

Bell Ringers: Mini-Lessons with a Hook

An integral part of any successful classroom lesson is to get students engaged with a “hook.” A thought-provoking question, quote, or an activity involving movement can often serve not only as an effective transition from one topic to another but also as a way to pique students’ interest in what will come next. The Atlanta Fed has developed a series of short *Bell Ringers* on topics in economics and personal finance that provide both students and teachers with new ways to look at these topics and refresh the teaching of familiar themes. These mini-lessons can be used in their entirety during the start of a class period or with the written activities assigned outside of the classroom for practice. Here’s a look at the topics so far.

Am I a risk taker?

In the [Life Is Risky Business](#) *Bell Ringer*, students look at their own lives and see there are risks they face every day. In assessing risk and understanding that people differ in their approach to risk, this activity serves as an introduction to the topic of insurance and how it is used to mitigate risk.

Which movie is number one at the box office?

In the [Real versus Nominal Values: Let’s Go to the Movies!](#) activity, students use a movie price index to discover the difference between real and nominal values. What movie is really the number one box office sales winner when adjusted for inflation? No, it didn’t feature an alien, superhero, sinking ship, or Jedis, just a feisty young woman named Scarlett.

Breaking the ice with economics

The [Economic Theme Bingo activity](#) puts a twist on the familiar first-day icebreaker activity of filling out a bingo chart with the names of students who meet certain characteristics. Instead of searching for classmates who have a dog or who drive a blue car, students learn about the economic themes of scarcity, interdependence, incentives, and gains from trade by finding peers who have illustrated these themes through choices they have made, such as trading fruit for candy at lunch or studying instead of playing video games.

Does Bill Gates have a lot of money?

Of course, he’s the richest man in the United States! Not so fast—while he may be rich, there is a difference between money and wealth. By calculating a “shopping list” for Gates (his fortune could buy over 42 million two-liter sodas, for instance), students learn the definitions of money, wealth, and net worth and also compare this number to the level of the national debt in this [money-themed Bell Ringer](#).

Public debt: a blessing or danger?

One Founding Father declared that debt could be a national blessing, another decried it as the greatest of dangers. Recent presidents have defended their contributions to our growing national debt for a variety of reasons. By examining current debt levels, matching quotes about the debt with their



originators, and completing a debt timeline for the statesmen, this [debt mini-lesson](#) teaches the hows and whys of public debt creation.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. on trade

This [international trade activity](#) looks local, beginning with a quote from Dr. King that connects your breakfast table to the interdependency created by world trade and its link to world peace. Students look at information from the Southeast's leading industries as well as world trade figures to determine who our top trading partners are in terms of trade value. The answers may be a bit surprising, especially for the Southeast; cotton and citrus have long been replaced by aircraft, automobiles, and oil as leading sectors in the 21st-century economy.

Who are your student entrepreneurs?

Get your students moving with this [Characteristics of the Entrepreneur](#) four corners activity. Students will choose a corner in the room that coincides with how they respond when given a variety of situations. Their choices are then scored to give them an idea of how well they match the characteristics of successful entrepreneurs.

What are college athletes wearing?

Do you have Southeastern Conference (SEC) sports fans in your class? Are some of your students passionate about the sports apparel brand they wear? If so, start a conversation about market power with this [SEC football activity](#) regarding the economics of the sport apparel industry.

What would you do with \$1,000?

Teach students about saving and investing with the [Risk and Return Grab Bag activity](#). Given a hypothetical \$1,000 to invest for 10 years, students make a choice about where to put their money among a variety of saving and investment choices. When interest rates and overall returns are revealed, they discover if they have made the right choice, prompting a discussion on risk and return.

With *Bell Ringers*, you can ring in the new grading period with fresh lessons and activities in economics and personal finance—[be on the lookout](#) for more topics to come!