Lesson 6: Specialization

Concepts
Assembly-line Production: When workers add parts in a sequential manner to produce a finish product
Craft Production: When workers add all parts by hand with or without tools to produce a finish product
Specialization: Workers learn to produce more finished products by performing the same tasks on an assembly line

Activity
Ms. Clark, a 7th grade teacher, enters the classroom, while carrying construction papers, scissors, and magic markers. She tells her students that they are going to make greeting cards. They are going to do an experiment to see which method – craft production or assembly-line production – would enable them to make more or better greeting cards with the same amount of resources and time.

Ms. Clark shows the class how to make a greeting card: cut a sheet of paper in half, fold one-half of the paper, draw a picture on the outside (a smiling face, a cake, balloons, or candles), and write Happy Birthday on the inside.

She divides half of the class into craftsmen and the rest into assembly-line workers. She explains that in craft production, each worker is an independent producer, making greeting cards one at a time. However, in assembly-line production, card making is divided into four sequential tasks (cutting paper, folding paper, drawing pictures, and writing messages) and each task is assigned to a sub-group of workers.

Ms. Clark provides each group of workers with an equal amount of resources and asks them to stack the finished cards into sets of ten. Next, she allows each group a few minutes to experiment with making cards. Finally, Ms. Clark asks students to make greeting cards in three, ten-minute rounds. After each round, a group manager writes on the board how many cards his/her workers produced and adds up.

Wrap-Up
Upon completion of the activity, Ms. Clark shows the class a sample of greeting cards made by each group and asks students several questions to see what they have learned from this lesson:
1. Which group made more cards?
2. Which group made better cards?
3. How much do you price a greeting card made by craftsmen?
4. How much do you price a greeting card made by assembly-line workers?
5. What factors explain this price difference?
6. How did you feel while making cards?
7. What were the advantages and disadvantages of working as craftsmen?
8. What were the advantages and disadvantages of working as assembly-line workers?
9. What are some of the ways each production method can be improved?
10. How does specialization help increase production?

Source: Economics for Kids, National Council for Economic Education