



Using the Berenstain Bears to Teach Economics in the Elementary Classroom

This paper identifies economic concepts in Berenstain Bears children's books written by Stan and Jan Berenstain via content analysis. Of the over 400 books in the series, 143 were included in the sample, with economic concepts found in 64 (45 percent). The most common economic concepts found were choices, opportunity cost, human capital, money, and resources. To link research to practice, for each of these concepts, the paper provides examples of how they may be taught in the elementary classroom using specific Berenstain Bears books. A sample lesson plan is also included.

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1. Introduction

Stanley and Janice Berenstain's¹ massive collection of the Berenstain Bears children's books about a loveable family of bears celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2012. In those 50 years, the Berenstain Bears series sold over 300 million copies in 23 languages (Loviglio, 2011). As of May 2015, there were over 400 distinct Berenstain Bears books (Berenstain Enterprises, Inc., 2015), which include board books, chapter books, and early readers but not coloring or activity books. The Berenstains succeeded in bringing easy-to-read books to the mass market for early readers. The objective of each story is to illustrate everyday life in humorous and thoughtful ways. Luckily for the economic education community, many of the Berenstain Bears books also illustrate lessons in economics.

This article identifies economic concepts found in a broad sample of Berenstain Bears books via content analysis, discusses some economic concepts commonly found in the series, and then provides classroom applications using specific Berenstain Bears books that include these common concepts. Additionally, this article discusses the importance of cultivating interest and motivation in economics education, specifically via the use of children's literature.

I focus on this series in particular for two reasons. First, the books are part of American literary culture. Most people know them and grew up reading them. As Miller and Watts (2011) argue "using books that many students read as children or that their parents read to them makes economics more memorable and accessible" (p. 147). Twenty-two Berenstain Bears books are on the list of best-selling children's books of all time compiled by Publisher Weekly for paperback titles having sold more than one million copies (Roback, Britton, & Turvey, 2001). Second, most of the books are readily available and easily accessible, in-print, for purchase, and at local libraries. For example, as of May 10, 2016, the Louisville Free Public Library System website (lfpl.org) listed 201 print Berenstain Bears books available. Accounting for duplicate copies in the library system, 59 are actually unique titles. And, as of December 2015, YouTube had more than 40 videos of Bears books being read aloud. Easy access to a variety of titles will help facilitate the link between research and practice, which is a goal of this study.

With so many Berenstain Bears titles available, one might expect a host of economic education resources using this popular series. However, that is not the case. A search of popular economic and financial literacy resources for teachers (i.e., EconEdlink.org and Virtual Economics [Council for Economic Education, 2011]) found no lesson plans using Berenstain Bears books. The only printed lesson plans found based on Berenstain Bears books (other than lessons written by me and discussed below) are in supplement three of *Economics and Children's Literature: Special Third Supplement, Storybooks for Primary Grades* (Hopkins, Wright, & Wood, 1998), a publication currently out of print. A January 2016 Google keyword search of "Berenstain and Economics" resulted in only three lesson plans, other than ones written by me, and a coloring activity with minimal economic content and no tie to a specific Berenstain Bears title. Therefore, there is little evidence of integration of the Berenstain Bears books into the economics curriculum today.

To address this issue, this paper reviews a large selection of Berenstain Bears books, highlighting the potential of this popular and widely available, series as a resource for teaching economics in the elementary classroom. In addition to the overview of the series and examples, I also provide an example lesson plan targeted at grades 1-3 and information on where to find additional resources.

1 Stanley Berenstain (1923–2005) and Janice Berenstain (1923–2012).

2. Cultivating Motivation and Interest in Economics

Research has already shown that even kindergarteners are able to understand basic economic concepts such as scarcity, opportunity cost, and money (see Webley, 2005 for review of the seminal works in this area). Additionally, using children's literature to teach pre-college economics is accepted among economic education scholars as a "best practice" (Rodgers, Hawthorne, & Wheeler, 2007; VanFossen, 2003). Lesson plans using a variety of children's literature have been published to guide teachers in integrating children's literature with economics (see Day et al., 1997; Day et al., 2006; and Hopkins et al., 1998). There are also various supplementary materials for that purpose available on the Internet, including from various state council websites (e.g., the Maryland Council for Economic Education; <http://www.econed.org>), Federal Reserve Bank economic education websites (e.g., Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis EconLowdown; <https://www.stlouisfed.org/education>), and websites specifically dedicated to linking economics and children's literature (e.g., Rutgers University EconKids; <http://econkids.rutgers.edu/>).

According to VanFossen (2003), the benefits of teaching economics via children's literature are threefold:

1. Using literature can act as a motivational strategy to engage children in the learning of economics.
2. Linking economics with literature helps children understand real world applications of economics.
3. Teaching economics through literature causes positive spillover effects.

Increasing motivation to learn economics is an important task. Research has shown that students interested in a topic have an easier time learning and that increased motivation leads to additional learning (Lepper and Cordova, 1992). Kehler (1998) believes that "using literature in any form in the classroom is motivational; children love stories" (p. 26). Additionally, linking economic concepts to real-world applications requires students to use higher-order thinking skills. Such skills are advocated for in Bloom's Taxonomy, the 21st Century Learners, and included in the Common Core State Standards, and the College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework. Finally, spillover effects are the result of teachers effectively being able to "kill two birds with one stone" by integrating economics with literacy learning. This integration is extremely important in the era of increased accountability, where the amount of content on standardized exams keeps increasing without a corresponding increase in class time. This often results in less and less time spent on social studies (where economic content is usually taught).² Further, Johnson (2012) believes that this combination of content creates "one interdisciplinary teaching activity that might be used to maximize use of instructional time and to support students in the development of literacy skills needed for standardized exams" (p. 66).

Clearly, economic educators agree that teaching economics through children's literature is a best practice, but can children learn economics this way? Harter and Harter (2014/15) investigated the effectiveness of such a practice and found the answer to be yes. Specifically, they found that using children's literature to teach economics increased student test scores on the Basic Economics Test—if the teacher received professional development regarding how to use the books to teach economics. If the teacher alternatively received the books, a list of economics concepts found in the books, but no instruction on how to teach the concepts, student test scores were not affected. Thus, their results are important with respect to this paper in two

2 See VanFossen (2010) for evidence of this specific to the state of Indiana.

ways: First, they provide empirical evidence that students can learn economics through children's literature. Second, they show that to effectively teach economics through literature, teachers need more than a list of the concepts covered by a book. By providing a sample lesson, and information on where to find additional lessons utilizing the Berenstain Bears titles, this article provides teachers with content support and structure that will aid in their instruction of economics.

3. Content Analysis

Content analysis is a qualitative research method used to determine the presence of certain words or concepts within texts or sets of texts (Busch et al., 2016). In the economic education literature, content analyses have primarily focused on textbooks with the most notable exception being Miller and Watt's (2011) examination of Theodore "Dr. Seuss" Geisel's work. In this article, Miller and Watts examined the 50 books in Suess' collection and provided a detailed listing of the applicable (if any) economic concepts found in each. They also provide a discussion on how these books could be used as examples in the classroom, but focus on secondary and post-secondary exclusively in their applications.

With respect to content analyses specific to textbooks, prior content analyses research has focused on economic concepts therein (American Economic Association, 1963; Townshend-Zellner & Carr, 1970), the extent to which the National Standards in Economics are represented (Lopus & Leet, 2007), how government is represented (Lopus, Paringer & Leet, 2008), and the extent to which female and minority issues are discussed (Feiner, 1993; Robson, 2001).

4. Methodology

A. Sample

As of May 2015, there were 403 Berenstain Bears books cited in the bibliography published on the Berenstain Bears website (Berenstain Enterprises, Inc., 2015). Of these, 12 are collections of books previously published and 11 are republications of earlier works; thus, there are actually 380 distinct titles. I remove all of the titles published by Zondervan, an Evangelical Christian publisher, from the sample leaving 323 distinct, non-religious (i.e., no direct reference to God) books. I restrict the sample in this way for two reasons. First, and most importantly, it eliminates many duplicate story lines that were repurposed and republished in a religious context. For example, *The Berenstain Bears and the Summer Job* (Berenstain & Berenstain [hereafter BB], 1995) and *The Berenstain Bears Reap the Harvest* (Berenstain, Berenstain, & Berenstain [hereafter BBB], 2011) are essentially the same story except that the latter attributes the bountiful harvest to God. Second, because the purpose of this study is to examine how economics could be taught using the Berenstain Bears titles and the majority of primary school students attend public schools, direct references to God might exclude the books' use in public schools in keeping with the constitutional separation of Church and State.

The books in this study were included based on convenience sampling. I used books in my personal collection and from local, county, and city (Louisville, KY; Owensboro, KY; and St. Louis, MO) libraries where I live and work. Grounded theory sampling methodology, a flexible sampling procedure whereby you continue to sample until based on the data collected you believe you have a representative sample, was employed to determine an appropriate sample size. Accordingly, additional books were examined until saturation was reached and no new con-

cepts emerged (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Concepts found in the books covered the 16 standards with grade four benchmarks in the Voluntary National Economic Content Standards (Council for Economic Education, 2010) and four of the six in the National Standards for Financial Literacy (Council for Economic Education, 2013), which include grade four benchmarks. The grade four benchmarks are an appropriate measure because most of Bears books are aimed at ages four through eight, but concepts in the grade eight and twelve benchmarks were also found.

The resulting sample used for this study consists of 143 of the 323 nonreligious Berenstain Bears titles (or 44 percent) with a variety of publication years and all authors represented (Jan, Stan, and their son Mike Berenstain, a coauthor of some of the book included in the sample).

B. Analysis and Measures

To analyze the books for economic concepts and situations, each book in the sample was analyzed using a two-step process: First, I read through the story, noting possible economic content as I went along. Next, I conducted a more careful reading, where each page was examined and coded for economic concepts. An economic concept was coded as being present in a book if it met the following three criteria:

1. The concept aligns with either the Voluntary National Content Standards in Economics or National Standards for Financial Literacy (regardless of grade level).
2. An elementary or middle school teacher could, with a simple description and the book, teach the concept.
3. The text includes multiple references to the concept or multiple examples to which the concept applies.

Books that did not meet all three criteria were coded as “no significant content matching economic standards.” For example, the concept of diminishing marginal utility is present in *The Berenstain Bears and Too Much Junk Food* (BB, 1985) and *The Berenstain Bears and Too Much Birthday* (BB, 1986) but violates condition one because it is not in either set of content standards. I also argue that it violates condition two, because the concept of diminishing marginal utility is an advanced concept likely too complex to teach without an entire lesson plan dedicated to the topic. Several concepts, especially from the chapter books, were excluded based on condition three. For example, in *The Berenstain Bears Attic Treasures* (BB, 1990), the family talks about selling the items in their attic at a yard sale to make money, but they then change their minds. Thus, the concept of money is mentioned, but a mere mention would not help with teaching about the concept, characteristics, or functions of money.

Finally, to ensure the reliability of my coding logic described above, a randomly selected subset sample of 53 books was reviewed and coded by another economic educator. This step is needed as a methodological check because economic concepts are found both explicitly and implicitly in the text. For example, the economic concept “money” is explicitly mentioned 29 times in the text of *The Berenstain Bears Trouble with Money*; thus, this concept was coded as being present in this particular title. However, coding becomes more subjective when concepts are implicitly present such as the concept of “scarcity” found in *The Berenstain Bears Get the Gimmes*. Nowhere in the text is the word “scarcity” or variations like “scarce” found, but when Momma and Papa are explaining to the cubs why they cannot have everything they want all the time, they are actually explaining the economic concept of “scarcity.” Thus, being able to recognize the implicit presence of an economic concept requires content knowledge of economics and is subject to interpretation. The second economic educator coded 50 of the 53 (or 94.3 percent) books exactly the same as I did. These discrepancies were then addressed,

Externalities	<i>The Berenstain Bears Don't Pollute (Anymore)</i>
Goods and/or services	<i>The Berenstain Bears That Stump Must Go; The Berenstain Bears: We Love Trucks; C is for Clown; He Bear, She Bear; The Berenstain Bears Moving Day; The Berenstain Bears on the Job; The Berenstain Bears and Mama's New Job; The Berenstain Bears and the Mama's Day Surprise</i>
Human capital	<i>The Berenstain Bears and Report Card Trouble; The Berenstain Bears and Too Small for the Team; The Berenstain Bear Scouts and the Really Big Disaster; The Berenstain Bears and the Big Spelling Bee; The Berenstain Bears and the Excuse Note; The Berenstain Bears and the Wishing Star</i>
Immediate consumption v. saving	<i>The Berenstain Bears and the Summer Job</i>
Improving and/or investing human capital	<i>The Berenstain Bears Go to School; The Berenstain Bears Go Out for the Team; Berenstain Bears Ready, Get Set, Go!; The Berenstain Bears Go Back to School</i>
Incentives	<i>The Berenstain Bears Forget Their Manners; The Berenstain Bears and the Bad Habit; The Berenstain Bears and the Wishing Star; The Berenstain Bears and Report Card Trouble</i>
Income	<i>The Berenstain Bears Think of Those in Need; The Berenstain Bears' Trouble with Money; The Berenstain Bears and the Summer Job; The Berenstain Bears' Mad, Mad, Mad Toy Craze; The Berenstain Bears Dollars and Sense</i>
Increasing prices	<i>The Berenstain Bears and the Tooth Fairy</i>
Interest	<i>The Berenstain Bears' Trouble with Money</i>
Jobs	<i>He Bear, She Bear; The Berenstain Bears on the Job</i>
Labor (volunteering, work/ leisure tradeoff)	<i>The Berenstain Bears Lend a Helping Hand; The Berenstain Bears Big Bedtime Book</i>
Market	<i>The Berenstain Bears' Mad, Mad, Mad Toy Craze</i>
Middlemen	<i>The Berenstain Bears at the Super-Duper Market; The Big Honey Hunt</i>
Money	<i>The Berenstain Bears' Trouble with Money; The Berenstain Bears Meet Santa Bear; The Berenstain Bears and the Summer Job; The Berenstain Bears' Mad, Mad, Mad Toy Craze; The Berenstain Bears Dollars and Sense; The Berenstain Bears and the Missing Watermelon Money; The Berenstain Bears and the Tooth Fairy</i>
Monopoly	<i>The Berenstain Bears: No Girls Allowed</i>

Opportunity cost	<i>The Berenstain Bears and Too Much TV; The Berenstain Bears Get the Gimmies; The Berenstain Bears and Too Much Pressure; The Berenstain Bears and the Trouble with Chores; The Berenstain Bears Lend a Helping Hand</i>
Preferences	<i>Old Hat, New Hat; The Berenstain Bears and Too Small for the Team</i>
Price(s)	<i>The Berenstain Bears' Mad, Mad, Mad Toy Craze; The Berenstain Bears and the Tooth Fairy</i>
Producer and/or consumer	<i>The Berenstain Bears Big Bedtime Book; The Berenstain Bears and Mama's New Job; The Berenstain Bears Cook It!; The Berenstain Bears and Trouble with Commercials</i>
Production	<i>The Berenstain Bears on the Job</i>
Providing goods and services	<i>He Bear, She Bear</i>
Resources (natural, physical, capital, human)	<i>The Berenstain Bears' Nature Guide; The Berenstain Bears Moving Day; The Berenstain Bears on the Job; The Berenstain Bears and the Showdown at Chainsaw Gap; The Berenstain Bears Down on the Farm; The Berenstain Bears Go Green; The Berenstain Bears: We Love Trucks; The Berenstain Bears Gone Fishin'!</i>
Role of government	<i>The Berenstain Bears and Mama for Mayor!; The Berenstain Bears Go Green</i>
Saving	<i>The Berenstain Bears' Trouble with Money; The Berenstain Bears and the Bad Dream</i>
Savings goal	<i>The Berenstain Bears and the Bad Dream</i>
Scarcity	<i>The Berenstain Bears Get the Gimmies; The Berenstain Bears Meet Santa Bear; The Berenstain Bears and Too Much Pressure; The Berenstain Bears and the Showdown at Chainsaw Gap</i>
Shortage and surplus	<i>The Berenstain Bears' Mad, Mad, Mad Toy Craze</i>
Specialization	<i>The Berenstain Bears Go to the Doctor; The Berenstain Bears Visit the Dentist; The Berenstain Bears and the Messy Room; The Berenstain Bears on the Job</i>
Taxes	<i>The Berenstain Bears and the Homework Hassle</i>
Trade/barter	<i>The Big Honey Hunt; The Berenstain Bears and the Bad Dream; The Berenstain Bears Learn to Share</i>
Tradeoffs	<i>The Berenstain Bears and the Showdown at Chainsaw Gap; The Berenstain Bears and Too Much Pressure</i>
Unemployment	<i>The Berenstain Bears Scouts and the Really Big Disaster</i>
Unintended consequences	<i>The Bike Lesson; The Bears' Picnic; The Bears' Vacation</i>
Value	<i>The Berenstain Bears and the Tooth Fairy</i>

results in two ways. First, Table 1 (discussed below) will be helpful for teachers who have economic concepts in mind and are looking for books addressing those concepts. Second, Table A1 in the Appendix provides an alternative approach for teachers and lists the Berenstain Bears books in the sample by publication year and notes for each book the economic concepts addressed.³

As shown in Table 1, the most common economic concepts found (following my criteria for inclusion discussed previously) were choices, opportunity cost, human capital, money, and resources. Each of these concepts is examined in greater detail below, with classroom applications provided for each.

A. Choices and Opportunity Cost

The focus of many of the Berenstain Bears books is teaching important life lessons to children; therefore, it is not surprising that making choices was a prevalent concept in the books. In *Old Hat, New Hat* (BB, 1970), Brother Bear decides he needs a new hat.⁴ He visits a hat shop, but there are problems with all of the hats he sees. For example, they are “too big, too small, too flat, too tall” (BB, 1970, pg. 3), and in the end he chooses his old hat. This book not only provides the opportunity to teach about choices, but also about the criteria we use to make those decisions, one of which is our preferences. Teachers can lead students through a discussion about a recent choice the students made and how they made that choice based on their likes or dislikes, or preferences.⁵

Because informed decision making is at the heart of economic education, students of economics are trained to evaluate costs and benefits involved in making choices. In *The Berenstain Bears and the Truth* (BB, 1983a), Brother and Sister Bear accidentally break their mother’s lamp, but instead of telling the truth about it, they lie. The decision of whether to tell the truth is something even the youngest child has likely encountered. The story offers a wonderful set-up for teaching students about using cost-benefit analysis to make choices. The teacher could have the students work with a partner and list all the benefits and costs associated with telling the truth as it relates to the story. For example, one of the benefits is that you do not have to recall and recount false details. The Bear cubs learn this lesson the hard way when their stories (lies) to Mama and Papa do not match. A cost of telling the truth when you do something you were not supposed to do (like the cubs playing soccer in the house) is the risk of disappointing your parents. Mama was upset that the cubs broke her lamp, but she became even more upset when she discovered that the cubs lied about how it happened.

Finally, because making choices naturally involves choosing among alternatives, it makes sense that opportunity cost was also a commonly found concept in the Berenstain Bears books. In *The Berenstain Bears Get the Gimmies* (BB, 1988), the Bear family deals with the cubs seemingly always wanting more and more, no matter how much they have. The cubs learn that they must make choices because they cannot have everything they want. Thus, a discussion of choices and opportunity costs flows naturally from the story line.⁶

3 Table A2 in Appendix A lists the 79 books coded as “no significant concept matching standards found.” I include this table so the reader, coupled with Table 1, will have the entire list of books in the sample.

4 Brother Bear is known as Small Bear in the earlier books, like this one. He does not become “Brother Bear” until Sister Bear is born in 1974 in *The Berenstain Bears’ New Baby* (BB, 1974). However, for ease of reading, I will refer to his character as Brother Bear (or Brother) throughout.

5 My lesson “The Berenstain Bears: Old Hat New Hat,” included in Appendix B, teaches precisely these concepts and is available along with the other lessons and resources for teaching economics using the Berenstain Bears at www.theinvisiblepaw.com.

6 Additionally, *The Berenstain Bears Get the Gimmies* (BB, 1988a) can also be used to teach the concepts of wants, scarcity, alternative, and goods, which are all addressed in my lesson of the same name: https://www.stlouisfed.org/legacy_assets/education_resources/assets/lesson_plans/Gimmies.pdf.

B. Human Capital

“We all have something
we do the best~
a little bit better
than the rest.”⁷

The Berenstain Bears storylines that reference the concept of human capital widely focus on improving or investing in human capital. Human capital accumulation—in the form of advancing knowledge, skills, or training—increases productivity and in general produces favorable labor market outcomes with respect to employment and earnings. The Berenstain Bears books can be used to discuss a variety of human capital acquisition topics. For example, in *The Berenstain Bears Go to School* (BB, 1978) and *The Berenstain Bears Go Back to School* (BBB, 2005), readers learn that children go to school to gain knowledge, which is an investment in human capital. In *The Berenstain Bears Go Out for the Team* (1987), readers learn that practice improves skills. In this story, the cubs enjoy playing baseball and decide they want to join the Bear County League. However, Mama warns the cubs “You’ll be competing against a lot of other cubs and not everyone is going to make the team” (BB, 1987, pg. 12). This warning is a perfect example of the principle of competition existing because of scarcity. Because spots on the team are scarce, the cubs must compete with other cubs to obtain a spot. To give themselves the best chance of obtaining a coveted spot, they must invest in their human capital (or knowledge, skills, and experience) related to playing baseball. They do this by practicing. To teach these concepts, the teacher could have the students list all of the things the cubs did to invest in their baseball human capital. More specifically, the teacher could talk about how the Bear cubs increased their skills in “fielding and hitting,” “bunting and running” (BB, 1987, pg. 15), playing “pitch-and-catch,” “batting,” and studying “up on the rules of the game” (pg. 3). The teacher could then ask the students to list times when they had to practice to make themselves better at something and why they have to do that.

In the *The Berenstain Bears Ready, Get Set, Go!* (BB, 1988b), the Bear family participates in a family Olympics by competing against each other in various tasks. Because individuals have different sets of knowledge, skills, and experience, this book offers an avenue for teaching about how differences in human capital make each person unique. In the story, Sister Bear is the best at running, climbing, driving, pogo jumping, and trapeze swinging. Brother Bear is the best at jumping and diving. Poor Papa Bear does not seem to be the best at anything until the end of the story when the whole family is exhausted from a day of competition and Papa turns out to be the best sleeper. To teach how different levels of human capital make each of us unique, the teacher could have the students list which Bear is good, better, or best at each activity as they listen to the story. Then the students could each list things they believe they are good, better, and the best at and share with the class, with the teacher pointing out how everyone’s list is different.

C. Money

“When little bears spend
Every nickel and penny,
The trouble with money is~
They never have any!”⁸

Several of the Berenstain Bears books deal with the concept of money, as well as issues

⁷ *The Berenstain Bears Ready, Get Set, Go!* (BB, 1988b, pg. i).

⁸ *The Berenstain Bears’ Trouble with Money* (BB, 1983c, pg. i).

commonly related to money, such as earning income, spending versus saving, and banks. Some stories explicitly deal with money as the main story line. In *The Berenstain Bears' Trouble with Money* (BB, 1983c), Mama and Papa Bear decide the cubs should earn their own money after getting upset with the way the cubs were irresponsibly spending money. The cubs earn money by selling flowers, wild berries, and maps; pet sitting; and providing tours. This lesson provides an opportunity to teach that income is money earned in exchange for providing goods and services. The teacher could extend learning by having students identify whether the cubs were providing a good or a service. As the cubs make their money, or income, they start saving it in a piggy bank, and Mama and Papa suggest that it might be best to open a bank account. This story line provides an opportunity to discuss the concepts of spending (which they were doing without caution at the beginning of the story) and saving (which they do at the end of the story). Further, the book introduces the concept of a bank as a safe place to keep your money—a natural extension for the teacher to make.⁹

The *Berenstain Bears Dollars and Sense* (BB, 2001) is written almost as a sequel to *Trouble with Money*. In this story, the cubs are good at earning money but not very good at managing it. Because of their spendthrift ways, Papa and Mama Bear devise a system to teach the cubs about managing money (or budgeting): The cubs are able to write checks and withdraw money from their allowance to make purchases. Copies of play checks are included in the book; the teacher could photocopy the checks to implement a similar system in the classroom. Students could earn “classroom bucks” for things such as good behavior, turning in homework on time, or being a classroom helper (earning income) and could then write checks (spending) to withdrawal their money to purchase homework passes, extra time at recess, etc. The use of classroom bucks would also give the teacher the opportunity to show that money is anything widely accepted as payment for goods and services. In the case of their classroom, “classroom bucks” would be money.

D. Resources

“Because wheat’s what it takes
to make the flour that goes into bread,
cookies, and cakes.”¹⁰

In *The Berenstain Bears Down on the Farm* (BB, 2006), the family goes to visit their neighbor, Farmer Ben, and spend the day helping him on his farm. Although the economic terms of natural, human, and capital resources are never explicitly mentioned, all three major categories (at an elementary level of understanding) are found throughout the story. The text and illustrations throughout the book do a great job of showing how productive resources are used to make other goods and services. To teach the three concepts, a teacher could define each and then ask the students to identify examples in the text and illustrations. Some examples of natural resources or “gifts of nature” include the land the farm occupies, the animals, and the crops Farmer Ben grows such as wheat, corn, and peas. Some examples of capital resources, or goods that are used to make other goods or services, include a pitch fork, a Jeep, and a silo. The human resources, or the people doing the work to produce goods and services, are clearly Farmer Ben and his wife but also the Bears, who are helping out. For example, Brother Bear milks a cow to produce milk and Farmer Ben shears a sheep to make wool.

9 My lesson “The Berenstain Bears’ Trouble with Money” teaches the economic concepts of banks and interest and the language art concepts of figures of speech and captions; <https://www.stlouisfed.org/~media/Education/Lessons/pdf/The-Berenstain-Bears-Trouble-with-Money.pdf>.

10 *The Berenstain Bears Down on the Farm* (2006, pg. 16).

Teachers could check for knowledge transfer after teaching from *The Berenstain Bears Down on the Farm* by having the students select another Bears book with the same economic concept (see Table 1) and then have the students identify the economic resources found in that book. This approach would work especially well with the stories that include only one of the three resource types, for example, natural resources in *The Berenstain Bears Go Green* (2013), capital goods in *The Berenstain Bears: We Love Trucks* (2013), and human resources in *The Berenstain Bears On the Job* (1983b).

6. Conclusion

Of the 143 the Berenstain Bears books reviewed in this sample, 64 (or 45 percent) include economic concepts. Although this rate may or may not be found in the entire series of books, it is likely that a significant percentage of those not examined here also include economic ideas. In addition to reviewing the Berenstain Bears books for economic content via content analysis, I sought to link research to practice. To date, I have written four (three cited as footnotes within this paper and one provided in Appendix B) lessons using Berenstain Bears titles. In this paper, I have also provided classroom application of selected Berenstain Bears titles that include the most prevalent economic concepts in the series. In addition, I have provided a comprehensive list of the Bears books in the sample and the economic concepts in each (see Table 1 and Table A1 in Appendix A). The sheer volume of titles and variety of storylines provide economic educators with the chance to explore a wide assortment of concepts that appear less frequently in the series but are still important, such as the role of government, the labor-leisure tradeoff, externalities, and unintended consequences. By beginning to teach children economics early in their education, teachers help provide a scaffolding on which to build future learning. The Berenstain Bears series provides a wonderful opportunity to engage children in learning and motivate them to want to learn and apply economics.

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<i>The Berenstain Bears Go Out for the Team</i>	1987	Competition (exists because of scarcity; and a resource allocation method); improving human capital (practicing)
<i>The Berenstain Bears' Trouble with School</i>	1987	Choices
<i>The Berenstain Bears and the Bad Dream</i>	1988	Saving, savings goal, barter/ trade
<i>The Berenstain Bears Get the Gimmies</i>	1988	Scarcity, choices, opportunity cost, alternatives
<i>The Berenstain Bears Ready, Get Set, Go!</i>	1988	Competition, improving human capital
<i>The Berenstain Bears at the Super-Duper Market</i>	1991	Goods, middlemen
<i>The Berenstain Bears Don't Pollute (Anymore)</i>	1991	Externalities
<i>The Berenstain Bears and Too Much Pressure</i>	1992	Scarcity, opportunity cost, tradeoffs, choices
<i>The Berenstain Bears Learn to Share</i>	1992	Choices, trade
<i>The Berenstain Bears and the Excuse Note</i>	1993 & 2001	Human capital
<i>The Berenstain Bears and the Wishing Star</i>	1993 & 2005	Human capital, incentives
<i>The Berenstain Bears and the Summer Job</i>	1994	Immediate consumption v. saving, income, money, choices, bank
<i>The Berenstain Bears Count Their Blessings</i>	1995	Economic wants
<i>The Berenstain Bears and the Green-Eyed Monster</i>	1995	Economic wants
<i>The Berenstain Bears and the Showdown at Chainsaw Gap</i>	1995	Alternatives, tradeoffs, decision-making, natural resources, scarcity
<i>The Berenstain Bears Cook It!</i>	1996	Producer, consumer
<i>The Berenstain Bears Fly It!</i>	1996	Capital goods, entrepreneurial skill
<i>The Berenstain Bears and the Homework Hassle</i>	1997	Taxes
<i>The Berenstain Bears Go Out to Eat</i>	1997 & 2009	Choices
<i>The Berenstain Bears Go Platinum</i>	1998	Boycott, competition, demand, determinants of demand
<i>The Berenstain Bears Lend a Helping Hand</i>	1998	Opportunity cost, labor (volunteering)

<i>The Berenstain Bear Scouts and the Really Big Disaster</i>	1998	Human capital, unemployment
<i>The Berenstain Bears' Mad, Mad, Mad Toy Craze</i>	1999	Price, market, money, income, law of demand, competition, buyer, sellers, shortage, surplus
<i>The Berenstain Bears Think of Those in Need</i>	1999	Income (lack thereof [i.e. Poverty])
<i>The Berenstain Bears and the Escape of the Bogg Brothers</i>	2000	Bank
<i>The Berenstain Bears That Stump Must Go</i>	2000	Services, capital goods
<i>The Berenstain Bears Dollars and Sense</i>	2001	Budgeting, income, money
<i>The Berenstain Bears and the Missing Watermelon Money</i>	2001	Money (who can use it), buying, selling (stealing), entrepreneurships
<i>The Berenstain Bears and Report Card Trouble</i>	2002	Human capital, incentives
<i>The Berenstain Bears and Too Small for the Team</i>	2003	Competition, human capital, preferences
<i>The Berenstain Bears and the Mama's Day Surprise</i>	2004	Goods
<i>The Berenstain Bears Go Back to School</i>	2005	Investing in human capital
<i>The Berenstain Bears and the Trouble with Chores</i>	2005	Choices, opportunity cost
<i>The Berenstain Bears Down on the Farm</i>	2006	Resources (natural, physical, and capital)
<i>The Berenstain Bears and the Trouble with Commercials</i>	2007	Consumers, advertising/ marketing
<i>The Berenstain Bears and the Big Spelling Bee</i>	2007	Human capital
<i>The Berenstain Bears Big Bedtime Book</i>	2008	Producers, work vs. leisure tradeoff
<i>The Berenstain Bears and Mama for Mayor!</i>	2012	Role of government
<i>The Berenstain Bears and the Tooth Fairy</i>	2012	Prices, money, increasing prices, value
<i>The Berenstain Bears Go Green</i>	2013	Natural resources, role of government (as a provider of goods and services)
<i>The Berenstain Bears: We Love Trucks</i>	2013	Capital resources, goods, services
<i>The Berenstain Bears: Gone Fishin'!</i>	2014	Capital resources, natural resources
NOTE: *Republished in 1997 as <i>The C Book</i> . **Republished in 1984 as <i>The Berenstain Bears Nature Guide</i> .		

Table A2 - Berenstain Bears Books, Reviewed but with No Significant Economic Concepts Found Matching Standards, by Publication Year

Title	Year
<i>Inside Outside Upside Down</i>	1968 & 1997
<i>Bears on Wheels</i>	1969
<i>The Bears' Christmas</i>	1970
<i>The B Book</i>	1971
<i>Bears in the Night</i>	1971
<i>The Berenstain Bears' New Baby</i>	1974
<i>The Bear Detectives</i>	1975
<i>The Spooky Old Tree</i>	1978
<i>The Berenstain Bears and the Missing Dinosaur Bone</i>	1980
<i>The Berenstain Bears and the Sitter</i>	1981
<i>The Berenstain Bears Get in a Fight</i>	1982
<i>The Berenstain Bears Go to Camp</i>	1982
<i>The Berenstain Bears in the Dark</i>	1982
<i>The Berenstain Bears on the Moon</i>	1985
<i>The Berenstain Bears and Too Much Junk Food</i>	1985
<i>The Berenstain Bears and the Week at Grandma's</i>	1986
<i>The Berenstain Bears Get Stage Fright</i>	1986
<i>The Berenstain Bears and Too Much Birthday</i>	1986
<i>The Berenstain Bears and the Big Road Race</i>	1987
<i>The Berenstain Bears and the Missing Honey</i>	1987
<i>The Berenstain Bears and the Trouble with Friends</i>	1987
<i>The Berenstain Bears Blaze a Trail</i>	1987
<i>The Berenstain Bears and the Double Dare</i>	1988
<i>The Berenstain Bears and the Ghost of the Forest</i>	1988
<i>The Berenstain Bears the In-Crowd</i>	1989
<i>The Berenstain Bears Too Much Vacation</i>	1989
<i>The Berenstain Bears Trick or Treat</i>	1989
<i>The Berenstain Bears Prize Pumpkin</i>	1990
<i>The Berenstain Bears and the Slumber Party</i>	1990
<i>The Berenstain Bears Trouble with Pets</i>	1990
<i>The Berenstain Bears Attic Treasures</i>	1990
<i>The Berenstain Bears Are a Family</i>	1991

<i>The Berenstain Bears' Four Seasons</i>	1991
<i>The Berenstain Bears Trouble with Grownups</i>	1992
<i>The Berenstain Bears Accept No Substitutes</i>	1993
<i>The Berenstain Bears and the Bully</i>	1993
<i>The Berenstain Bears Gotta Dance!</i>	1993
<i>The Berenstain Bears and the New Girl in Town</i>	1993
<i>The Berenstain Bears and the Nerdy Nephew</i>	1993
<i>The Berenstain Bears Hug and Make Up</i>	1993
<i>The Berenstain Bears and the Bedtime Battle</i>	1993 & 2004
<i>The Berenstain Bears and the Baby Chipmunk</i>	1993 & 2005
<i>The Berenstain Bears and the Dress Code</i>	1994
<i>The Berenstain Bears New Neighbors</i>	1994
<i>The Berenstain Bears and the Talent Show</i>	1994
<i>The Berenstain Bears Visit Uncle Tex</i>	1994
<i>The Berenstain Bear Scouts Meet Bigpaw</i>	1995
<i>The Berenstain Bears Too Much Teasing</i>	1995
<i>The Berenstain Bears Help around the House</i>	1996
<i>The Berenstain Bear Scouts and the Sci-Fi Pizza</i>	1996
<i>The Berenstain Bears Blame Game</i>	1997
<i>Big Bear Small Bear</i>	1998
<i>The Berenstain Bears by the Sea</i>	1998
<i>The Berenstain Bears' Comic Valentine</i>	1998
<i>The Berenstain Bear Scouts and the Evil Eye</i>	1998
<i>The Berenstain Bears and the Big Question</i>	1999
<i>The Berenstain Bears Go Hollywood</i>	1999
<i>The Berenstain Bears Baby Makes Five</i>	2000
<i>The Berenstain Bears The Big Blooper</i>	2000
<i>The Birds, the Bees and the Berenstain Bears</i>	2000
<i>The Berenstain Bears and the Goofy</i>	2001
<i>The Berenstain Bears and the Runamuck Dog Show</i>	2001
<i>The Berenstain Bears' Funny Valentine</i>	2002
<i>The Berenstain Bears and the Papa's Day Surprise</i>	2003
<i>The Berenstain Bears We Like Kites</i>	2004
<i>The Berenstain Bears New Pup</i>	2005
<i>The Berenstain Bears Play T-Ball</i>	2005

<i>The Berenstain Bears' Seashore Treasure</i>	2005
<i>The Berenstain Bears and Too Much Car Trip</i>	2005
<i>The Berenstain Bears Go on Vacation</i>	2006
<i>The Berenstain Bears Hug and Make Up</i>	2006
<i>The Berenstain Bears Out West</i>	2006
<i>The Berenstain Bears Lose a Friend</i>	2007
<i>The Berenstain Bears and the New Kitten</i>	2007
<i>The Berenstain Bears and the Bad Influence</i>	2008
<i>The Berenstain Bears and the Really Big Pet Show</i>	2008
<i>The Berenstain Bears Sick Days</i>	2009
<i>The Berenstain Bears and the Sleepover</i>	2009
<i>The Berenstain Bears at the Aquarium</i>	2014

Appendix B

The Berenstain Bears: Old Hat New Hat

By Stan and Jan Berenstain / ISBN: 0-394-80669-7

Lesson Author

Erin A. Yetter, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis—Louisville Branch

Standards and Benchmarks (see page 9)

Lesson Description

In this lesson, students make a choice about what they want to eat for dinner, but then they are asked to trade with a partner and discuss whether they like their new dinner better. Based on this discussion, they learn about preferences and how they help us make choices. Students then hear a story about a little bear who looks at many hats to see if he can find a new one he likes. Students will relate key concepts from the lesson to the story and create a hat to discuss their own choices and preferences with the class.

Grade Level

1-3

Concepts

Choice
Preferences

Objectives

Students should be able to

- explain that when they pick among different options they have made a choice,
- explain that choices are based on individual preferences, and
- explain that preferences are different for everyone and can change over time.

Time Required

Approximately 60 minutes

Lesson Plan

The Berenstain Bears: Old Hat New Hat

Materials

- *The Berenstain Bears: Old Hat New Hat* (ISBN: 0-394-80669-7) by Stan and Jan Berenstain
- Visual 1
- Handout 1, one copy for each student, printed on various colors of card stock with enough copies of each color so that students may choose a color
- Scissors
- Glue, at least one unit per two students
- Accessories to decorate a hat (see Handout 1), such as sequins, buttons, ribbon, puff balls, pipe cleaners, glitter, and stickers
- Markers or crayons
- Stapler
- Construction paper, cut into approximately 2-inch strips
- Scrap paper (about 3 inches x 3 inches), one piece for each student
- Pencil or pen, one for each student

Procedure

1. To introduce the lesson, pass out small pieces of scrap paper and ask the students to write down what they would like to eat as a main course for dinner but to not show or tell anyone. Allow a minute or two for students to complete the task and then explain that they just made a **choice**. Write the word "choice" on the board and explain that a choice involves deciding among different things, or options.
2. Instruct the students to give their pieces of paper to the person to their left (or trade with a partner). Tell the students to pretend that whatever is on the new piece of paper is what they will have for dinner today. Watch the expressions on their faces and listen for verbal cues as to how they feel about their new food item.
3. Call on students who reacted, either positively or negatively, and ask them why they reacted the way they did. (*Answers will vary, but students will likely say things that reveal their preferences, such as "I got pizza. I love pizza!" or "I got a cheeseburger. I don't like cheese on my burgers."*)
4. Tell the students that because resources are limited, people can't have everything they want, so they must make choices. People make choices every day based on what they prefer. Write the word "prefer" on the board. Ask students the following question:
 - What do you think the word "prefer" means? (*Answers will vary, but some students may say that the things we prefer are the things we like.*)

Lesson Plan

The Berenstain Bears: Old Hat New Hat

5. Explain that when people use the word “prefer,” they are actually talking about their likes and dislikes. Explain that when people tell us why they like or dislike something, they are actually telling us about what they prefer. In other words, they are telling us about their **preferences**. Add “ences” on the board to make the complete word “preferences.”
6. Explain that people telling us about their likes and dislikes is not the only way we learn what they prefer. When people make choices, because resources are limited, they are also showing us their preferences.
7. To illustrate, go back to students who reacted favorably to the new food item. Ask them if they would prefer the new food item or what they originally wrote down. (*Either answer is fine.*) Explain what is learned about each student’s preference. For example, if Mike originally wrote down meatloaf but likes the new choice of pizza better, we now know that Mike likes pizza better than meatloaf.
8. Explain that because preferences are different for everyone and can change over time, for many choices there is no right answer. Also, based on what people say, we learn about their preferences. Choose a student as an example and ask questions similar to the following based on that student’s preferences:
 - Will Mike always choose pizza over meatloaf? (*Not necessarily, because his preferences, like anyone’s, can change over time.*)
 - Will everyone make the same choice as Mike? (*No, because everyone has his or her own preferences.*)
9. Tell the students they are going to hear a story about a little bear who wants a new hat. As you read the story, pause to show the students the pictures of all the various hats. They will probably like the silly drawings and can use the picture as an inspiration later when they create their own hats.
10. Read the story *Old Hat New Hat*.
11. Ask the students the following questions:
 - Little Bear finally made a choice. Which hat did he choose? (*His old hat*)
 - What did he dislike about the other hats he considered? (*They were too loose, too tall, too heavy.*)
 - What do we call such dislikes? (*Preferences*)
 - Because he chose the old hat, what do we now know about Little Bear? (*Little Bear prefers his old hat to the other hats.*)
 - Because everyone’s preferences are different and can change over time, did Little Bear make the right choice? (*Yes, he liked the old hat best, so that is what he picked.*)

Lesson Plan

The Berenstain Bears: Old Hat New Hat

- What hat would you have chosen? Why? (*Answers will vary, but students should mention why they liked a particular hat.*)
12. Point out to students that what they liked about the hat they chose reflects their preferences. Tell them they are going to get to make choices and show their preferences by creating their own hats.
 13. Distribute a copy of *Handout 1: Hat* (ask the students to tell you which color they would prefer), scissors, glue, and two of the 2-inch strips of construction paper to each student.
 14. Instruct the students to cut out the hat from Handout 1. Make sure they know to cut only around the outside of the hat and not on any of the internal lines. While they are cutting, display the hat accessories on a desk or table.
 15. Display *Visual 1: Assembly Diagram*. If age appropriate, have the students staple their bands to their hats as shown. If not, staple the bands for them.
 16. Instruct the students to decorate their hats any way they want. Tell them to think about the story and all of the crazy hats shown, or let them look through the book for inspiration. Allow students to select accessories and glue them on their hats.
 17. Once the hats are completed, call on students to tell you about their designs and why they chose to make them the way they did. Record their answers by creating the following table (graphic organizer) on the board:

Name	Design	Explanation
Nikki	Red hat with glitter	Red is my favorite color. I love sparkly things.
James	Various colors with buttons	I like so many colors and wanted to use any many as I could.
Cong	Blue hat with green polka dots	I wanted my hat to stand out.

18. Once you have called on several students, erase the word "design" and replace it with the word "choices." Ask the students the following question:
 - Why did I make this change? (*They made choices when designing their hats.*)
 Next, replace the word "explanation" with the word "preferences." Ask the students the following question:
 - Why did I make this change? (*When they state things they dislike or like or when they make a choice, they are showing their preferences.*)

Lesson Plan

The Berenstain Bears: Old Hat New Hat

19. Place the hats somewhere out of the way to dry.
20. After the hats are dry, have each student try on his or her to measure for fit. Hold the bands together at the appropriate spot, remove the hat, and place two staples to secure the band in place.

Closure

21. Review important content from the lesson by discussing the following:
 - What do you call making a decision among different things? (*A choice*)
 - What do we use to help us make choices? (*We use our preferences.*)
 - What do people learn about us when we make a choice? (*They learn about our preferences.*)
 - Explain why it is okay for me to like something that you don't like. (*Everyone's preferences are different. You should be able to choose the things that you like whether someone else likes them or not.*)
 - Is it okay to change your mind about something you like or dislike? (*Yes, our preferences can change.*)

Assessment

22. Handout copies of *Handout 2: Assessment* to each student. Instruct them to read the stories and answer the questions. They should circle only "True" or "False." Once they are finished, review the stories using the answers below.

Handout 2: Assessment—Answer Key

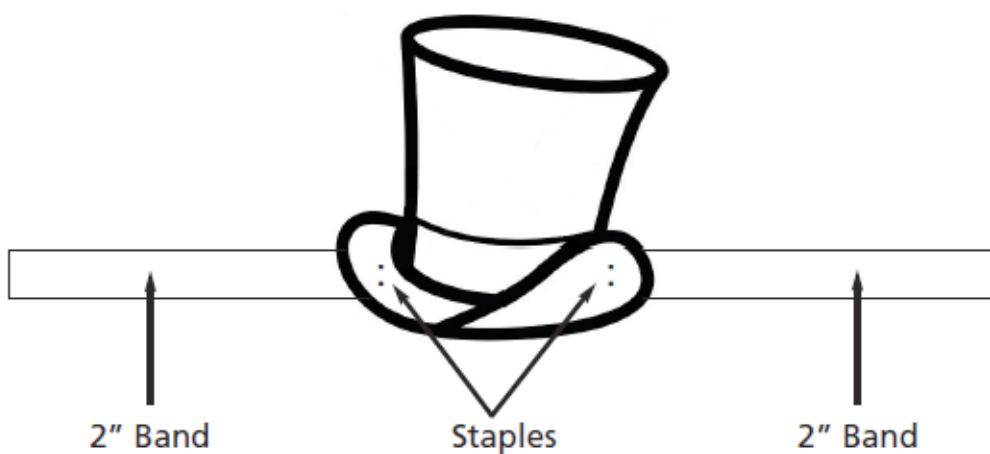
Story A

1. *True.* Dante says he likes turkey better than ham.
2. *False.* Dante's mom packed his lunch, so she made the sandwich choice.
3. *False.* We only know what type of sandwich Dante has, not about his preferences.

Story B

4. *True.* Dante chose to have pizza for lunch.
5. *True.* The story says Dante likes turkey but loves pizza.
6. *False.* The story doesn't tell if Dante prefers chicken soup.
7. *True.* A person's preferences can change, and that is okay.

Visual 1: Assembly Diagram



Handout 1: Hat



Handout 2: Assessment

Name _____

Directions: Read the following stories and answer the questions based on the story. Circle either "True" or "False" for each question.

Story A

Dante had a ham sandwich for lunch, but his friend Milton had a turkey sandwich. "Ugh," thought Dante. "I wish my mom would have made me a turkey sandwich instead. I like turkey better than ham!"

1. We know about Dante's preferences. True False
2. Dante made a choice about which sandwich he wanted for lunch. True False
3. We know about Milton's preferences. True False

Story B

After school, Dante went home and his mother had just returned from the grocery store.

"Dante, I bought turkey for sandwiches and some pizzas," his mom said. "Which would you like for your lunch tomorrow?"

Dante thought to himself, "Well, I really like turkey, but I love pizza."

"Mom, I would like to have pizza for lunch tomorrow, please," he replied.

4. Dante made a choice. True False
5. We know that Dante likes pizza better than turkey. True False
6. We know that Dante likes pizza better than chicken soup. True False
7. One day Dante might like ham better than turkey, and that is okay because people's preferences can change. True False

Standards and Benchmarks

National Standards in Economics

Standard 1: Productive resources are limited. Therefore, people cannot have all the goods and services they want; as a result they must choose some things and give up others.

- **Benchmark 4, Grade 4:** Whenever a choice is made, something is given up because resources are limited.

Common Core State Standards: English Language Arts, Grade 2

Reading: Literature

- **Integration of Knowledge and Ideas**
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.2.7: Use information gained from the illustrations and words in a print or digital text to demonstrate understanding of its characters, setting, or plot.