

Lesson Plan: The Glorious Inflection – Unprecedented Prosperity

Grade Level: High School (Grades 10–12)

Subject: Social Studies, Economics, History

Duration: 1-2 class periods (50–60 minutes each)

Objectives

By the end of this lesson, students will:

1. Understand the historical context of poverty and the transformation brought about by the Glorious Revolution and the Industrial Revolution.
 2. Analyze the factors that led to the "Glorious Inflection" and its impact on global incomes, quality of life, and societal development.
 3. Evaluate the differences in economic growth among countries and discuss the concept of the "Great Divergence."
 4. Reflect on the role of income in determining well-being and the broader implications of economic inequality.
 5. Explore the relevance of these historical transformations to modern challenges and future prosperity.
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Materials Needed

1. Video called The Glorious Inflection – Unprecedented Prosperity.
 2. Video Script and Supplemental Video Notes.
 3. Access to a world map (physical or digital).
 4. Chart or graph showing historical GDP growth
 5. Quality of Life Graphs using logarithmic scale for visualizing changes at higher incomes.
 6. Handouts with key terms and discussion questions.
 7. Whiteboard/Smartboard or chart paper for brainstorming.
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Lesson Structure

1. Introduction (10 minutes)

- **Hook Question:** Begin by asking students: *"Who would you rather be: an average person today or the wealthiest person 200 years ago? Why?"*
 - Discuss responses briefly to frame the discussion around quality of life, access to resources, medical treatments, lifestyle choices, freedoms and historical context.

- Share a brief overview of the script’s main idea: How historical changes have drastically altered the human experience in a very short period of time.
 - Presentism, judging the past with the values of the present. How different lives were in the recent past and how that affected the way they thought.
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2. Video/Script Engagement (15 minutes)

- **Watch or Read:** Share the video (if available) or read selected parts of the script aloud. Use visuals like GDP growth charts and maps to illustrate points.
 - Highlight key concepts:
 - **Glorious Revolution:** Constitutional monarchy, rule of law, and its role in unlocking individual freedom.
 - **Industrial Revolution:** Technological and economic transformation.
 - **Great Divergence:** Economic disparities among countries.
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3. Group Activity: Mapping Economic Growth (15 minutes)

- Divide students into small groups and provide them with:
 - A map showing GDP per capita across countries today.
 - Data on historical economic growth rates.
 - **Task:** Groups analyze how economic growth spread geographically over time and identify regions with high vs. low incomes.
 - Discuss: What factors contributed to these differences?
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4. Class Discussion: Income and Well-being (10 minutes)

- Pose questions for discussion:
 - What role does income play in quality of life?
 - Are there limits to the benefits of high income? (Introduce the concept of the plateau in happiness with rising income).
 - What are the implications of the Great Divergence for global migration and inequality today?
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5. Reflection and Extension (10 minutes)

- **Reflection Prompt:** Students write a short response to one of these prompts:
 1. What do you think is the most significant consequence of the Industrial Revolution for our world today?

2. How can understanding the Glorious Inflection help address challenges like global inequality or climate change?
- **Extension Ideas** (Optional):
 - Research and present on a country's journey through industrialization.
 - Debate: Is income or another factor (e.g., relationships, spirituality) the best measure of well-being?
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Assessment

1. **Participation** in discussions and group activities.
 2. **Written reflection** to assess understanding and critical thinking.
 3. Optional **presentation or debate** for deeper engagement.
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Key Terms

- **Glorious Revolution**
 - **Constitutional Monarchy**
 - **Industrial Revolution**
 - **Great Divergence**
 - **GDP per capita**
 - **Quality of Life**
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This lesson plan provides a structure for teachers to help students engage critically with the content of the video/script and make connections to broader themes in social studies and economics.

The Glorious Inflection: The Most Important Event in History

Introduction

Who would you rather be: an average person living today or the wealthiest person from 200 years ago? Even 100 years ago?

If you would rather be an average person today, then what is the one event in history that has measurably improved your life more than all the other events in history combined? Some call it the Glorious Inflection, the time when average incomes rose from hundreds of dollars per year, to thousands of dollars per year.

Life Before Industrialization

To live a good life, humans need access to many goods and services. For 300,000 years, the average income was just a few hundred dollars a year. Our ancestors lived in small groups of 25 or more, constantly on the move to forage for food. Life was short, with an average lifespan of 30 years. Half of all newborns didn't survive childhood, and there was up to a 25% chance of dying from violence. Poverty ruled, forcing people into relationships of intimidation and violence—a harsh reality just slightly removed from the law of the jungle.

Over time, agriculture and cities began to improve life, allowing people to settle and have a more stable food supply. However, poverty remained widespread. Average incomes were still only a few hundred dollars a year.

The Glorious Inflection

Everything changed 200 years ago. What caused this sudden and dramatic rise in incomes?

The transformation began in England. The Glorious Revolution created a new form of government called a Constitutional Monarchy, where even the king had to follow the law. This system unleashed the energy of free individuals. Reason, science, property rights, free speech, fair laws, and free markets brought massive social changes, leading to the Industrial Revolution.

Around 200 years ago, British incomes rose above \$1,000 per year. Progress was slow at first, then exponential—a phenomenon known as "The Glorious Inflection." As incomes rose, freedoms increased, quality of life improved, and voting rights expanded to include more people.

Spread of the Industrial Revolution

During Britain's Industrial Revolution, attempts to export industrial practices to other countries initially failed to catalyze systemic change. Social and political conditions in those nations weren't ready. Only after Britain fully industrialized and surged ahead with growing incomes, did other countries adopt similar changes. Scholars have debated why other societies had not initiated the Industrial Revolution earlier. They also ask whether, without the unique combination of circumstances in Britain, would the entire world still be living in poverty today? Using average use of coal as a measure, industrialization spread to the United States and Germany in the 1830s, and Japan joined in the 1870s. What took Britain 150 years to achieve now takes some countries just a few decades.

Benefits of Rising Incomes

As incomes increase, so do numerous quality-of-life measures. Lifespans have nearly tripled, from 30 years to 80. Child mortality dropped from 50% to 1%, and fewer mothers die in childbirth. High-income countries also experience other benefits, such as improved drinking water, electricity, better education, and higher literacy rates. People in these countries generally report greater life satisfaction.

Unequal Growth: The Great Divergence

Different countries have grown at different rates, a phenomenon known as "The Great Divergence." High-income nations like the UK, the US, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand—the Anglosphere countries—are directly descended from Britain. Their high incomes are likely influenced by their cultural background, including Protestantism. Similarly, Northwest European countries, which are also mostly Protestant, maintain high incomes. The countries of Korea, Japan, and China form the core of Confucianism, which also supports high incomes. Israel's high incomes are attributed to the cultural influence of Judaism. Some resource-rich countries, like those with abundant oil, also achieve high incomes.

However, many countries grow much slower. Today, a person's income depends more on where they live than on what they do. This disparity drives millions of people to migrate each year, often risking their lives, from low-income to high-income countries.

Understanding the British Empire

England's rise to wealth also helps explain the British Empire. Although England made up less than 1% of the world's population, it governed $\frac{1}{4}$ of the world's land and people. The British Empire wasn't planned; instead, it expanded through trade and alliances with local leaders. The same impulse that drives people to move from low income countries to high income countries created the conditions for the British Empire. Wealth, technology, infrastructure and institutional stability attracted people to British trading centers, and these connections often led to British dominance.

Beyond Income

Some argue that income doesn't measure the most important aspects of life, like wisdom, relationships, or spirituality. However, higher incomes provide opportunities to pursue these higher goals. For many, the benefits of modern high incomes—access to goods, services, and technologies—are among the greatest achievements in human history.

Key Questions for the Future

If you believe that high incomes and productive economies are vital to human well-being, you may view the Industrial Revolution as the most important event in history. But it raises critical questions:

- How did we achieve these high incomes and productive economies?
- Why have certain countries excelled while others lag behind?
- How can we ensure future generations benefit from these advancements?

The answers to these questions matter not only for individuals but for humanity as a whole.

Supplemental Video Notes

In economics, the Average Income of a country is a mirror of the Gross Domestic Product per Capita. One is calculated by adding up the incomes of all the people in the country. The other is calculated by adding up all of this production by the people. This is arguably the most important measurement for human well-being.

Income is a measure for the access to Goods and Services. The more income, the more Goods and Services one can access.

Personal freedoms