

SPECIAL REPORTS

JOHN STOSSEL IS AMERICA NUMBER ONE?

Subjects: Social Studies

Grade Levels: 9–12

Running Time: 41 minutes

INTRODUCTION

Born in 1947, John Stossel is a 1969 graduate of Princeton University, where he earned a BA in psychology. He started his journalism career as a researcher for a Portland, Oregon, television station. When ABC News first hired him, Stossel became the consumer editor on *Good Morning America*. He joined the ABC News show, *20/20*, in 1981 and rose to the role of co-anchor (with Barbara Walters) in 2003. (In 2004 Elizabeth Vargas replaced Barbara Walters, joining John Stossel at *20/20*'s anchor desk.)

Stossel began hosting his own one-hour specials in 1994. On these and on his *20/20* opinion segment called "Give Me a Break", he deals with topics ranging from economics to pop culture to politics to censorship to widely believed but unfounded fears. Stossel has received many honors for his work, including 19 Emmy Awards.

This program is divided into three segments. Students may view and discuss the segments separately or together. This guide provides sets of discussion questions and a worksheet to accompany each segment.

You might use this program as part of a social studies or language arts unit focussing on critical thinking, drawing conclusions, and identifying facts and opinions. Help students distinguish verifiable facts from opinions. If some students disagree with conclusions that are drawn, encourage them to articulate why. Ask them to do library and Internet research to back up their views. Help them find impartial sources and detect biased sources.

Also encourage students to use critical thinking to analyze their own "mindsets" in favor of—or against—various popularly held beliefs. Challenge them to ask themselves why they believe as they do. From whom have they learned their beliefs? From the news media? From family members and friends? From politicians? From books, TV shows, or movies? What evidence can they cite to support their opinions? What are their sources?



NEWS CLASSROOM

105 Terry Drive, Suite 120, Newtown, PA 18940
(800) 295-5010 • www.abcnewsclassroom.com

OBJECTIVES:

The student will:

- explore ethical, philosophical, sociological, and economic issues such as responsibilities and powers that the U.S. government—as opposed to individual Americans and private businesses—should reasonably possess;
- use critical thinking to detect faulty logic and distinguish between fact and opinion;
- determine whether to accept sources' opinions as valid, based on their credentials and the kinds of evidence they present;
- begin to develop the habits of mind that historians and scholars in the humanities and social sciences employ to study the past and its relationship to the present in the United States;
- begin to become informed, responsible and competent citizens in our participatory democracy;
- begin to understand and appreciate differences in historical, political, and economic perspectives, recognizing that people's experiences, societal values, and cultural traditions influence their viewpoints.

ON THE DVD:

Scene Selection

The DVD is divided into 5 chapters. This allows the user to show the whole program or to enter at different points in the program.

The educator's guide is set up so that the program can be viewed a few chapters at a time. Following each segment, there are discussion questions, as well as a student response sheet.

DVD chapter	approximate length	DVD chapter title
1	2 minutes	Introduction
2	3 minutes	How to Measure Success
3	10 minutes	How to Achieve Prosperity
4	6 minutes	Opportunity, Not Guarantees
5	4 minutes	Openess to New Ideas
6	8 minutes	Defining Poverty
7	3 minutes	Country Comparisons
8	4 minutes	Statistical Correlations

Also Available

Includes a segment from *Teaching Tools for Microeconomics from John Stossel* and another segment from *Teaching Tools for Macroeconomics, Government and International Trade from John Stossel*.

THE ENVIRONMENT FOR SUCCESS

DVD Chapters 1, 2 and 3 (15:00)

Use with Response Sheet #1

Introduction - Chapter 1 (2:00)

How to Measure Success? - Chapter 2 (3:00)

Concept: Culture

Perhaps the most neglected condition responsible for wealth is culture. Countries that protect individual rights and private property, and reward effort and ingenuity, create a culture where success is expected and encouraged. Countries that quash these characteristics rob humans of their incentives to succeed. History documents this all too well.

Concept: Freedom

If freedom is restricted, the government is left to determine output, production, and even job selection. Getting a job depends entirely on how loyal you are to the government, no matter how repressive it is, and someone else decides what occupation you will pursue.

Concept: Prosperity

Prosperity depends on the ability of people to be upwardly mobile. This means if you are born poor, you have the chance to move up, through hard work, intelligence and ingenuity.

Discussion Questions:

1. What do you think is the most important measure of success?
2. Which counts most, personal freedom or prosperity?

How to Achieve Prosperity - Chapter 3 (10:00)

Concept: Physical and human capital

Physical capital refers to factories, machines, transport vehicles, operating cash, etc. Human capital includes employees – from the custodian to the CEO. Human capital can be in the form of physical or mental abilities and effort. A good combination of these elements is necessary for prosperity.

Concept: Voluntary association

The right to make contracts or agreements with others is guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution. Voluntary association ensures that businesses treat their customers well. If they do not, customers take their business elsewhere. In a command economy, you must engage in business or make purchases as directed by the government.

Private charities are groups that are voluntarily joined or supported. Individuals decide to spend time on the problems in which they are interested. The diversity of people's interests ensures all problems will be treated in some fashion.

Discussion Questions:

1. Can wealth (jobs) be protected by government?
2. How does the rule of law contribute to wealth creation?
3. Are freedom and democracy the same thing?
4. Do overpopulation and lack of resources correlate with poverty?

RESULTS MAY VARY

DVD Chapters 4 and 5 (10:00)

Use with Response Sheet #2

Opportunity, Not Guarantees - Chapter (6:00)

Concept: Risk taking

Entrepreneurs are people who take risks in business situations with the hope that the risk will be rewarded. The key is to balance the amount of risk with the likelihood of the expected reward.

Concept: Upward mobility

Upward mobility refers to the ability of an individual to "move up" in the economic system, i.e., to make more money and move from "lower class" to "middle class," etc. Upward mobility is directly linked to freedom.

Discussion:

1. Define entrepreneur.
2. Does it help to limit how many hours a week they can work?
3. To which country do most emigrants wish to go?
4. Why do some people in the U.S. disagree with the woman from Jamaica?
5. Why do immigrants often do better financially than native-born Americans?

Openness to New Ideas - Chapter (4:00)

Concept: Personal freedom

To guarantee personal freedom is to guarantee that every interest and idea under the sun will eventually be pursued. Many things have been brought to market because someone solved a personal problem or promoted a personal passion; from this, we all benefit.

Concept: Community standards

Government attempts to balance personal freedoms with community standards. Your freedom ends where your neighbor's begins. Sometimes this works well, such as in preventing your neighbor from starting a pig farm in his suburban back yard. Sometimes this wastes your tax dollars "helping the community;" for example the U.S.D.A. actually produced a document entitled "How to Buy Dairy Products" (www.ams.usda.gov/howtobuy/dairy.pdf), and has mandated that the size of holes in Swiss cheese be changed from 11/16" to 3/8".

Discussion Questions:

1. Does freedom give you the right to offend someone else? To hurt them? To take their property?
2. Can you think of a rule that, if followed by everyone, would prevent this kind of abuse of freedom?
3. Can innovation occur without personal freedom?



IS IT ARROGANCE?

DVD Chapters 6, 7 and 8 (15:00)

Use with Response Sheet #3

Defining Poverty - Chapter 6 (8:00)

Concept: Real and in-kind income

Real income is your cash income measured after accounting for inflation. In-kind income is neither cash nor equities, but things like property, food, clothing, etc. In evaluating wealth and poverty, one must look not only at bank accounts, but in-kind income. A surprising amount of most people's net worth is in their in-kind income.

Concept: Relative standards

Standards of wealth are relative to what you are used to. With free trade we find that people all over the world will do the same work we have done for much less money. Everyone aspires to do better, but better is defined by one's current standard of living.

Discussion Questions:

1. How does being poor in America compare with being poor in the rest of the world?
2. If your income is low, but you have all the modern conveniences, are you poor?

Country Comparisons - Chapter 7 (3:00)

Concept: Productivity

Productivity can be measured many ways, e.g., output, units per hour, gross domestic product, etc. Economists can rank which country's workers are the most productive (America's are consistently ranked among the highest, if not the highest).

Concept: Job creation

While politicians love to claim credit for "job creation," the real credit goes to entrepreneurs who expand their businesses and hire new workers. Job creation is always a sign of a healthy and free economy.

Concept: Unemployment

Unemployment results when companies are poorly managed or their products or services are out of date and not desired. Rising unemployment is not always a sign of a bad or weak economy. "Downsizing," while never fun if it happens to you, is often a sign that corporations are sharpening their productivity – doing the same job with fewer workers – which ultimately strengthens the economy. Unemployed workers must seek other jobs, but with a growing economy many new and often better jobs are being created.

Discussion Questions:

1. Why do people risk their lives to come to the U.S.?
2. Why do people seem to work harder in the U.S.?
3. Which do you value more, freedom or safety?

Statistical Correlations - Chapter 8 (4:00)

Compare the examples given in the film: New York, Hong Kong, and India. Where would you rather live? Which one has higher productivity, job creation and standard of living?

While 13 percent of Americans live below the poverty line, 66 percent of them have air conditioning, 99 percent have televisions, and 20 percent have automobiles. It is difficult to compare poor Americans with Indians living in a sewer pipe.

Discussion Questions:

1. What do the countries with the most wealth have in common?
2. As a case study, what has happened to the economies of Eastern European countries since regaining their freedom from Soviet rule?



(Discuss after watching Chapter 1 – Introduction, Chapter 2 – How to Measure Success, and Chapter 3 – How to Achieve Prosperity.)

1. How should we define poverty? Does it matter how we plan to use the definition?
2. Why do people in richer countries live longer?
3. Do you think people who live in rich countries are happier than people who live in poor countries? What kind of evidence could help settle this question?
4. How does the video refute the assertion that India's poverty stems from its population density? Do you find the refutation convincing? What additional evidence could you gather to help settle this question?
5. The video argues that a lack of natural resources cannot explain why India is poor – because Hong Kong was nothing but a big rock, and it became rich. Do you agree or disagree with this argument? What additional evidence might convince you that this argument is correct? What additional evidence might convince you that it is incorrect?

RESPONSE SHEET #2

(Discuss after watching Chapter 4 – Opportunity, Not Guarantees and Chapter 5 – Openness to New Ideas.)

Use these questions as a starting point for discussion and further research. Also jot down any questions that come into your mind as you view the show.

1. What is the difference between freedom and democracy?
2. Segment 2 opens with John Stossel saying, "Even if you don't think America is the best country in the world, you can't quarrel with America's performance at creating opportunity." Do you accept this? Why? Why not?
3. On a scale of 1-10, where would you rate America's openness to new ideas? To immigrants?
4. List some government regulations. What are their benefits? What are their costs?
5. In one of the exchanges between Stossel and Tom Palmer they discuss "one seemingly worker-friendly (French) law (that) actually says workers may not work more than thirty-five hours a week." How could this law not be worker friendly? List several American laws passed with the intent of protecting workers. What are the benefits? What are the costs?

(Discuss after watching Chapter 6 – Defining Poverty, Chapter 7 – Country Comparisons and Chapter 8 – Statistical Correlations)

1. Why do countries with more economic freedom grow faster? Why do those with less economic freedom grow more slowly?

2. The restaurant owner, Malik Amstead, claims that you can triumph over the racial and ethnic prejudice in America. Do you agree or disagree? Why?

3. Do high taxes encourage or discourage inventiveness? How?

4. Dinesh D'Souza argues that people voting with their feet is powerful testimony relative to desirable places to live. Do you agree with his analysis? Explain the basis of your argument.

5. Is it arrogant to assert that America is Number One? Why? Why not?

FINAL RESPONSE SHEET

(Discuss after watching all eight chapters.)

Use these questions as a starting point for discussion and further research. Also jot down any questions that come into your mind as you view the show.

1. What issues raised in the video have implications for government policies? Are any of the issues not related to government policies? Explain your answers.
2. What evidence does the video cite to support its claims? What other evidence might support or contradict those claims?
3. What other evidence can you find – besides the evidence in the video and in this study guide – that either supports or contradicts the claims in the video and study guide?
4. You have seen a good deal of evidence and heard testimony from a variety of witnesses. Where do you now rank America? Is America Number One?

SPECIAL REPORTS

JOHN STOSSEL IS AMERICA NUMBER ONE?

SPECIAL THANKS

ABCNEWS Classroom acknowledges In The Classroom Media for its development of classroom materials for this title.

In The Classroom Media

1502 Powell Avenue
Erie, PA 16505

www.intheclassroom.org

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Visit www.abcnewsclassroom.com.



NEWS CLASSROOM

105 Terry Drive, Suite 120, Newtown, PA 18940
(800) 295-5010 • www.abcnewsclassroom.com