

The Banker with Heart

Compassion

Ingenuity

Resourcefulness

Optimism

Leadership

STORY

Muhammed Yunus is creating one of the greatest humanitarian campaigns in history. He started by talking with people in the streets and villages of his homeland, Bangladesh where he learned that the root cause of their poverty was the outrageous interest rates they were forced to pay in their desperate attempts to create their own little businesses. Starting by loaning money out of his own pocket, Muhammed created the Grameen Bank, which helps poor people help themselves while helping each other. Today, in addition to two million borrowers in Bangladesh, Grameen now helps African-Americans and Mexicans in South-Central Los Angeles, Native Americans in South Dakota, poor whites in Arkansas, North Carolina and New England, and Southeast Asian refugees. Grameen gives the poor the opportunity to create their own jobs rather than waiting around for someone else to do it for them. An unprecedented 99% have repaid their loans in full. By the year 2005, they hope to have 100 million of the world's poorest families join them. "Society has always told the poor they should not be seen nor heard," says Yunus. "Grameen invites them to come together, hold their heads up high."

ACTIONS

Language Arts and Social Studies

- Locate Bangladesh on a map / globe. Study the culture/lifestyle, especially of their youth.

Economics

- Use Monopoly money to create a banking exercise. Have students practice borrowing "money" from a credit card at 21% interest rates for their business. Compare to 5% interest rates. What difference does it make?
- Have students develop a list of small businesses they could run; products to make or sell.

Community Service

- Create a Grameen Bank Club with students. Have each student contribute \$10 to a special fund. Then invite them to decide on a product they could sell; develop a business plan; and practice borrowing and repaying their loan with Monopoly money. Organize a weekly support group to troubleshoot challenges and discuss ways to improve each other's business
- Organize a school store with student-made crafts from home EC, woodworking classes etc.
- Host a holiday event at the store and advertise to families and the community.
- Have students agree to give a percentage of their earnings to a project that helps others.

Reflection Questions

1. Would you lend your own money to someone who was trying to start a small business?
2. What kind of small business would you like to start if someone gave you a "hand up"?
3. Do you think that poor people are just plain lazy? Why or why not?

Lessons You Can Learn

1. Most poor people aren't lazy. They are human beings who want to make a decent living.
2. A "hand-up" instead of a handout gives poor people opportunities to create a livelihood.
3. One root cause of poverty is high interest rates for people who create small businesses.
4. When people help each other and themselves, they can build a promising life together.
5. By listening carefully to poor people, Muhammed learned how he could help them.