Broken Window Fallacy: Lesson Plan

Topic
The broken window fallacy is an argument that assumes destruction and the subsequent repairs create a net benefit for society. This is a fallacy because it ignores lost opportunity costs or otherwise unseen factors because they are not readily obvious.

Possible subjects/classes | Time needed
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Economics, English, Debate, Public Speaking, Government | 30-45 minutes

Video link:
https://academy4sc.org/topic/broken-window-fallacy-the-cracks-of-economic-destruction

Objective: What will students know/be able to do at the end of class?
Students will be able to...
- Define the broken window fallacy.
- Articulate the flaws behind the belief that destruction is good for the economy.
- Identify hidden or otherwise obscure costs and consequences of an action.

Key Concepts & Vocabulary
Logical fallacy, opportunity cost

Materials Needed
Worksheet

Before you watch
Quick debate: Is war good for the economy? Split the class into two groups and assign one side of the argument to each group. Give them five minutes to design
an argument and then have a short back and forth debate. If students on the “yes” side are stuck, help them by asking them to consider the job market, the potential destruction and recovery of wars, etc.

While you watch

Answer questions 1-6 on the Worksheet

After you watch/discussion questions

1. Can destruction be purely beneficial to an individual party? Explain and, if appropriate to do so, provide an example.
2. Can we thus say destruction is beneficial to the economy? Why or why not?
3. If you spend time, money, and effort on repairing something, do you lose anything? Explain, and if appropriate to do so, provide an example.

Activity Ideas

● Have students complete the Worksheet and discuss answers in groups or as a class.
● Go back to the intro activity question about war. Ask students how they would argue against someone who believes that war is good for the economy, or maybe who personally benefits because they work in an industry that makes weapons or military equipment.

Sources/places to learn more

1. Bastiat, Frédéric. *That Which Is Seen, and That Which Is Not Seen* [original French: *Ce qu'on voit et ce qu'on ne voit pas*]. 1850, trans Patrick James Stirling.