



# Leave the Cooking to Me

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## Lesson Overview

*Leave the Cooking to Me* is a humorous yet touching story of a young girl's responsibility to get meals on the table for her single parent mother and her little sister. Shirley Merton decides to take this daily chore a step further. Without her mother's knowledge, Shirley, a.k.a. Vanessa, opens her own catering business. Her enthusiasm for her new job keeps her from becoming discouraged when she is faced with the many problems and decisions that go along with being an entrepreneur.

### Key Economic Concepts

Entrepreneur  
Opportunity Cost  
Human Capital  
Profit

Productive Resources  
Human Resources  
Specialization  
Costs

### Materials

Handouts 1 and 2



## Teaching Procedure

1. Before reading *Leave the Cooking to Me*, define and discuss the following economic concepts: **entrepreneur**, **opportunity cost**, **productive resources**, **human capital**, **specialization**, **costs**, and **profit**.
2. To introduce the book, ask the students to identify typical summer jobs for students. Have students share their own job experiences. Discuss good and bad points about typical summer jobs.
3. Read *Leave the Cooking to Me*.
4. List and discuss the different problems and decisions that Shirley faced in her catering business. Discuss the creative things she did to be successful.
5. Complete and discuss Handout 1. Work individually or in groups.
6. Work in small groups. Tell students to form a catering business. They must decide on a name for their business, devise a menu with appropriate **prices**, and develop a **marketing strategy**. Use Handout 2.



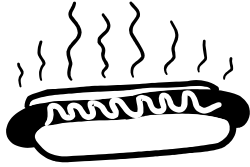
## Key Questions To Ask Students

1. How did “Vanessa” get involved in the catering business? *(She helped a friend’s mother put on a dinner party.)*
2. What was Vanessa’s **opportunity cost** when she decided to go into business for herself? *(She gave up time with her friends, working for someone else, and much of her free time.)*
3. What **productive resources** did Vanessa need to operate her business? *(human resources – herself and her friends, capital resources – cooking equipment, oven, car, etc.; natural resources – water, land, raw materials)*
4. What **human capital** (special skills and training) did Vanessa have? *(She was a gifted cook, a good organizer, and a quick thinker.)*
5. To be successful, Vanessa had to depend on other people or other producers. Give examples of this **interdependence**. *(Examples – friends being there for work, her own health, a car and gas for transportation, the grocery having all the ingredients, etc.)*
6. Every business must hire **human resources (labor)**. Do businesses want to hire more labor? What are some potential problems when dealing with human resources? *(Businesses want to hire the labor they need to produce, but no more. There are many problems – absenteeism, lack of effort, poor skills, quitting at the last minute, etc.)*
7. Vanessa tried to earn a **profit**. What is profit? Do you think she was successful? *(Profit is the money that is left after subtracting all costs. She was probably successful since she had so much business and wanted to keep it going.)*



## Follow-Up Activities

1. *Yellow Pages:* Using the phone book’s yellow pages, list the different types of catering services in your town.
2. *Classroom Visitor:* Have a local caterer come to the class to discuss the different aspects of the catering business.
3. *Create an Ad:* Design an advertisement for your own catering service that could be placed in the yellow pages.
4. *Serve Lunch!:* Ask the cafeteria supervisor if your class can help serve in the lunch room one day a week for a month.



## Handout 1

# Business Basics!

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1. **Human Resources:** Every business needs human resources (labor). You are interested in starting a concession stand at the elementary basketball games. What kinds of human resources would you need to hire for your business? What skills (**human capital**) would they need?
- 2.
3. **Interdependence:** You are the owner of a local taco restaurant. Who are some of the people and businesses you must depend on for your own business to be successful?
4. **Profit:** Your school economics club runs a snow cone business each Friday. You sell your snow cones for \$ .50 each. Your school has 650 students, teachers, and staff. Estimate how much profit you think your business could make in one month.
- 5.
6. **Wages:** What factors must the owner of a business consider when deciding how much to pay a new employee? Do businesses want to hire employees? Explain.

