



# History: History and Wealth (High School)

## What if history were about different types of wealth and poverty?

Emily had difficulty getting her high school history class to see beyond the material poverty of the Middle Ages and see the riches they had in terms of values, faith, and culture.

"I decided to make recognizing different types of wealth a fundamental part of the unit, so I included it in my planning as one of the objectives. I shared the objectives with the students as usual.

"We started by brainstorming with the words 'wealth' and 'poverty'. I then asked students to list different types of wealth, and gave some examples to get them started. We put the results up on the display as a reminder to look for different types of wealth and poverty in medieval life as the unit progressed. Each week, we looked at our list and commented on what we had been studying in light of it. We added to the list as the unit developed. New aspects of wealth and poverty were suggested as we discovered more about the period, such as poverty of power and material wealth but riches of skill and faith.

"This way of approaching the subject enabled the students to learn from the past as we had consciously expanded our ideas of wealth and poverty before we started. At the end of the unit, we drew together what we thought were the wealth and poverty of the period. We then reflected on the poverty and wealth of our own times, and what the medieval period had to say to us."

## What's going on here?

Emily saw cultures of the past as something her students could learn from if only they could approach them with humility instead of superiority.

She engaged students in progressively extending their understanding and rethinking their views of medieval culture, with regular reminders to focus their

attention. She emphasized learning from it as well as learning about it.

She reshaped her practice by including the new emphasis in her planning and objectives, making students' existing assumptions explicit. She provided key words as a focus (brainstorming), and also used lists, displays, discussions, and reminders to sustain the focus.

## What does this have to do with faith, hope, and love?

There is often within modern Western culture an assumption of present superiority: now is superior to the past, material poverty counts more than other types of poverty, and technological and material advances are what matter. The Bible, in contrast, recognizes a variety of wealth: wealth in terms of relationships, wisdom, faith, love, good deeds, and one's relationship with God (Proverbs 16:16; James 2:5; Psalms 145:8; 1 Timothy 6:18; Luke 12:21). Stopping to consider other types of wealth and poverty involves humility as it concedes that another culture might have something important to say to us.

## What difference does it make?

Emily raised her students' awareness of different types of poverty and wealth, which enabled them to critique and appreciate a range of cultures, including their own.

## Where could we go from here?

Different types of wealth and poverty could be highlighted in other parts of the curriculum (e.g., design and technology, and geography).

## Digging deeper

Superior attitudes to the past can make it difficult for us to learn from historical cultures and leave us unable to critique our own. Humility is essential if we are to learn from

others. Humility makes us teachable; for this reason St. Augustine, when asked what he thought were the three greatest virtues, replied: "Humility, humility, humility."

Humility is not groveling self-abasement, but it is the opposite of pride and arrogance ([Proverbs 16:18](#); [Ephesians 4:1-2](#)). It is not being untruthful about our abilities. Humility involves trust; if we don't inappropriately draw attention to ourselves by boasting, we have to trust that others will notice and encourage us. True humility is a generous attitude of mind that values others and sees oneself realistically. Jesus modeled humility throughout his life ([Philippians 2:5-6](#)).

The Bible does not decry material wealth as bad in itself. It can be a blessing to enjoy, but it carries responsibility with it, and it must be justly gained ([Deuteronomy 16:17](#)). Wealth that is not justly gained or shared just creates another form of poverty: spiritual poverty ([Luke 12:16-21](#)). The Bible combines concern for the materially poor with a concern for those who are spiritually poor. Everyone needs God. Too often, wealth can create the illusion of power and security, but it is only an illusion; riches cannot be trusted ([Luke 12:16-21](#)). Some wealthy, powerful people do not see their need of God, which makes it extremely hard for them to enter a relationship with him ([Matthew 19:24](#)).



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