



# CLASS 1

## The Fruits of Fairness

From *United for a Fair Economy's The Activist Cookbook: Creative Actions for a Fair Economy, 1997.*

### MATERIALS NEEDED

Ten sturdy chairs, student activity handout, a few calculators

### CLASSROOM NARRATIVE

**INTRODUCTION:** We're getting started today on an important unit, one I hope will help you learn about things that will be important for the rest of your lives. You'll learn about how connected we are to people who live near us and to those who live on the other side of the globe. You'll learn about how we share resources in the U.S. and how inequality and unfairness spur conflict and suffering. You'll learn about what people are doing to help and what you can do. You'll see how even small decisions have a big impact on other people around the world—and on us.

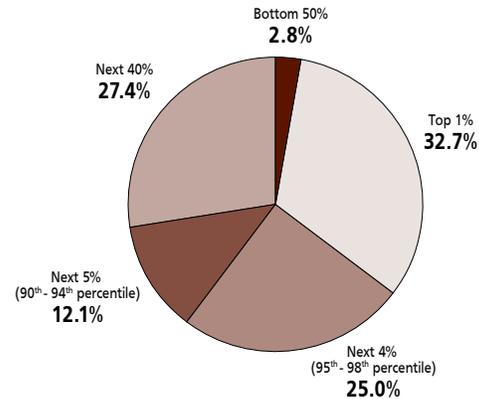
**ACTIVITY INTRODUCTION:** We're going to begin by looking at what happens when things aren't fair. (*Line up 10 sturdy chairs in a row in the front of the classroom, facing the class.*)

What do you own? (*Wait for students to call out things like their clothes, toys, CDs, iPods, etc.*) Wealth is the value of what people own—the value of land, natural resources, buildings, money, etc.

Let's act out the way wealth is distributed in our country so you can see what it looks like. Let's take these 10 chairs and pretend they all equal the wealth of the U.S. They represent all the land, buildings, businesses, natural resources, and money in the U.S.

Now let's pretend that we're all of the people in the U.S. Estimate how much wealth the wealthiest 10% of the people in the U.S. own. (*Collect estimates from students.*) In 2001, the wealthiest 10% of the people in the U.S. owned 70% of the wealth in the country.

DISTRIBUTION OF U.S. WEALTH OWNERSHIP, 2001



Total Net Worth in U.S.: \$42.3892 trillion  
(\$42,389,200,000,000)

Source: Arthur B. Kennickell, "A Rolling Tide: Changes in the Distribution of Wealth in the U.S., 1989-2001," Table 10. (Levy Economics Institute: November 2003)

If we represent all the people in the U.S., how many of us would represent 10% of the people in the U.S.? (*Help them do the math: 10% of the number of students in your class, rounded to the nearest whole number. You'll need to get that many students to play the role of the wealthiest people in the U.S. You might choose students with upcoming birthdays.*)

How many chairs will these wealthy people have? (*Help students do the math: 70% of 10 chairs = 7 chairs. Have the wealthy students count off their chairs from the left. Ask them to touch all of their chairs.*)

The next wealthiest 40% of the people in the U.S. owned 27% of the wealth in 2001. How many students will we need? (*Help them do the math: 40% of the number of students in your class, round to the nearest whole number. You'll need to get that many students to play the role of the next wealthiest people in the U.S. You might choose students with the next birthdays.*) How many chairs will they have? (*Help students do the math: 27% of 10 chairs = 2.7 or a little less than 3 chairs, so to make this work, have these students use 2 chairs and part of the last one.*)

The poorest 50% of the people in the U.S. owned 3% of the wealth in the U.S. How many students would represent 50% of all the people in the U.S.? (*The students left or .5 x the total number of students.*) How many chairs do they have? (*The chair left over will be more than 3% of the chairs. Have students take the last chair on the right. Ask them to all touch the chair without moving it.*)

**NOTE:** Refer to chart on page 11 for more information on strategies for helping students understand how to work with percentages.

If you have a digital camera, ask students to pose for a photo and put it up on a bulletin board in your classroom or in your class scrapbook. Put a title on it, such as, “How Wealth is Distributed in our Country Today.”

**DIALOGUE:** Look around and what do you see? How does it look? What’s fair and what’s unfair? How does it feel to be a wealthy person? How does it feel to be a poor person? How does it feel to be in the middle? How do you feel about the wealthy people? How do you feel about the poor people? If you could choose, which position would you choose and why?

What would our classroom be like if we actually shared our chairs the way wealth is distributed in the U.S.? How would it affect your relationships? How would it feel to have many more chairs than you needed while other people had to stand through all their classes? If you had all those chairs, how would you protect them? How would it feel if you had to stand while others had chairs they didn’t need? If you had to stand all day, how would you manage it? What would our classroom feel like? How safe would you feel?

**INDIVIDUAL ASSIGNMENT:** Ask them to take their handout and draw their classmates on the first row of chairs showing how we distribute wealth in the U.S. today. Ask them to draw their classmates on the second row of chairs to show how the chairs would be distributed if we wanted to have a peaceful classroom where we were able to focus on learning. Then ask them to write a paragraph describing why they chose to share the chairs in the way they did. Have students show their drawings and read their paragraphs.

**DIALOGUE:** When is it fair to share things equally? When is it fair to not divide up the resources equally? (For example, at a doctor’s office, everyone in the waiting room shouldn’t all get the same treatment.) Why does it make sense to share chairs equally in this example? What resources in our classroom might we share unequally and still be fair? For example, is it important for us to be sure everyone uses the same number of pieces of paper or pencils? Is it important for us to be sure everyone uses a pair of scissors for the same number of minutes every week?

**SUGGESTED ACTIVITY:** As a class, look at the portraits in Material World: A Global Family Portrait, by Peter Menzel, Charles C. Mann, and Paul Kennedy (Sierra Club Books, 1995).

**DIALOGUE:** What do these portraits say to you?

## FRACTIONS, DECIMALS, AND PERCENTS

Here's a chart that shows how to translate each of the percentages used in this class into words, pictures, fractions, and decimals.

Let's say you have 22 children in your class. There are many ways to find out what 10% of your class would be. Here are two different methods:

### *Method #1: Dividing up the class into tenths*

1. Since 10% is the same as ten out of 100 or one tenth, first you divide your class into 10 equal parts and see how many kids there are in one of those tenths.
2. You'll have 10 groups of two kids with two kids left over. If you had enough kids left over to put another kid in more than half of your groups, you'd round up and pretend you could add an extra kid to each group, but since you only have an extra kid for two of your 10 groups, you just round down and ignore them.
3. So one tenth of your class is two kids.

### *Method #2: Multiplication*

1. Since 10% equals one tenth or .1, we can multiply 22 by .1
2.  $22 \times .1 = 2.2$ , so 10% of 22 students is two students with .2 left over

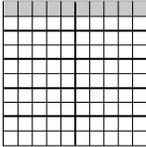
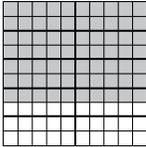
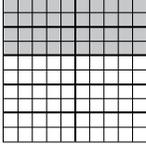
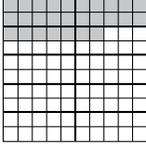
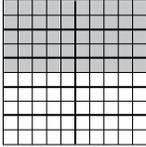
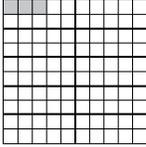
## TO FIND OUT WHAT 70% OF TEN CHAIRS WOULD BE:

### *Method #1: Dividing up the chairs into tenths*

1. Since 70% is the same as seven out of 10 or seven tenths, first you divide up the chairs into 10 equal parts and see how many chairs there are in seven of those tenths.
2. You'll have 10 groups of one chair with no chairs left over.
3. So 70% of 10 chairs is seven chairs.

### *Method #2: Multiplication*

1. Since 70% equals seven out of 10 or .7, we can multiply 10 by .7
2.  $10 \times .7 = 7$ , so 70% of 10 chairs is seven chairs.

PERCENT	WORDS	PICTURE	FRACTION	DECIMAL
10%	Ten out of one hundred equal parts OR One out of ten equal parts		$\frac{1}{10}$ OR $\frac{10}{100}$	.10 OR .1
70%	Seventy out of one hundred equal parts OR Seven out of ten equal parts		$\frac{7}{10}$ OR $\frac{70}{100}$	.70 OR .7
40%	Forty out of one hundred equal parts OR Four out of ten equal parts		$\frac{2}{5}$ OR $\frac{4}{10}$ OR $\frac{40}{100}$	.40 OR .4
27%	Twenty seven out of one hundred equal parts		$\frac{27}{100}$	.27
50%	Fifty out of one hundred equal parts OR One out of two equal parts OR Five out of ten equal parts		$\frac{1}{2}$ OR $\frac{5}{10}$ OR $\frac{50}{100}$	.50 OR .5
3%	Three out of one hundred equal parts		$\frac{3}{100}$	.03



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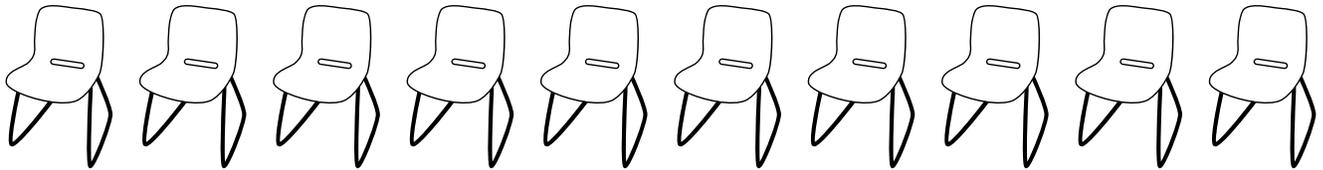
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# The Fruits of Fairness

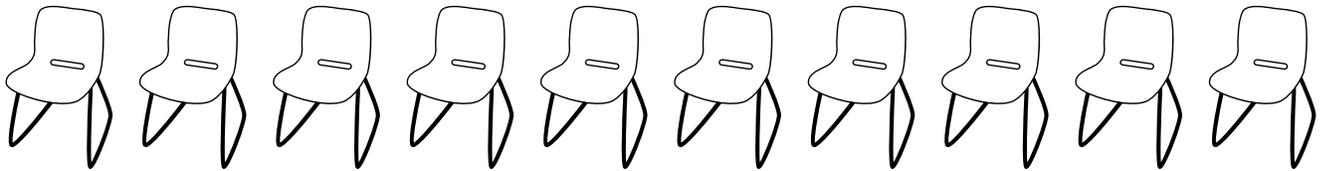
## OUR WORLD TODAY

We let all the people in the U.S. be represented by the students in our class and we let all the wealth in the U.S. be represented by 10 chairs. As of 2001, the wealthiest 10% of the people in the U.S. owned 70% of the world's wealth. The next wealthiest 40% of the people in the U.S. owned 27% of the world's wealth. The poorest 50% of the people in the U.S. owned 3% of the world's wealth in the U.S.

Draw your classmates on the chairs below to show how the chairs were divided up when we shared them in the same way that the resources in the United States are shared.



If we wanted to have a classroom where people felt safe and happy and where students could focus on learning important things, draw how we would divide up the chairs.



Why did you divide them up this way?

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