the model of humanity at the heart of mainstream economics

By the DEAL Team. See the last page for all contributors.

Overview

This lesson is a creative way to look at the limitations of the model of humanity at the heart of mainstream economics - rational economic man, or 'homo economicus'. The lesson centres around the video *Humanity vs Rational Economic Man: A Puppet Rap Battle* and the students are invited to review historical and academic references that underpin the lyrics of the rap. The lesson can be done as one 90 minute lesson or as a pre-class homework and a single 45 minute lesson. There is also the opportunity for further creative projects for students to write and perform their own rap battles.



Educators | Students aged 16+



90 minutes (or 45 lesson with a pre-class assignment)



10 - 40

Lesson Outcomes

- Understand the assumptions behind rational economic man
- Learn about the limitations of this depiction of humanity
- Creatively express their own ideas through rap
-



Projector / screen to show video

Handouts of the lyrics to the rap
Handouts of the references by theme

Timetable



Part 1	The puppet rap battle	15 min
Part 2	Breakout groups	20 min
Part 3	Facilitated discussion	25 min
Part 4	Create your own portrait	30 min
Total		90 min

Background

One of the most dangerous stories at the heart of 20th century economics is the depiction of humanity as rational economic man. In *Doughnut Economics*, Kate decided he needed to be depicted in a portrait so she drew him, standing alone, with money in his hand, ego in his heart, a calculator in his head and nature at his feet. He hates work, he loves luxury and he knows the price of everything.

Now here's the most fascinating (and unnerving) thing; the more that economics students learn about him – from Year 1 to Year 2 to Year 3 of their studies at university – the more they say they value traits such as self-interest and competition over traits such as altruism and collaboration.

The implication? Who we tell ourselves we are shapes who we become.

Many economics teachers around the world – especially those in secondary schools – want to encourage their students to critique this text-book model and offer them a far more nuanced understanding of human behaviour, so we created this video – Economic Man vs Humanity: a puppet rap battle – to invite students to critique the old and create a new portrait.

And if your students want to dive further into the back story and future possibilities of rational economic man, then go to Chapter 3 of *Doughnut Economics*, which was the basis for the video.



Preparation

Watch the rap [linked] then read the lyrics [linked] and the accompanying references [linked] for all the key quotes and concepts that are embedded within them.

Print a copy of the lyrics for each student and the handouts for each breakout group.

Part 1: The puppet rap battle

 **15**

- 1 Watch the [video](#) (6 minutes 40 seconds)
 - 2 Then invite any initial reactions from the class.
-

Part 2: Breakout groups

 **20**

- 1 Get students into 5 groups and give them the handouts with the lyrics and references.

The handouts are themed according to these verses:

- Verse 2: Models and reflexivity
- Verse 3: Self-interest vs. altruism
- Verse 4: Motivation and incentives
- Verse 5: Rationality and information
- Verse 6: Humanity and nature

- 2 Ask the students to read through the references as a group then discuss the theme given in each handout
-

Part 3: Facilitated discussion

 **25**

- 1 Starting with the group who looked at verse 2: Models and reflexivity, invite them to explain, in their own words, what their theme is, bringing in the references from the rap.

Then kick off a discussion about the topic.

- 2 Repeat for the other groups.
-

Part 4:

Create your own portrait



30

- 1 Time for the students to get creative!

The video ends on the question: We need a better portrait of who we are. What would that look like then...?

Invite students to create their own portrait of humanity in whichever creative form they like, be that a picture, painting, rap or any other form.

Download the beat to the rap [here](#).

- 2 Invite students to share back their creations with the story behind the choices they've made.

Where to take it next

After this lesson try ***Introduction to Systems Thinking***, a series of activities to introduce the essential tools of systems thinking and how to apply them to the world around you

Or try ***Meet The Economy: exploring core relationships*** where the many different traits of humanity are required to make the market, state, household and commons work effectively.

Acknowledgements

Original animation idea, storyline, references and lesson plan, Kate Raworth. Lesson plan written by Rob Shorter and Kate Raworth. Puppet designer Emma Powell. Songwriter Simon Panrucker. Additional contributions from Andrew Fanning, Carlota Sanz, Peter Bullock and Stephanie Leite.