Teen Money Independence

Educator Activity Pack

Classroom Adaptations for All 18 Family Activities

18 Activities	8 Units	Ages 13–18

About This Pack

This document contains classroom-ready adaptations for all 17 Teen Money Independence family activities. Each activity includes: classroom group configuration, setup instructions for 25–30 students, step-by-step facilitation notes, whole-class debrief questions, and differentiation strategies for advanced and support learners.

The original home version of each activity (designed for 2–3 players) is available in the TMI Teacher's Guide. Both versions cover the same learning objectives — only the delivery format differs.

Build your foundation. Own your future.

Activity 1: The Barter Challenge

Unit	Format	Time	Classroom Groups
Unit 1 — Money Fundamentals	Competitive	25 min	Pairs or groups of 3

Needs vs. wants, why money exists

Overview

Students experience first-hand why barter economies are inefficient and how money solves the double coincidence of wants problem. Each student gets a set of item cards and must trade to acquire their target items — discovering that barter requires both parties to want what the other has.

Materials (class of 25–30)

- Index cards or printed item cards (one set per student pair)
- Item list handout (10–15 everyday objects)
- Timer
- Whiteboard for debrief

Classroom Setup

1. Print or prepare item cards: sandwich, water bottle, phone charger, pencil, socks, snack, book, umbrella, earbuds, notebook
1. Each student draws 5 random item cards — do not let them choose
2. Each student writes down 2 items they "want" on a sticky note (kept secret)
3. Give students 8 minutes to trade freely with classmates

Facilitation Notes

- Circulate and listen to negotiation attempts — note which students struggle to find willing trade partners
- After 8 minutes, call time and ask students to raise their hand if they got both items they wanted
- Expect fewer than half to succeed — this is the point
- Ask: "What made trading difficult?" Lead them to "you needed someone who had what you wanted AND wanted what you had."

Whole-Class Debrief Questions

4. What is the double coincidence of wants? Why does it make barter inefficient?
5. How does money solve this problem?
6. What would happen in this activity if everyone had "money" (poker chips) instead of item cards?

Differentiation

Advanced: Add a rule that item values are unequal (a sandwich is worth more than a pencil) and students must negotiate prices. Support: Pair struggling students with a buddy and give them a target item that is common.

Educator Tip

> *The activity works best with 15+ students. With fewer than 10, the barter market is too thin and almost nobody succeeds — reduce item variety to 6–8 types so trades are more possible.*

Activity 2: Pay Stub Shock

Unit	Format	Time	Classroom Groups
Unit 1 — Money Fundamentals	Hands-on	30 min	Small groups of 3–4

Gross vs. net pay, FICA, W-4 withholding

Overview

Students calculate take-home pay from a sample W-2 at three different wage levels, discovering the gap between what they earn and what they keep. The shock of seeing 22–28% deducted creates a lasting anchor for understanding budgeting from net pay.

Materials (class of 25–30)

- Pay Stub Worksheet (one per student)
- Calculator or phone
- Tax rate reference card (provided below)
- Whiteboard for class comparison

Classroom Setup

1. Print one Pay Stub Worksheet per student (or display on screen if 1:1 device)
2. Assign each group a different wage scenario: Group A = $13/hr, Group B = $17/hr, Group C = $22/hr
3. Provide tax rate reference: Federal 10–12%, Social Security 6.2%, Medicare 1.45%
4. Students work 20 hours/week in the scenario

Facilitation Notes

- Walk groups through the first calculation together on the board: gross pay = wage × hours
- Let groups work independently on FICA and federal withholding
- Circulate and ask: “What percentage of your gross pay disappeared?”
- Bring the class together and have each group report their net pay

Whole-Class Debrief Questions

5. What surprised you most about the difference between gross and net pay?
6. If you were budgeting for your life, which number would you start with? Why?
7. What is the purpose of FICA? Who benefits from Social Security?

Differentiation

Advanced: Add a state income tax rate (3–5%) and have students recalculate. Ask how this changes take-home in different states. Support: Provide a step-by-step calculation guide and let students use a calculator freely.

Educator Tip

> *The most powerful moment is the comparison across groups. When the $22/hr group shares their take-home, students realize that doubling your wage does not double your take-home dollar for dollar. Let that land before moving to debrief.*

Activity 3: Budget Battle

Unit	Format	Time	Classroom Groups
Unit 2 — Budgeting	Competitive	45 min	Pairs (competing budgets), class votes on winner

50/30/20 rule, needs vs. wants, trade-offs

Overview

Student pairs receive identical income scenarios and must independently build a monthly budget. They then present their budgets to the class, which votes on who made the strongest financial decisions. The competitive format drives engagement and reveals that there is no single "correct" budget — only trade-offs with consequences.

Materials (class of 25–30)

- Scenario cards (one per student)
- Budget worksheet (one per student)
- Expense menu with 20+ items and prices
- Voting cards or a show-of-hands system

Classroom Setup

1. Scenario: 22-year-old working 30 hrs/week at $14/hr in your city. Take-home after taxes: approximately $1,400/month
2. Expense menu includes: rent options ($600–$950), food ($200–$450), transportation ($0–$350), phone ($0–$80), subscriptions ($0–$60), clothing ($0–$150), entertainment ($0–$100), savings ($0–$200)
3. Students have 20 minutes to complete their budget independently — no talking

Facilitation Notes

- After 20 minutes, pair students up and give each pair 5 minutes to compare
- Select 3–4 pairs to present their budgets to the class (2 minutes each)
- After each presentation, class votes: thumbs up if this budget is financially sustainable
- Discuss disagreements — why did some vote yes and others no?

Whole-Class Debrief Questions

4. Which budget line caused the most disagreement? Why?
5. Did anyone hit the 50/30/20 rule exactly? What did you have to give up?
6. What is one expense you would cut first if your income dropped 20%?

Differentiation

Advanced: Add a one-time unexpected expense ($300 car repair) mid-activity and require students to revise their budget in real time. Support: Provide a pre-sorted expense list labeled Needs / Wants / Savings to reduce cognitive load.

Educator Tip

> *The vote creates productive conflict. Students who chose higher rent versus lower rent will defend their choices — facilitate the debate rather than resolving it. The goal is for students to articulate the trade-off, not to reach consensus.*

Activity 4: Subscription Audit

Unit	Format	Time	Classroom Groups
Unit 2 — Budgeting	Hands-on	30 min	Individual, then class aggregate

Tracking spending, subscription creep, impulse vs. intentional spending

Overview

Students list every subscription they (or their family) currently pay, calculate the annual cost, then evaluate each one by usage. The class aggregates data to discover how much the average household spends on subscriptions annually — the number is almost always surprising.

Materials (class of 25–30)

- Subscription Audit worksheet
- Calculator
- Whiteboard for class aggregate

Classroom Setup

1. Students work individually for 10 minutes listing every subscription from memory
2. Common categories to prompt: streaming (video, music, gaming), apps, fitness, food delivery, news, software, cloud storage
3. Then check bank/credit card statements if devices are available

Facilitation Notes

- After the individual audit, collect one number from each student: total monthly subscription cost
- Add them on the board and calculate the class average
- Ask: how many of you use every subscription every week? Every month?
- Introduce the "72-hour rule test": would you miss this subscription if it disappeared for 72 hours?

Whole-Class Debrief Questions

4. What was your most surprising subscription finding?
5. What is the difference between a subscription you value and one you have forgotten about?
6. If you freed up $30/month from canceled subscriptions and invested it at 7%, what would it be worth in 30 years? (Answer: ~$34,000)

Differentiation

Advanced: Calculate the 30-year compound value of canceling one subscription.

Support: Provide a pre-populated list of 20 common subscriptions for students to check yes/no.

Educator Tip

> *Most students dramatically underestimate their family's total subscription spend. The reveal — often $150–$300/month — creates a genuine moment of surprise. That surprise is the lesson. Do not rush past it.*

Activity 5: Grocery Store Math Race

Unit	Format	Time	Classroom Groups
Unit 2 — Budgeting	Competitive	35 min	Teams of 3–4

Unit price comparison, value vs. brand, grocery budgeting

Overview

Teams receive a $75 grocery budget and must build a complete week of meals using printed grocery ads or a simulated price list. The team that feeds the most people nutritionally for the least money wins. Unit price math is required to compare package sizes.

Materials (class of 25–30)

- Printed grocery store circular or price list handout
- Weekly meal planning sheet
- Calculator
- $75 budget card per team

Classroom Setup

1. Provide a grocery price list with at least 30 items in varying package sizes
2. Each team must plan 7 dinners, 7 lunches, and 7 breakfasts for one person
3. All meals must include a protein, a vegetable or fruit, and a carbohydrate
4. Unit price must be calculated for at least 5 items where two sizes are available

Facilitation Notes

- Teams have 20 minutes to plan and calculate total cost
- No item can be purchased without calculating its unit price if multiple sizes exist
- Teams present: total spent, meals planned, and one unit price comparison they found

Whole-Class Debrief Questions

5. Which unit price comparison surprised you most?
6. Did the bigger package always have the lower unit price? What exceptions did you find?
7. How would this budget change if you were feeding a family of four instead of one?

Differentiation

Advanced: Add a constraint — two people in the household have dietary restrictions. Support: Pre-calculate unit prices for half the items and let students calculate the rest.

Educator Tip

> *The most effective debrief question is asking students to compare a store brand vs. name brand on the same item. In almost every case, the store brand has a lower unit price AND lower total price. This re-frames brand loyalty as a cost, not a value.*

Activity 6: The Envelope Challenge

Unit	Format	Time	Classroom Setup
Unit 2 — Budgeting	Challenge / Real Money	1 week (ongoing)	Individual / Whole class

Cash psychology, budget allocation, envelope method, spending trade-offs

Overview

Students go cash-only for one week using the envelope method. Before the week starts they divide their available cash into labeled envelopes by category. At the end of the week they compare what actually happened to what they planned. Almost everyone is surprised by the result — and that surprise IS the lesson.

Materials

- 5–6 physical envelopes per student (or folded paper works fine)
- Cash (use actual money if possible; play money as fallback for classroom simulation)
- Tracking sheet (one per student — record each withdrawal, which envelope, and remaining balance)
- Debrief worksheet for the end-of-week reflection

Steps

1. Day 1 (setup): Decide spending categories together — suggested: Savings, Food, Transport, Fun, Miscellaneous.
2. Calculate how much each category gets for one week based on normal spending patterns.
3. Label envelopes, divide cash. Every purchase this week comes from the correct envelope only — no cards for these categories.
4. If an envelope runs out: stop spending in that category, OR make a conscious decision to transfer from another envelope and record why.
5. End of week: count what remains in each envelope. Complete the debrief worksheet.
6. Class debrief: share results. Which envelope emptied fastest? Did you spend differently because you could SEE the money running low?

Debrief Questions

1. Which envelope emptied fastest? Did that surprise you?
2. Did you make any different spending decisions during the week BECAUSE you could see the cash running low?
3. Would you spend differently if you always used cash instead of cards? Why or why not?
4. What would your ideal envelope budget look like for next month?

Facilitation Notes

The most powerful moment is usually Day 3 or 4 when the Fun envelope starts running low. Watch what happens — most students make genuinely different choices when they can physically see the money disappearing. That moment of hesitation IS the lesson. Let it land before jumping to the debrief.

For students who cannot use real cash (school policy, no access): run the simulation with play money during one class period. Compress the timeline — each "round" represents one day. It loses some of the real-life impact but still teaches category-based spending and trade-off decisions.

For students without bank accounts: frame this explicitly as a professional budgeting tool, not a workaround. Many adults use envelope budgeting by choice. Students in this situation are learning a real skill, not a temporary substitute.

Educator Tip

The envelope challenge works because it removes abstraction. Money in a bank account feels infinite until it isn't. Cash in an envelope feels finite from the moment you seal it. The student who hesitates at the vending machine on Day 4 because they can see their Fun envelope getting thin — that student is learning something no spreadsheet can teach. Your job is to create the conditions for that moment and let it do the work.

Activity 7: Savings Goal Race

Unit	Format	Time	Classroom Groups
Unit 3 — Saving & Emergency Funds	Competitive	30 min	Individual tracking, class comparison

SMART goals, timeline, savings rate

Overview

Each student picks a real savings goal (not hypothetical) and calculates exactly how long it will take at three different monthly savings rates. The class compares timelines and discovers that doubling your savings rate more than halves your timeline due to compounding.

Materials (class of 25–30)

- Savings Goal worksheet
- Calculator
- Goal timeline chart (included in worksheet)

Classroom Setup

1. Students write one real savings goal with a specific dollar amount (laptop, car, travel, etc.)
2. They calculate time to goal at $25/month, $50/month, and $100/month savings rates
3. Include a 4% APY high-yield savings account in the calculation

Facilitation Notes

- Have students share their goal and the three timelines
- Ask: what would you give up to get to the $100/month savings rate?
- Calculate the class average time savings from $25 to $100/month

Whole-Class Debrief Questions

4. What specific expense would you reduce to move from $25 to $50/month in savings?
5. How does a high-yield savings account change your timeline versus a regular savings account?
6. If your goal timeline is more than 2 years, is it still motivating? What would help?

Differentiation

Advanced: Add a stretch goal — what additional savings rate would be needed to reach the goal in half the time? Support: Provide a pre-built savings timeline table.

Educator Tip

> *The goal of this activity is specificity. Generic "save money" intentions fail. Students who write "I want to save $1,200 for a laptop by December" and calculate the monthly amount needed are far more likely to follow through.*

Activity 8: Emergency Fund Math Challenge

Unit	Format	Time	Classroom Groups
Unit 3 — Saving & Emergency Funds	Hands-on	25 min	Small groups of 3–4

Emergency fund calculation, monthly essential expenses, 3–6 month rule

Overview

Students calculate the actual dollar amount of a 3-month emergency fund for a realistic post-high-school budget. The exercise reveals that an emergency fund is a specific, calculable number — not a vague financial concept.

Materials (class of 25–30)

- Essential expenses worksheet
- Sample budget scenario cards
- Calculator

Classroom Setup

1. Scenario: 20-year-old living on their own, working full time. Monthly essentials: rent $850, utilities $120, groceries $250, transportation $180, phone $45, health insurance $90
2. Students calculate total monthly essentials, then multiply by 3 and 6
3. Groups compare their answers and discuss which expenses they would include or exclude

Facilitation Notes

- Ask groups to define “essential” — what makes something an essential vs. a want?
- Common debate: is a streaming subscription essential? Is a gym membership?
- Have each group present their monthly essential number and justify one inclusion they debated

Whole-Class Debrief Questions

4. What is the difference between an emergency and an “I forgot this was coming” expense?
5. Where should an emergency fund be kept, and why does that matter?
6. If you can only save $75/month, how long does it take to build a 3-month emergency fund at this budget?

Differentiation

Advanced: Calculate how an emergency fund number changes with a roommate (split rent and utilities).
Support: Provide a pre-filled expenses list and have students only calculate totals.

Educator Tip

The most common student mistake is including wants in their essential expenses list. Gently challenge any item that is not truly non-negotiable. The discipline of defining “essential” is itself the lesson.

Activity 9: Credit Card Debt Calculator Duel

Unit	Format	Time	Classroom Groups
Unit 4 — Credit & Debt	Competitive	35 min	Pairs, class presents findings

Minimum payments, interest accumulation, payoff timeline

Overview

Two students receive the same credit card balance ($1,200 at 22% APR) and compete to find the most efficient payoff strategy. One pays minimum payments, the other tries different fixed monthly amounts. The gap between strategies — in time and total interest — is almost always shocking.

Materials (class of 25–30)

- Credit card payoff worksheet
- Calculator
- Interest calculation reference card

Classroom Setup

1. Both students start: $1,200 balance, 22% APR, $30 minimum payment
2. Student A calculates: how long to pay off at $30/month, total interest paid
3. Student B tries: $60/month, $100/month, and $200/month — calculates all three
4. Monthly interest formula: balance × (APR ÷ 12)

Facilitation Notes

- Walk through the first month together: $1,200 × 1.83% = $22 interest. $30 payment – $22 = $8 to principal
- Let students work through months independently or in groups
- After 15 minutes, share results: at $30/month, payoff takes 5+ years and costs $800+ in interest

Whole-Class Debrief Questions

5. What was the total interest cost at minimum payment? Does that surprise you?
6. What monthly payment cuts the payoff time in half?
7. At 22% APR, is there any investment that reliably beats the interest rate? What does this tell you about debt payoff as an investment?

Differentiation

Advanced: Add a second card with a different balance and rate. Introduce the debt avalanche and debt snowball strategies. Ask which one saves more money. Support: Provide a pre-built month-by-month table for the first 12 months and let students extend it.

Educator Tip

> *The minimum payment trap is the most important insight in Unit 4. Do not rush past the moment when students realize that $30/month on $1,200 takes 5+ years. Ask them to calculate how old they will be when the debt is paid off at minimum payments. Make it personal.*

Activity 10: Build Your Credit Score Plan

Unit	Format	Time	Classroom Groups
Unit 4 — Credit & Debt	Hands-on	30 min	Individual, then pair share

FICO factors, credit building ladder, authorized user strategy

Overview

Students receive a fictional credit profile with gaps and errors, identify the specific actions that would improve the score, and build a 12-month credit improvement plan. The exercise makes abstract FICO factors concrete and actionable.

Materials (class of 25–30)

- Sample credit profile cards (one per student)
- FICO factor reference sheet
- Credit action plan worksheet

Classroom Setup

1. Each student receives a different fictional credit profile: varies in payment history, utilization, age of accounts, and inquiries
2. Students identify the two biggest drags on the score
3. Students write three specific actions they would take in the next 12 months

Facilitation Notes

- Have students read their profile and estimate the score before revealing it
- After revealing, discuss: what surprised you about how high or low the score was?
- Pairs share their action plans and give each other feedback

Whole-Class Debrief Questions

4. Which FICO factor has the most impact, and which is hardest to change quickly?
5. Why is an authorized user strategy particularly valuable for someone starting with no credit history?
6. What is one thing you could do THIS WEEK to start building credit?

Differentiation

Advanced: Calculate the mortgage payment difference between the profile's current score and a 760+ score on a $250,000 loan. Support: Provide a color-coded FICO factor chart with examples of actions that help and hurt each factor.

Educator Tip

The most powerful moment is the mortgage calculation. When students see that a 100-point credit score difference costs $200+/month for 30 years, the abstract concept of credit becomes a very real financial number. Build this into the debrief.

Activity 11: Paycheck Surprise Game

Unit	Format	Time	Classroom Groups
Unit 5 — Taxes	Competitive	25 min	Teams of 3–4

Tax brackets, marginal vs. effective rate, W-4 withholding

Overview

Teams receive a series of income scenarios and must calculate the correct federal income tax owed using the current tax bracket structure. The team with the most accurate answers wins. The game reveals the difference between marginal and effective tax rates.

Materials (class of 25–30)

- Tax bracket reference card (current year)
- Income scenario cards
- Calculator
- Answer sheet

Classroom Setup

1. Provide current federal tax brackets for single filers
2. Scenarios: $12,000 / $28,000 / $45,000 / $68,000 gross income, all single filers with standard deduction
3. Teams calculate: taxable income, tax owed, effective tax rate, and take-home after taxes

Facilitation Notes

- Walk through the $12,000 scenario together — after standard deduction, taxable income is $0 (below the standard deduction)
- Let teams work independently on the remaining scenarios
- Teams compare answers — common error: applying the top bracket rate to all income

Whole-Class Debrief Questions

4. What is the difference between a marginal tax rate and an effective tax rate?
5. At $45,000, what percentage of your income actually goes to federal taxes?
6. Why might getting a raise into a higher bracket still be a good thing, even if some of your income is taxed at a higher rate?

Differentiation

Advanced: Add state income tax (use your actual state) and FICA to calculate true total tax burden and real take-home pay. Support: Provide a step-by-step tax calculation worksheet that walks through each bracket in sequence.

Educator Tip

> *The marginal vs. effective rate confusion is nearly universal. The most effective correction is a visual: draw the brackets as a staircase on the board and show how income fills each step from the bottom. The first $11,925 is ALWAYS taxed at 10% regardless of how high the total income goes.*

Activity 12: Tax Receipt Scavenger Hunt

Unit	Format	Time	Classroom Groups
Unit 5 — Taxes	Hands-on	30 min	Small groups of 3

Where taxes go, public goods, civic finance

Overview

Students calculate approximately how much of a $40,000 salary goes to specific government programs based on actual federal budget allocation percentages. The exercise connects abstract tax dollars to tangible services students use or benefit from.

Materials (class of 25–30)

- Federal budget allocation reference card
- Tax receipt worksheet
- Calculator

Classroom Setup

1. Federal allocation approximations (for classroom use): Social Security 22%, Medicare/Medicaid 25%, Defense 13%, Education 2%, Interest on debt 13%, Other 25%
2. Scenario: individual pays $4,200 in federal income taxes
3. Students calculate the dollar amount going to each category

Facilitation Notes

- Ask before revealing: what do you think is the largest category?
- After calculating, ask: what surprises you about where your taxes go?
- Connect to local taxes: what does your city's property tax fund?

Whole-Class Debrief Questions

4. If you could redirect $500 of your tax dollars to any category, where would it go and why?
5. What services do you personally use that are funded by taxes?
6. Why do some people pay more in taxes than others?

Differentiation

Advanced: Compare federal vs. state vs. local tax allocation and have students identify one service funded at each level. Support: Provide a pie chart showing budget categories and have students only calculate dollar amounts.

Educator Tip

The goal is not political debate but civic literacy. Keep the debrief focused on "what does this buy" rather than "is this good or bad." Students who understand where taxes go make more informed civic decisions.

Activity 13: Compound Interest Race

Unit	Format	Time	Classroom Groups
Unit 6 — Investing & Wealth Building	Competitive	30 min	Individual, class comparison

Compound interest, time vs. amount, Rule of 72

Overview

Each student is assigned a starting age (14, 17, 20, 25, or 30) and calculates the future value of $1,000 invested at 7% annually to age 65. The student whose starting age produces the highest value wins. The gap between the youngest and oldest starting age is the lesson.

Materials (class of 25–30)

- Compound interest calculation worksheet
- Calculator
- Future value reference table

Classroom Setup

1. Assign starting ages so you have students representing each: 14, 17, 20, 25, 30
2. Formula: FV = $1,000 × (1.07)^(65 – starting age)
3. Students also calculate using the Rule of 72: how many times does $1,000 double before age 65?

Facilitation Notes

- Have each starting age group calculate and stand up to share their result
- Arrange students by starting age and read results youngest to oldest
- The contrast between age 14 ($33,000+) and age 30 ($10,677) is the entire lesson

Whole-Class Debrief Questions

4. What is the dollar cost of waiting from age 14 to age 20 to invest $1,000?
5. If you cannot invest $1,000 right now, what is the smallest amount you could invest?
6. Using the Rule of 72 at 7%, how many doublings does the 14-year-old get vs. the 30-year-old?

Differentiation

Advanced: Calculate how much a 30-year-old would need to invest to match the 14-year-old's outcome. The answer reveals the true cost of waiting in terms of dollars required. Support: Provide a pre-built doubling table at 7% from age 14 to 65.

Educator Tip

The standing reveal — youngest to oldest — is more powerful than just sharing numbers on paper. The visual of the oldest student having a number less than a third of the youngest student's is memorable in a way a worksheet is not.

Activity 14: Index Fund vs. Stock Picker

Unit	Format	Time	Classroom Groups
Unit 6 — Investing & Wealth Building	Competitive	35 min	Two teams compete

Diversification, index funds, active vs. passive investing, expense ratios

Overview

Team A picks 5 individual stocks based on brand recognition. Team B invests the same amount in a total market index fund. Using the previous year's actual performance data, the class discovers which strategy won — and why the result is predictable over long periods.

Materials (class of 25–30)

- Stock performance data (prior calendar year — use actual returns)
- Portfolio tracking worksheet
- Index fund vs. individual stock comparison chart

Classroom Setup

1. Team A selects 5 companies they know and like (equal allocation, 20% each)
2. Team B selects the total market index fund (one holding, 100% allocation)
3. Both start with $1,000 and apply the prior year's actual performance data

Facilitation Notes

- Have Team A announce their picks and justify each choice
- Apply returns and calculate final portfolio values for both teams
- Discuss: what was Team A's best pick? Worst pick? How did diversification affect Team B's outcome?

Whole-Class Debrief Questions

4. Even if Team A wins this year, what does the research say about 10-year or 20-year performance of active vs. passive investing?
5. What is an expense ratio and how does a 1% difference affect a $10,000 investment over 30 years?
6. What is Warren Buffett's famous bet, and what does it tell us about index funds?

Differentiation

Advanced: Add a 0.03% (index) vs. 1.2% (active fund) expense ratio calculation over 30 years on $10,000. The dollar difference illustrates why fees matter more than most people realize. Support: Pre-calculate the index fund return and let stock-pickers focus only on their five picks.

Educator Tip

> *Use the actual prior year's data. Real numbers make the lesson credible. If it was a year where individual stocks happened to beat the index (it happens), use it as a teaching moment: "This happens sometimes. What does the evidence say over 20 years?"*

Activity 15: Financial Life Simulation

Unit	Format	Time	Classroom Groups
Unit 6 — Investing & Wealth Building	Simulation	60 min	Small groups of 4–5, full-period activity

All Units 1–6 integrated, long-term financial decision-making

Overview

The capstone simulation for Units 1–6. Students receive a life scenario card (job, salary, city, starting debt) and make sequential financial decisions across 10 simulated years. Net worth is tracked on a shared class leader board. The group with the highest net worth at year 10 wins.

Materials (class of 25–30)

- Life scenario cards (one per group)
- Decision event cards (shuffle deck)
- Net worth tracker worksheet
- Class leader board on whiteboard

Classroom Setup

1. Each group gets a scenario: job + starting salary + city + student loan amount (if any)
2. Each round = 2 years. Groups make 3 decisions per round: (1) housing choice, (2) savings rate, (3) investment allocation
3. After decisions, draw one event card: could be “promotion”, “car repair”, “medical bill”, “inheritance”, or “layoff”
4. Calculate net worth change. Update leader board.

Facilitation Notes

- Round 1 (Years 1–2): Focus on housing and emergency fund. Groups without an emergency fund pay double for event card expenses.
- Round 2 (Years 3–4): Introduce investment decisions. Groups that started investing in Round 1 show compound growth.
- Round 3 (Years 5–6): Credit decisions become relevant. Groups with high credit card debt pay interest drag.
- Rounds 4–5 (Years 7–10): Long-term compounding separates the groups dramatically.

Whole-Class Debrief Questions

5. What single decision in Round 1 had the biggest impact on your Year 10 net worth?
6. Which event card hurt the groups who had no emergency fund the most?
7. What would you do differently in Round 1 if you played again?

Differentiation

Advanced: Introduce tax implications for each investment decision. Groups that use Roth IRAs correctly show an advantage in later rounds. Support: Pre-fill the net worth calculation formula and let groups only make decisions.

Educator Tip

This activity works best as a full-period event, ideally on the last day of Unit 6. The leader board creates genuine competition and the "what would you do differently" debrief almost always leads students to say they would have started investing earlier and built the emergency fund first — which is exactly the lesson.

Activity 16: Crypto or Scam? — Critical Thinking Challenge

Unit	Format	Time	Classroom Groups
Unit 6 — Investing & Wealth Building	Competitive / Discussion	35 min	Teams of 3–4

Speculation vs. investing, pump-and-dump schemes, exchange risk, taxable events, influencer hype

Overview

Teams receive 6 real-world crypto scenario cards and must classify each as: (A) Reasonable speculation with known risks, (B) Classic scam or pump-and-dump, or (C) Red flag — more research needed. Teams score points for correct classifications and lose points for falling for scams. The winning team is not the one that made the most money — it is the one that avoided losing it. This reframe is the lesson.

Materials (class of 25–30)

- Scenario cards (6 per team, printed or on screen) — see scenarios below
- Classification cards: one set of A/B/C voting cards per team (index cards work)
- Whiteboard for class leader board
- Scoring sheet (2 points correct, -1 point for classifying a scam as legitimate)

The 6 Scenario Cards

Card 1: "A financial advisor recommends putting 5% of your investment portfolio in Bitcoin as a hedge against inflation. He shows you his CFP certification and a written disclosure of his fee structure." → Answer: A (Reasonable — licensed advisor, written disclosure, small allocation)

Card 2: "An influencer with 800K followers posts: 'I just bought $50K of MoonCoin. This is going 1000x. Link in bio — use my code for a bonus.'" → Answer: B (Classic pump-and-dump — influencer is almost certainly paid, urgency language, no financial basis)

Card 3: "A new crypto exchange offers 12% annual returns on deposited Bitcoin, guaranteed, with no risk to principal." → Answer: B (Scam — no legitimate investment guarantees returns; this mirrors the FTX/Celsius collapse model)

Card 4: "Your friend trades $200 of Bitcoin for Ethereum every time Bitcoin dips. He says it is not taxable because he never converts to dollars." → Answer: C (Red flag — crypto-to-crypto trades ARE taxable events; your friend has an undisclosed tax liability)

Card 5: "A publicly traded company adds Bitcoin to its balance sheet as a treasury reserve. The decision is announced in an SEC filing." → Answer: A (Reasonable — SEC-regulated, transparent, a legitimate corporate treasury decision with known risk)

Card 6: "A teen puts their entire $1,200 savings into a new cryptocurrency because their older brother made $500 on it last month." → Answer: B/C (Unacceptable risk — entire savings in a single speculative asset based on anecdote, no emergency fund, no diversification)

Classroom Setup

- Divide class into teams of 3–4. Each team gets a set of 6 scenario cards and A/B/C voting cards
- Teams discuss each scenario for 2 minutes, then all teams reveal their answer simultaneously
- Award points: +2 correct, 0 for C on a B scenario, -1 for answering A on a B scenario
- After each reveal, spend 1–2 minutes on the explanation before moving to the next card

Facilitation Notes

- Do not pre-teach the answers. Let teams reason through each scenario with what they already know from Lesson 6.6 reading
- Card 4 (taxable event) generates the most surprise. Linger here — most students assumed crypto-to-crypto was not taxable
- Card 6 often sparks debate — some students defend the decision because the brother made money. Use this to discuss survivor-ship bias: for every person who made $500, how many lost $500?
- The scoring penalty for classifying a scam as legitimate (-1 point) creates urgency around the critical thinking. Getting fooled has a cost — in the activity and in real life

Whole-Class Debrief Questions

- Which scenario was hardest to classify and why? What made it ambiguous?
- What is the difference between someone making money in crypto and crypto being a good investment? (Introduce survivor-ship bias if not already discussed)
- Before putting any money into crypto, what three questions should you be able to answer? (Correct order: emergency fund? Roth IRA? Index funds? — then and only then, maybe.)

Differentiation

Advanced: After the activity, have students write their own Card 7 — a new scenario that is genuinely ambiguous — and challenge another team to classify it. Support: Provide a one-page reference sheet with the three risk categories and key red flags before the activity begins.

Educator Tip

The most powerful moment of this activity is not the competition — it is the debrief after Card 6. Students who defend the teen's decision to put all $1,200 in crypto "because his brother made money" are experiencing survivor-ship bias in real time. Ask: if you only heard about the people who won, how would you know about the people who lost? That single question teaches more about financial decision-making than any worksheet.

Activity 17: Apartment Hunt — The Real Cost

Unit	Format	Time	Classroom Groups
Unit 7 —Housing & Insurance	Real Money Activity	45 min	Small groups of 3–4, devices required

Move-in costs, 30% rule, true housing affordability

Overview

Groups search real apartment listings online and calculate the true move-in cost and ongoing monthly cost for a realistic entry-level apartment in a target city. The shock of seeing true move-in cost (often $3,000–$5,000) creates a lasting anchor for housing financial planning.

Materials (class of 25–30)

- Device per group with internet access
- Apartment Hunt worksheet
- Income scenario cards
- Calculator

Classroom Setup

1. Educator assigns a target city (use your actual city or a nearby metro)
2. Each group receives an income card: Group A = $2,100/month take-home, Group B = $2,800/month, Group C = $3,400/month
3. Groups search Zillow, Apartments.com, or Craigslist for a 1-bedroom apartment they would realistically consider
4. Groups calculate: (1) maximum rent under the 30% rule, (2) true move-in cost including deposits and fees, (3) total monthly cost including utilities

Facilitation Notes

- Circulate and check that groups are applying the 30% rule to take-home (not gross) pay
- Ask Group A: “What is your maximum monthly rent?” ($630). Then ask: “Did you find a private apartment under $630?”
- The answer is almost always no — this leads to the roommate discussion
- Have each group present their apartment, true move-in cost, and whether it fits the 30% rule

Whole-Class Debrief Questions

5. Group A: what would you need to do to afford a private apartment in this city?
6. What is the difference between what the landlord advertises and what moving in actually costs?
7. If you needed to save your move-in cost in 12 months, how much would you need to set aside per month?

Differentiation

Advanced: Calculate the savings required for move-in AND a 3-month emergency fund simultaneously, at a $75/month savings rate. How long does it take? Support: Pre-identify 3 apartments from the target city and let groups choose from those rather than searching independently.

Educator Tip

The most powerful moment with Group A is the realization that the 30% rule means a $630 maximum rent on their income — and that private apartments in most US cities start at $800–$1,000+. This makes the roommate and geographic trade-off conversation real and urgent rather than theoretical.

Activity 18: Salary Negotiation Roleplay

Unit	Format	Time	Classroom Groups
Unit 8 — College, Career & Independence	Competitive Role play	30 min	Pairs, class observes select rounds

Salary research, negotiation scripts, total compensation, compounding impact of first salary

Overview

Student pairs role play a job offer negotiation. One student plays the candidate (who has researched market salary data), and one plays the hiring manager (who has a secret salary range). The candidate must counter the opening offer using one of three scripts from Lesson 8.5. The class observes selected rounds and debriefs on what worked.

Materials (class of 25–30)

- Job title cards (educator assigns)
- Candidate research sheet
- Employer script card (secret range)
- Negotiation script cards (3 options)
- Salary compounding calculator

Classroom Setup

1. Assign job titles: Registered Nurse, Software Developer, Elementary Teacher, Electrician, Marketing Coordinator
2. Candidates spend 10 minutes researching on BLS.gov — find the median wage for that role in your city
3. Employer card (secret): “Your authorized range is $X–$Y. Open at the lower end. You can go up by $1,000–$3,000 if they counter with specific data.”
4. Opening offer is set 5–10% below the midpoint of the authorized range

Facilitation Notes

- All pairs negotiate simultaneously for 10 minutes
- Select 2–3 pairs to redo their negotiation in front of the class
- After each observed round, class votes: did the candidate handle it effectively?
- Discuss: what made some counters stronger than others?

Whole-Class Debrief Questions

5. What was the hardest moment of the negotiation? (Almost always: making the counter-offer)
6. Calculate: if you accepted $2,500 less than you could have negotiated, and receive 3% annual raises, what is the total 10-year earnings difference?
7. What specifically did the strongest negotiators do differently than the weakest?

Differentiation

Advanced: Add a total compensation layer — the employer offers a signing bonus or extra PTO instead of raising base salary. Candidates must evaluate whether to accept. Support: Provide the three negotiation scripts as sentence starters on a card and let candidates choose which one to use.

Educator Tip

The debrief is more important than the role play itself. Ask: "What was the hardest moment?" The answer is almost always the counter-offer — the moment of actually saying a higher number out loud. Normalize that discomfort. Then calculate the 10-year compounding impact of a $2,500 negotiation. The number ($35,000–$50,000 in cumulative earnings) is the moment the lesson becomes real.