

Lesson Plan: Raising the Minimum Wage

By Rachel Roberson

Featured resource

[KQED's The Lowdown: Raising the Minimum Wage](#)

Opening quick write prompt:

The federal minimum wage is currently \$7.25, though it is higher in many states. Do you think the minimum wage should increase and, if so, by how much? Explain your answer. If you were a business owner, would you want the minimum wage to increase? Why or why not?



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A quick write allows students to write down their thoughts before discussing the opening question in order to increase participation and make the discussion more accessible to English Language Learners.

Objective

- Students will analyze the historical context and ongoing debate about whether to raise the minimum wage.
- Students will evaluate the effect of raising the minimum wage on the lives of workers, families and businesses.

Essential Question and Lesson Context

What effect does raising the minimum wage have on workers, families and businesses?

Minimum wages in 19 states went up on January 1, 2017. The increase was just 5 or 10 cents in seven states who link their minimum wage to inflation. But in 12 states, the minimum wage rose because of legislation or voter-approved ballot measures for more significant increases. In California, the minimum wage went from \$10 to \$10.50. In Arizona, the minimum wage rose by \$1.95 to \$10 per hour, a change that will impact 328,000 workers, or nearly 12 percent of the workforce. Those in favor of raising the minimum wage say it can lift families out of poverty. Some lawmakers, however, worry that businesses will cut jobs to save money, thus increasing unemployment. Most evidence links a rise in the minimum wage to a boost in productivity and lower turnover costs.

Key vocabulary

Pre-teach key vocabulary before students do the activity, especially if you have English Language Learners. After going over the simple definition, consider providing a visual aid or having students draw one. More ideas for how to pre-teach vocabulary can be found [here](#).

Word	Simple definition
Fiscal (adj.)	Related to finances or money, especially the money of a government or business
Hike (v.)	To increase sharply
Inflation (n.)	A continuing rise in the price of goods and services over time
Poverty line (n.)	A government estimate of the minimal level of income necessary to pay for basic living costs
Short-sighted (adj.)	Not considering what might happen in the future

Lesson procedure

- Discuss the quick write prompt: Do students think the minimum wage should rise? Why? Gauge students' opinions on the issue, including whether or not those opinions change when assuming the role of a business owner. Ask what questions students still have about the issue.
- As a class, individually or in small groups, students view and read the slide interactive found on [KQED's The Lowdown: Raising the Minimum Wage](#). The interactive provides a historical context and an overview of the issue in slideshow format.
- Students read the interactive and prepare responses OR answer the following questions:
 - Although the dollar amount of the minimum wage has gone up, explain how the minimum wage has changed in real value since 1968?
 - What are two arguments against raising the minimum wage?
 - What are two arguments in favor of raising the minimum wage?
 - How are individual states responding to the question of whether to raise the minimum wage?
- As a class, individually, or in small groups, students explore the States with Minimum Wage Increases interactive map on [The Lowdown post](#).
- After they have explored the map, ask: How much of a difference does raising the minimum wage make? How much does a worker's annual salary change if they get a 10 cents/hour raise? What about 50 cents? What about \$1.95? (*Note: You can have students do the math or tell them*

a 10-cent/hour raise means an extra \$208/year, a 50-cent raise means \$1,040, a \$2/hour raise means \$4,160.)

Discussion questions

- True/False: The average low-wage worker is a teenager who wants to make extra money. Explain your answer using evidence.
- Do you support or oppose raising the minimum wage? If you were speaking to a person who disagreed, what is the strongest argument in support of your position?
- Raising the minimum wage by 10 cents per hour comes to about \$200 per year. What are examples of what workers or a family could do with an extra \$200? What about \$1,000?
- Places like New York, Oakland, San Francisco and Seattle have raised the minimum wage in their cities, in some cases to \$15/hour. Why do you think these places have raised their municipal minimum wage? Do you think it would be worth it for workers to move to these cities to earn more money per hour? Why or why not?

[Circle chats](#), small-group discussions and [think-pair-share](#) provide a safer space for students to practice speaking and listening, and also boost participation during whole-class discussions.

Extension activities

What does it mean to live on the minimum wage? Using [the interactive map on the Lowdown post](#) and any online budgeting tool such as [TheMint.org](#), students choose a state, calculate the annual salary for a minimum wage worker and budget from there. Students can experiment by raising their chosen state's minimum wage and adjust the salary to see how the lives of workers would change in concrete terms.

What does the minimum wage mean to you? Using a poster-making or presentation tool such as [Prezi](#), [Easel.ly](#), [Piktochart](#), [Infogr.am](#), students create a poster or graphic explaining what the minimum wage means to them, drawing on personal examples, research, first-person accounts or other sources, such as [this Los Angeles Times article](#).

Common Core standards

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1	Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7	Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.