

Minimum Wage



Pre-Reading

A. Warm-Up Questions

1. What is the lowest amount of money (per hour) that people can legally earn in your native country?
2. Which types of jobs offer minimum wage?
3. Do you agree with the concept of minimum wage? Why or why not?

B. Vocabulary Preview

Match up as many words and meanings as you can.

Check this exercise again after seeing the words in context on page 2.

- | | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| ___ 1. get by | a) not likely to happen |
| ___ 2. merely | b) to hire temporary workers outside of a company |
| ___ 3. outsource | c) to have just enough money to pay the bills and live off of |
| ___ 4. desperate | d) in great need of resources |
| ___ 5. think twice | e) to consider the consequences of one's actions |
| ___ 6. get a foot in the door | f) just barely |
| ___ 7. overqualified | g) to have more than the necessary skills or education for a job |
| ___ 8. disposable income | h) to get an entry-level position or opportunity that could lead to something better |
| ___ 9. within one's grasp | i) money that is not already designated to pay for living expenses and bills |
| ___ 10. unrealistic | j) possible, achievable |

Reading

MINIMUM WAGE

Is it enough to make life worth living?

1. Minimum wage is the lowest amount of money an employer is legally allowed to pay an employee. The hourly rate or yearly salary differs in every country. In some countries, minimum wage is enough for people to **get by**. In other nations, minimum wage allows people to **merely** survive.
2. Some people argue that increasing the rate of minimum wage can actually lead to job loss. If forced to pay more, employers may choose to maintain a smaller workforce. They may also **outsource** work from countries where people are more **desperate** and will accept lower wages.
3. Businesses aren't the only ones to blame. Our purchasing habits help keep minimum wage low. Most people don't **think twice** about where cheap clothing and goods are manufactured. Would you be willing to pay more for products if you knew workers were being paid a fair wage to make them?
4. Many students and teens take minimum wage jobs in order to **get a foot in the door**. After they graduate, many students are **overqualified** for these jobs, but they have to start at the bottom. Young people can't contribute much to the economy if they have no **disposable income**. Is spending more really the answer, though? What would happen if everyone in the world had a bit more spending money?
5. Minimum wage in some countries is so low that it traps people in poverty. Some people think putting an end to world poverty is **within our grasp**. Would an "international minimum wage" help us reach this goal? Many economists argue that this is an **unrealistic** idea. Anything that is "universal" is very difficult to enforce. Would you bother getting an education if a minimum wage job let you live comfortably?

"People will, indeed, work all day for two dollars if that is their only option."

—Nolan Hamilton, Gawker.com

Comprehension

Discuss these questions in pairs, and write the answers below.

1. Provide a definition for “minimum wage.” Use your own words.

2. How could increasing the rate of minimum wage also increase unemployment?

3. What does the reading say about consumer habits?

4. Why is it difficult for young people to help grow the economy?

5. Why might an international minimum wage not be ideal?

Vocabulary Review

A. Chunking

Create five words or expressions by pairing the words that are commonly found together in English. Write a sentence for each example.

Word List

- put an
- reach a
- end to
- grasp
- income
- get one's
- disposable
- within our
- goal
- foot in the door

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

B. Complete the Sentences

Complete the sentences using vocabulary from page 1. You may need to change the word forms.

1. I wasn't trying to start a fight. I was _____ telling you how I felt.
2. The newlyweds are barely _____ by. They only have enough money for groceries and rent.
3. A peaceful community is _____. It would help if we all got to know each other.
4. The big banks _____ work from India. This leaves local people unemployed.
5. You should _____ before you hire that painter. She has a criminal record.

Discussion

1. Does minimum wage give employers the right to pay people less than they deserve?
2. Do you agree with the practice of having different minimum wage rates in a single country (based on age, type of job, etc.)?
3. Does raising the price of low-skilled labor reduce the demand for it?
4. Do you usually save or spend your disposable income? If you spend it, do you like to buy things you consume immediately or experiences you can remember for years to come?



Critical Thinking

Should postsecondary students who are investing in their education receive a higher minimum wage than adults who do not enroll in school?

Listening

Fill in the blanks as you listen to the recording.

MINIMUM WAGE

Is it enough to make life worth living?

1. Minimum wage is the lowest amount of money an employer is legally allowed to pay an employee. The hourly rate or yearly salary differs in every country. In some countries, minimum wage is enough for people to _____. In other nations, minimum wage allows people to _____ survive.
2. Some people argue that increasing the rate of minimum wage can actually lead to job loss. If forced to pay more, employers may choose to maintain a smaller workforce. They may also _____ work from countries where people are more _____ and will accept lower wages.
3. Businesses aren't the only ones to blame. Our purchasing habits help keep minimum wage low. Most people don't _____ about where cheap clothing and goods are manufactured. Would you be willing to pay more for products if you knew workers were being paid a fair wage to make them?
4. Many students and teens take minimum wage jobs in order to _____. After they graduate, many students are _____ for these jobs, but they have to start at the bottom. Young people can't contribute much to the economy if they have no _____ income. Is spending more really the answer, though? What would happen if everyone in the world had a bit more spending money?
5. Minimum wage in some countries is so low that it traps people in poverty. Some people think putting an end to world poverty is within our _____. Would an "international minimum wage" help us reach this goal? Many economists argue that this is an _____ idea. Anything that is "universal" is very difficult to enforce. Would you bother getting an education if a minimum wage job let you live comfortably?

Answer Key

LESSON DESCRIPTION:

In this lesson, students read about minimum wage. The lesson includes vocabulary review exercises, comprehension questions, and discussion questions.

TEACHING TIPS:

See *Discussion Starters Teaching Guide* (<https://esllibrary.com/courses/72/lessons/>) for a variety of ways to use the reading.

LEVEL: Int – Adv

TIME: 1.5–2 hours

TAGS: discussion, business, economy, minimum wage, poverty

Pre-Reading

A. WARM-UP QUESTIONS

Answers will vary. Discuss in pairs, in small groups, or as a class.

B. VOCABULARY PREVIEW

- | | | | | |
|-------|------|------|------|-------|
| 1. c* | 3. b | 5. e | 7. g | 9. j |
| 2. f | 4. d | 6. h | 8. i | 10. a |

*Explain to your students that “get by” has a few other meanings besides *to manage financially*.

It can also mean *to get past an obstacle*.

- Excuse me, can you please move your cart? I need to get by.

It can also mean *to not get noticed*:

- We got by the security. They didn’t even notice us.

Reading (and/or Listening)

Read individually, in small groups, or as a class. Discuss the quote. You can also play the listening as your students read along. A gap-fill version of the reading is available on page 6. Help your students with vocabulary and expressions that they are unfamiliar with.

Comprehension

- Minimum wage is defined as the lowest amount of money a business or organization can pay its workers.
- Increasing the rate of minimum wage can cause businesses to reduce or outsource their workforce.
- The reading says that consumers help keep minimum wage low by buying products made by people who receive very low wages.
- It is difficult for young people to help grow the economy because they don’t have much disposable income.
- Some economists think that an international minimum wage is not the answer to world poverty because it would be difficult to enforce.

(continued on the next page...)

Answer Key cont.

Vocabulary Review

A. CHUNKING

Answers will vary for sentences.

1. put an end to
2. reach a goal
3. within our grasp
4. disposable income
5. get one's foot in the door

B. COMPLETE THE SENTENCES

1. merely
2. getting
3. within
our grasp
4. outsource
5. think twice

Discussion

Answers will vary. Place students in pairs or small groups.

Critical Thinking

Answers will vary. Place students in pairs or small groups.

Listening

1. get by, merely
2. outsource, desperate
3. think twice
4. get a foot in the door, overqualified, disposable
5. grasp, unrealistic

SPELLING NOTE:

This lesson shows the American spelling of the words *Labor* and *Postsecondary*. Most other English-speaking countries spell these words this way: *Labour* and *Post-secondary*. Make it a challenge for your students to find these words in the text and see if they know the alternate spellings.