

Background information

In 2007 the United Nations reported that nearly one billion people lived in slums and that this number was likely to double in the next 30 years.



© 2010 Alex E. Proimos <http://www.flickr.com/photos/proimos/4292843430/in/photostream/>

The Medina of Fez, Morocco.

Two thoughts:

- Are slums places of hope or of despair?
- The use of the term 'slum' says more about the speaker than it does about the listener. 'Slum' is an emotive word. Should we refer to them as 'low-income communities', 'informal settlements', 'squatter colonies' or 'shantytowns'? Should we use the country specific names e.g. 'bustee', 'bidonville', 'favella', 'barrio' or 'kampong', etc?

Chance cards



<p>You have built your slum next to a river. After heavy monsoon rains your slum has flooded and been destroyed.</p> <p>Move to another area and start again.</p>	<p>The government has agreed to make your slum more permanent and has connected you to both the water and the electricity supply.</p>	<p>Along with other newcomers to the city, you built your slum on illegal land. It has now been bulldozed to the ground.</p> <p>Move to a new site and start again.</p>
<p>As part of a self-help scheme, you have received free building materials to make your home more stable.</p> <p>Ask the government official (teacher) for a pair of scissors and some additional sellotape.</p>	<p>The land you have built on has been sold to a property developer because, being in central Mumbai, it has high value.</p> <p>You have to move to a new area immediately and start again.</p>	<p>The local government has offered free building materials for any newcomers to Mumbai.</p> <p>Go and collect these from the government official (teacher).</p>
<p>A fire breaks out in the slum area that you have built in. Due to the materials used, all slums have been burnt to the ground.</p> <p>Move to another area and start again.</p>	<p>The government has awarded you ownership of the land you have built on.</p> <p>You now own the property you have built.</p>	<p>Due to overcrowding and unsatisfactory sanitation, cholera spreads rapidly through your slum.</p> <p>You move to a new area taking whatever materials you can so that your family is protected.</p>

Teaching notes

Slums are universally assumed to be the worst places for people to live in. However, for many of their inhabitants, slums are seen as the stepping stone between rural poverty and a considerably better life in the city in the near future.

Starter activity

Ask students to write down what they think living in a slum would be like. Students may well have seen the film *Slumdog Millionaire*, filmed partly in the Dharavi slum in Mumbai and this could be used if required. Alternatively the first three minutes of an excellent audio clip downloadable at <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/counterpoint/slums-of-despair-or-hope-3137144> could provide an introduction. The full clip lasts nine minutes.

Main activity: Build your own slum

1. Students are placed in groups of three or four maximum.
2. Explain that each group represents a family which has just arrived in Mumbai (or any other city experiencing rapid urbanisation) from the surrounding countryside.
3. Ask them what their first priority is (i.e. to find somewhere to live). Stress that they don't know anyone and they have very little in terms of money. Therefore they decide to build a makeshift home until they can afford something better.
4. When directed by the teacher, one person from each group must come to the rubbish tip (at the front of the class) and pick one piece of rubbish to help start building their home. At appropriate intervals, another person from each family must come to the rubbish tip until every family member has visited it two or three times.
5. Allow each group to have three strips of sellotape at the beginning of the game but nothing else.
6. At the end of the activity, each family must present their slum to the rest of the group. The most creative and imaginative use of materials (and of course the sturdiest structure) will win.

Note to teachers

In the weeks leading up to this session I collect bits of cardboard, empty milk cartons, cereal packets, bubble wrap, etc. in a black bin liner which will act as the rubbish tip / landfill site. Obviously nothing dangerous or sharp should be included!

Chance cards

As the activity progresses, families are allowed to pick a chance card. This may help in their task of building a shanty settlement or it may well hinder it but regardless they must follow the instructions given. The chance cards reflect real life scenarios that newly arrived inhabitants in any city may be faced with and will allow students to appreciate the difficulties and hardships which come with living in a shanty settlement. It might be worth arranging the chance cards in numbered laminated sets prior to the lesson.

Conclusion

At the end of the session, ask students what they have learnt from the experience.

- Have their thoughts and attitudes towards squatter settlements changed from the start of the lesson?
- What skills did they need to build their squatter settlements?
- What do they feel about the slum they created? (Hopefully the word 'pride' will appear a lot at this point.)