

SHOULD GOVERNMENTS PROVIDE UNIVERSAL BASIC INCOME?

THIS ACTIVITY SHOULD TAKE ABOUT 90 MINUTES. IF LEARNERS ARE ABLE TO REVIEW MEDIA PRIOR TO THE LESSON, ACTIVITY TIME SHOULD BE 45 TO 60 MINUTES.

INVESTIGATE

Read, watch, and listen to the three media resources on the Thinkalong module. Learners can use the Investigate graphic organizer to summarize each piece of media and record new information. Below are summaries of the three pieces of media curated in the Thinkalong module.

SHOULD WE GET FREE MONEY FROM THE GOVERNMENT?

Above the Noise | November 13, 2018 | Video
5:29 minutes

Above the Noise host Myles Bess presents the idea of universal basic income and discusses the practicalities along with the possible benefits or shortcomings.

- The concept of universal basic income is that the government gives every one of its citizens just enough money to afford the basics like food, electricity bill, and rent. In theory, this is supposed to prevent anyone from falling into poverty.
- Universal basic income has been coming to the mainstream because of the fear that artificial intelligence like robots will make millions of jobs obsolete.
- In the U.S., universal basic income would be \$1,000 per month or \$12,000 per year, exactly at the federal poverty level. The money would be used for anything the citizen needs or wants.
- Segments of both conservative and liberal groups support the idea. Some liberals believe it's one of the best ways to fight financial inequality. Some conservatives like the idea because they believe it would replace or reduce social programs.
- The U.S already has a welfare system. However, programs like Food Stamps, free or low-cost health care, and federal housing assistance require you to be in abject poverty to qualify.
- Opponents of universal basic income say that the cost is too high, it could possibly hurt the economy by discouraging people from getting jobs, or that it would cut welfare programs that are needed.

DOES A BASIC GUARANTEED INCOME DECREASE THE NEED FOR SOCIAL SERVICES?

PBS NewsHour | May 28, 2018 | Video
10:08 minutes

The idea of universal basic income is getting a trail run in Ontario, Canada. PBS NewsHour investigates the study.

- Though the economy was doing well in 2018, there were concerns over wage growth and the overall standard of living. The idea of universal basic income has been gaining public support.
- There are small pilot projects around the world of how it could work. One of these is in Ontario, Canada, where 4,000 randomly selected citizens are given \$1,130 to spend in whatever way they like. In exchange, recipients give up some social support and the government gets back 50 cents of every dollar they earn.

Using public media — video, audio and digital reports — about newsworthy topics, these classroom-based exercises help learners to think critically about media messages, develop informed opinions, and practice how to take a stand.

- Research director Kwame McKenzie and this team will analyze the results of this income study. They are looking to see if this program increases people’s chances of escaping poverty.
- Around the world, some believe that basic income could provide a simpler and more effective income support.
- Some of the participants of the study note the benefit of not having to deal with bureaucracy or having to report monthly on their life circumstances. Others report that they can now afford higher quality food and pay hospital bills with more ease. Some people are going back to school or wanting to improve their opportunities by finding a better job.
- Skeptics of universal basic income say that it will be expensive while benefits may never actually happen. Some community members doubt recipients will use it productively. Others worry about the elimination of government-produced social programs and downward wage pressure on the working poor.

MAYOR OF STOCKTON, CALIF., DISCUSSES UNIVERSAL BASIC INCOME PROGRAM RESULTS

NPR | October 19, 2019 | Audio

6:01 minutes

Stockton, California is the first town in America to experiment with universal basic income. Mayor Michael Tubbs discusses the early results.

- Stockton, California’s mayor is overseeing an experimental program called Stockton Economic Empowerment Demonstration (SEED) where the city has been sending \$500 debit cards monthly to 125 residents. This is the first city in the U.S. to experiment with universal basic income.
- 8 months into the 18-month pilot program, researchers have started releasing preliminary information about how participants are spending the money and the impact it is having on their lives.
- So far, they found that recipients spent the money on things like food, merchandise, and utilities. They say 40% spent it on food, 24% on merchandise from Walmart and similar stores, 12% on utility bills, 9% on car repairs.
- One of the arguments against universal basic income is that people will spend the money on unnecessary items.
- These results point out that recipients could simply withdraw cash from these debit cards, which would be untraceable. Mayor Tubbs pointed out that many transactions today still require cash, like barber shops or church offerings. He also stated that there is not one policy or program that has a 100% success rate.
- To counter that, the study also interviews recipients to get more of an understanding of how the money is being spent beyond debit card transactions.

KEY WORDS

Look out for these important keywords in the news stories. Discuss the definitions with your learners and see how they affect the understanding of the story.

- Universal
- Inequality
- Debit Cards
- Poverty
- Pilot Programs
- Recipients
- Welfare

CONTEMPLATE

Learners will use media literacy questions to critically engage with news by thinking about its purpose, searching for bias and discussing missing perspectives. They will answer the 5 Key Questions of Media Literacy created by the Center for Media Literacy, which are:

1. Who created this message?
2. What creative techniques are used to attract my attention?
3. How might different people understand this message differently than me?
4. What values, lifestyles and points of view are represented in, or omitted from, this message?
5. Why is this message being sent?

A graphic organizer is included in this guide and the Thinkalong website to help learners answer these five questions about each piece of media.

DEBATE

Use the debate tool on the module webpage to help form evidence-based responses to the debate question.

Thinkalong is designed to help learners engage with real issues that are relevant to their lives. [Structured discussions](#) allow learners to practice their critical thinking skills through evidence-based debate with their peers. Discussions are designed to take about 30 minutes. Educators are encouraged to modify aspects that work best for their learners.

To encourage civil discourse, please review the [Code of Conduct](#) with your learners.