

Homer Economicus: The Simpsons in the Economics Classroom¹

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Abstract:

The analysis of public policy issues in the classroom can be a powerful tool to help students learn because it encourages students to actively apply classroom material. The television show *The Simpsons* provides several episodes that revolve around policy issues amenable to examination. Using *The Simpsons* to provide students with material for analysis has two advantages over traditional sources such as newspapers or magazines. First, a long-running and popular television show effectively engages students in a way traditional sources cannot. Second, the context of an animated television show can help students separate positive economic analysis from normative economic analysis.

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I Introduction

In most introductory economic classes only a select number of students will become economists. However, unlike disciplines such as engineering where an entire sequence of coursework is needed to become a practitioner, in economics every student will be a lifelong practitioner of political economy (Klein 1999). Many textbooks recognize the importance of students learning to apply the tools of economic analysis to public policy issues. One popular textbook (Gwartney et al. 2003), for example, provides over a dozen ‘special topics’ that give students the opportunity to practice the economic analysis of public policy issues.

Empirical research on the pedagogical techniques used by economists finds that economists rely heavily on “chalk and talk” in the classroom (Becker and Watts 2001). Becker (2000) urges economists to move beyond the lecture-method of teaching and begin to integrate new types of pedagogy such as classroom games and the Internet into the classroom. Other economic educators have detailed how economists can use literature (Watts 2002) or movies (Leet and Houser 2003; Mateer 2004) to provide examples of economic concepts to students. Considine (2006) provides numerous examples from the long-running television show *The Simpsons* that can be used to help teach public choice.

Combining these two important points, we suggest that *The Simpsons* can be used to augment student learning in a basic economics courses through the application of economics to public policy issues. *The Simpsons* is a cartoon sitcom about a fictional middle class American family, set in the fictional town Springfield, USA. Although the show revolves around members

of the Simpson family, which includes Homer (the father), Marge (mother), Bart (son), and Lisa and Maggie (daughters), there are numerous additional recurring characters that play major roles throughout the series. *The Simpsons* is currently in its nineteenth season and airs on the Fox television network and earlier seasons are on in syndication in most areas.¹

Using *The Simpsons*, instructors can promote *active learning* by encouraging students to both participate in classroom discussions and apply the economic principles they are learning about in classroom lectures. Moreover, the clips suggested here allow students to examine real policy issues through a medium with which most of them are very familiar.² Use of clips from *The Simpsons* goes beyond simply providing examples of concepts to actually encouraging students to use the tools of economics to analyze both the positive and normative aspects of specific policy issues. Cameron (1998) suggests that active learning by students can lead to improved student outcomes such as enhanced retention of course material.

We have found that analyzing examples from *The Simpsons* has two distinct advantages over other, more traditional, ways to introduce policy discussions such as newspaper or magazine articles. First, given that most undergraduates do not regularly read newspapers or news magazines, *The Simpsons* engages students in a way that these traditional methods do not. Second, we have found that many students have a hard time applying basic microeconomics when it comes to real-world situations. A classroom discussion about the effects of a ban on organ sales, for example, can often be derailed by student opinions on the ethics of allowing individuals to sell their organs. Using a fictional, animated television show to discuss issues like organ donation makes it easier for students to set aside their normative concerns and focus instead on the positive effects of policy changes.

In this article, we present a list of episodes of *The Simpsons* that we have found useful in helping students to ‘think like an economist.’ These episodes were selected because the substance of the episode revolves around a particular public policy issue open to economic analysis and there is a clear economic concept that can be introduced or reinforced with the episode. The clips are effective when used as either an introduction to a specific topic or as a conclusion to the discussion of that topic. We suggest the following approach for utilizing the examples provided here: play a short clip (2-3 minutes in length) for the students if possible, and then present them with one or more of the discussion questions allowing them to think and discuss the relevant issues. An alternative approach is to simply provide students with a brief background of the plot along with a few relevant quotes (links to the transcripts of each episode are listed throughout this paper), and then present students with one or more discussion questions. In our experience, often many students will be able to clearly recall the episode from just a brief description of the story.

Currently, all of the episodes discussed in this paper have been released on DVD with the exception of “Lisa the Tree Hugger,” which is expected to be released in 2008. Federal Copyright Act ‘fair-use’ exemptions typically allow for the performance of copyright material for educational purposes.³ Nonetheless, we recommend that individuals consult a legal representative from their institution before showing movie clips as a part of their classroom presentation.

II Unintended Consequences of Disability and Health Insurance

Learning to acknowledge the power of incentives and the unintended consequences that often arise from public policies that alter incentives tends to be one of the foremost and perhaps

most important principles taught in an introductory economics class. Gwartney et al. (2003) suggest that failure to acknowledge secondary effects and unintended consequences is one of the most common mistakes made in economics. Some form of this idea appears in the first chapter of most other popular principles textbooks as well.⁴

In the episode “King-Size Homer,” after learning of a coworker’s absence from work because of a disability, Homer tries to find a way to purposely injure himself so that he too can go on disability and work from home.⁵ After walking around a construction site with no hardhat on and trying to trip and hurt himself on an oil spill, Homer almost loses hope of becoming disabled, remarking, “I’m never going to be disabled! I’m sick of being so healthy.” Homer then discovers the disease “hyper-obesity,” realizing that if he gains enough weight, he can qualify as disabled. Homer proceeds to eat as much as he can in order to become disabled.

This episode provides a straight-forward example of how individuals respond to incentives and correspondingly how public policies, even when designed with the best of intentions, can lead to unintended consequences, such as individuals trying to go on disability. Homer’s coworker Lenny perhaps clarifies this when he refers to disability as a “lottery that rewards stupidity.” Although Homer eventually decides that the costs of being obese do not warrant the benefit of not having to physically go to work, the incentive-altering effect of the program is clear nonetheless. Discussion of this excerpt is easily extended into many different areas of public policy and the potential unintended consequences they bear.

*Discussion Questions*⁶

- 1) Although Homer’s actions in this episode are likely an over-exaggeration of reality, does disability insurance induce people to behave differently and to what extent? Does this have any relation to health insurance and its effects on people’s actions?

2) This episode displays the role that public policies can play in altering incentives.

Within such a context, explain how other programs like unemployment insurance and welfare alter incentives?

3) What are the benefits of these types of social policies?

III Externalities and Property Rights

Discussions of externalities, where individuals not directly involved in an economic transaction are still positively or negatively impacted by that transaction, usually entail a wide range of potential policies even at a principles level of economics. Although economists often widely disagree on the extents and possible solutions to externalities, few would suggest that they are not an important economic principle to discuss.

In the episode “Two Cars in Every Garage, Three Eyes on Every Fish,” Bart and Lisa come across a three-eyed fish while fishing just downriver from the Springfield Nuclear Power Plant.⁷ This discovery leads to public outcry against Montgomery Burns, who owns the plant, and for stronger regulations on Burns and the plant. Hoping to avoid government intervention by lowering environmental standards through political office, Mr. Burns subsequently runs for governor, but fails in his attempt.

The beginning of this episode exemplifies the problems associated with externalities and addresses often suggested solutions and the corresponding tradeoffs. The major problems associated with negative production externalities are clearly seen as Bart holds up a three-eyed fish with the Springfield Nuclear Power Plant looming in the background. The often ignored cost of regulation becomes clear when Mr. Burns’ assistant Smithers reports that it would cost

“approximately fifty-six million dollars” to bring the plant up to government standards. Most students will realize that this cost will not simply be absorbed by Burns.

The conclusion of the episode even provides an example of how externalities can be internalized when Marge Simpson prepares the three-eyed fish for Burns as he joins the Simpson family for dinner (at his advisor’s suggestion) to show he is in touch with the common man. Burns’ inability to swallow and consequently his spitting out the fish causes him to lose the election before the fish “hits the floor.”

Discussion Questions

- 1) What type of externality is prevalent in this episode? What is the source of the externality?
- 2) Why is Mr. Burns so careless about polluting the river and why are more individuals not concerned with stopping him?
- 3) Would it be efficient to completely shut-down the Springfield Nuclear Power Plant? What are the tradeoffs associated with shutting it down? Can you think of other environmental quality standards that have tradeoffs as well?
- 4) Devise an appropriate policy to address the problem in this episode. What shortcomings are associated with such a policy?

IV Prohibition and Black Markets

In *The Simpsons* episode “Homer vs. the Eighteenth Amendment,” alcohol is prohibited in Springfield after Bart Simpson accidentally gets drunk during the St. Patrick’s Day parade.⁸ This episode helps to illustrate the differences and similarities between regular markets and black markets. For example, price is still determined by supply and demand when alcohol is

prohibited. Falling alcohol supply due to prohibition causes the price of a pitcher of beer to rise to \$45.

The episode also shows prohibition leading to a host of secondary effects such as increased corruption. The local organized crime boss, Fat Tony, bribes the Springfield police in order to smuggle large quantities of illegal alcohol into the city. Another secondary effect of prohibition is seen as bar patrons begin substituting from beer (the standard at Moe's Tavern when alcohol was legal) to much stronger drinks. After becoming the underground provider of alcohol to Moe's, Homer, aka the beer baron, is seen making gin, cognac, and "12 year old scotch" in bathtubs in his basement. The similarities between the secondary effects of alcohol prohibition seen in Springfield and the narcotics market in the United States are clear.

Showing this episode in class has the advantage that it is focused on a popular topic for undergraduates – the consumption of alcohol. Students often draw parallels between prohibition, in general, and the prohibition they faced prior to being of legal drinking age. (Typically, at least one student of legal drinking age will also remark on how being able to drink legally took at least some of the fun out of drinking, which corresponds well with Homer's observation that at the start of prohibition, "people were drinking more.")

Discussion Questions:

- 1) Economists typically believe that increased regulations (such as prohibition) are costly for suppliers. However, Homer indicates that "people were drinking more" as the result of prohibition. Analyze what this implies about supply and demand as a result of prohibition in Springfield?
- 2) Who were the biggest winners as a result of alcohol being prohibited in Springfield? What implications does this have for public policy?

- 3) Extend this example to the current prohibition of drugs in the United States and other countries. Who are the biggest winners and losers in the “War on Drugs?”

V Economic Effects of Immigration

Immigration policy is one of the more contentious policy discussions in the United States and internationally, especially as immigration to countries other than the United States has increased in recent decades. As Borjas (1994) points out, there are three policy questions surrounding immigration of which economists are uniquely qualified to answer. First, what role do immigrants play in their new country’s economy? Second, what sort of effects does the labor market success or failure of immigrants have on the job prospects for natives? Third, how can immigration policy best be structured to benefit the receiving country?

All of these issues are present in *The Simpsons* episode “Much Apu about Nothing.”⁹ In the episode, Springfield residents consider Proposition 24, a referendum on the deportation of illegal immigrants. The episode closely mirrors California’s Proposition 187, which was an attempt to deny illegal immigrants public benefits such as education and health care (Martin 1995). As in the case of Proposition 187, the reason for Proposition 24 was the public perception that the economic benefits of immigrants (such as Apu Nahassapeemapetilan and Groundskeeper Willie) in Springfield were less than the cost of the services they consumed. In addition, there is considerable concern about the secondary effects of immigration, such as the erosion of a common language.¹⁰ This episode also can help illustrate how different public policies are interrelated. We see that Apu first came to the United States to study at Springfield Heights Institute of Technology. Apu’s situation thus provides a good example of how immigration policy, higher education, and technical innovation are closely related.

Discussion Questions

- 1) This episode displays economic arguments both for and against immigration. Within this context, explain the effects that immigration can have on public services and social norms.
- 2) To what extent is immigration beneficial for an economy?
- 3) What are the tradeoffs associated with more closed or more open immigration policy?
- 4) How might public policy towards higher education affect the composition of immigrants into the United States? Illustrate with an example from the episode.

VI Conservation and the Environment

Many students have a difficult time applying economics to public policy issues where markets are not easily visible. It can be easy to imagine firms demanding labor and thereby construct a demand curve. It is more difficult to imagine a demand curve for environmental quality. Even if students can accomplish this, environmental markets are often sufficiently different from traditional markets that students often think that the insights from economics are not applicable to examining environmental problems.

Economics is clearly applicable to understanding *why* we have certain environmental problems and not others (even if it does not give us an easy solution). For example, economics students will see that it is the inability to clearly define property rights in air that is the primary reason why air pollution is such a persistent problem. While helping to diagnose the problem, economics frequently does not provide us with an easy solution. Situations do exist where an understanding of economics can help to improve the environment. Understanding that private property rights encourage conservation can make a difference in cases where private property

rights do not currently exist but can be created. The assignment of property rights can be a powerful tool for environmental protection and resource conservation.

The Simpsons episode “Lisa the Tree Hugger” illustrates some of the economic issues surrounding resource conservation.¹¹ The episode tells the story of Lisa Simpsons’ struggle to protect Springfield’s oldest redwood tree. The redwood is being cut down in order to make the world’s first “drive-through humidior.” In order to save it, Lisa ties herself to the tree, thereby preventing loggers from harvesting it.

This episode presents an excellent opportunity to raise the issue about resource conservation and the difference between private ownership and public control. The redwood that Lisa was trying to save was on public lands and only came to be endangered after Mayor Quimby auctioned off the logging rights to the tree to a “rich Texan” who wants to cut it down to make the world’s first drive-through humidior. Since the rich Texan only had logging rights to the tree and not full property rights, the tree was only valuable to him if it was cut down. Even if Lisa had succeeded in convincing the rich Texan to relinquish the rights to harvest the redwood she still would have had to remain vigilant against further attempts by Mayor Quimby to auction off the logging rights to the tree. “Lisa the Tree Hugger” provides a nice illustration of the difference between political control and economic control in resource conservation.

Discussion Questions

- 1) In this episode, the “rich Texan” purchases the logging rights to this section of Springfield forest. What incentives did this partial privatization create?
- 2) What if Mayor Quimby auctioned off the entire forest, not just the logging rights? Would this have any effect on the likelihood that the redwoods would be cut down? Explain why or why not.

- 3) Lisa has a strong preference that the forest should be left in a pristine state. How are strong preferences registered in markets? How about in politics?

VII Unions

The Simpsons episode “The PTA Disbands” shows the teachers at Springfield elementary school going on strike in response to Principal Skinner’s cost cutting, which includes replacing meat in the school lunches with shredded newspaper.¹² This episode provides a nice introduction to the economics of unions and collective bargaining. For example, unions can influence the compensation of their members through their bargaining power. If a union can inflict economic costs on an employer through a strike, then the union has some bargaining power. The strength of the union’s bargaining power depends on how important the striking workers are to the production process.

In “The PTA Disbands,” we observe the Springfield school district using ‘people from the neighborhood’ to replace striking teachers. They soon find out that in Springfield there are no close substitutes for the unionized teachers (at least in the short run). When Marge Simpson asks her daughter Lisa about her day with replacement teacher Jasper (a retiree from the Springfield Retirement Home), Lisa explains that it was a disaster because, “[t]hree kids got sick from inhaling his ointment fumes, he confiscated everything made of tin, and then he sent us home early because he got his beard caught in the pencil sharpener.” The failure of the citizens of Springfield as a substitute for the striking teachers led to the strike being quickly settled. In addition, this episode illustrates many other issues related to unions and collective bargaining such as sympathy strikes and other ways that unions work to increase their bargaining power in order to increase the wages of their members.

Discussion Questions

- 1) Why does Springfield Teachers Union end up with considerable bargaining power at the end of this episode?
- 2) Is the short-run labor supply curve for teachers in Springfield elastic or inelastic? How about in the long-run? Why the difference?
- 3) In the episode, the teachers are presented as striking on behalf of the students of Springfield Elementary. Is this a realistic portrayal?

VIII The Economics of Organ Donation

One of the fundamental principles of economics is that scarcity is omnipresent. Scarcity of a good implies that its use must be allocated or rationed among citizens in the economy. For goods traded in markets, prices help to allocate resources to where they are most valued. If a good is deemed illegal and thus cannot be bought or sold in a legal market it does not change the scarce nature of the good, it merely changes how it is rationed.

In the United States it is illegal to buy or sell an internal organ so price cannot be used as a mechanism to ration organs or induce additional donations (Carlstrom and Rollow 1997). In cases where the demand for donor organs greatly exceeds the supply of donated organs (as is the case with kidneys), they have to be rationed because donors cannot be compensated financially. Organ donations therefore primarily occur for altruistic reasons.

In *The Simpsons* episode “Homer Simpson in ‘Kidney Trouble,’” Grandpa Simpson has a “double kidney blowout” because Homer refuses to pull the car over during a long car ride so Grandpa can use the restroom.¹³ Students can observe Homer weighing the costs and benefits of donating a kidney to his father. The benefit – saving the life of a parent – is obvious. One cost, as

explained by Moe the bartender, is that Homer “won’t be able to drink [himself] stupid no more.” After the transplant surgery, Marge aptly summarizes the potential trade-off that living organ donors might be making when she says to Homer, “[y]ou’ve shortened your life significantly so someone else can have a slight extension of theirs.”

While this episode does not address all of this economic issues surrounding organ donation, it does provide a humorous introduction to the subject. The internal struggle Homer goes through regarding whether or not to donate a kidney to his father leads to insights about why shortages are so prevalent in the market for donor organs.

Discussion Questions

- 1) Dr. Hibbert indicates that there is a long waiting list for organs. However, typically when you want to purchase something, you can obtain it relatively quickly. Why is there such a wait for organs?
- 2) Currently, in the U.S. it is illegal to buy and sell organs. In such a case, what are the costs and benefits of donating an organ? Would these change if it were legal?
- 3) Are there potential tradeoffs associated with allowing individuals to buy and sell organs?

IX Market Power and Rent Seeking

The consequences and policy implications for differing levels of market power, which is basically the ability of a single economic agent to influence an entire market, typically comprise a large portion of principles of microeconomics classes. Consequently, rent seeking, or actions by economic agents to obtain an advantage through manipulating the policy environment instead of through trade, in relation to retaining market power is an area that is also often addressed.

In the episode “Springfield,” the town of Springfield legalizes gambling in an attempt to rejuvenate their economy.¹⁴ Although not explicitly seen, the episode implies that town government gives Mr. Burns, the owner of the Springfield Nuclear Power Plant, the rights to build a casino. Mr. Burns acknowledges this market power will allow him to benefit greatly, claiming, “By building a casino, I could tighten my stranglehold on this dismal town.” This episode exemplifies an individual using the political process to capture an advantage by restricting competition, as Mr. Burns puts it, “I’ve discovered the perfect business: people swarm in, empty their pockets, and scuttle off.” This excerpt is also particularly current and relevant to many students because many cities and states have begun adopting and allowing different forms and amounts of legalized gambling.

Discussion Questions

- 1) In this episode, Mr. Burns is shown to have considerable market power in the gambling market. What is the source of this market power?
- 2) What would he be willing to give up to retain his market power?
- 3) What would be a potential solution to limit the amount of market power retained by Mr. Burns? Is there any downside to this solution? Consider that this episode also displays one of the arguments against legalized gambling in that it can bring about negative externalities. What negative externalities are shown and why do they exist?

X The Money Supply and Exchange Rates

Students of economics have probably been previously exposed to at least some of the aspects associated with the previous policy issues. However, principles of economics classes are often the first time that they are exposed to the consequences of monetary policy. Moreover,

principles of economics classes are often the first time that students are exposed to the difference between real and nominal variables.¹⁵

The episode “Trouble with Trillions” illustrates the basic issues underlying both monetary policy and the difference between nominal and real variables, and the relationship between the two.¹⁶ In this episode, a historical clip shows President Truman authorizing a one-time printing of a one trillion dollar bill to be given as aid to Europe to help reconstruction after World War II. However, the bill is never actually delivered as Mr. Burns steals the one trillion dollar bill from the U.S. government when he was enlisted to fly it to Europe.¹⁷ Although the money never gets to Europe, it is still easy for students to consider the potential economic implications and consequences of such a policy.

Discussion Questions:

- 1) In this fictitious episode, the U.S. government is shown printing a one trillion dollar bill to help reconstruction in Europe. What would be the short-run and long-run effects of such a policy?
- 2) To what extent would this one trillion dollar bill represent *real* wealth to Europe?
- 3) Had Mr. Burns not stolen the trillion dollar bill, what type of effect would this policy have had on exchange rates?

XI Conclusion

Using examples from *The Simpsons* when teaching students how to analyze public policy has two benefits. The first benefit is that using an icon of popular culture such as *The Simpsons* can engage otherwise disinterested students and gets them to see that economics is all around us. A second benefit is that using examples from a fictional show helps students learn how to apply

economics to all types of real world situations, even to those situations they find normatively upsetting. Because students frequently find it difficult to use the tools of economic analysis on situations they find normatively unappealing, evaluating the costs and benefits of potentially awkward situations are made easier if discussed in the context of a fictional animated television show.

Our own experience with using the clips presented here has had many positive results. Students really enjoy both seeing and discussing them, particularly in comparison to straightforward “chalk and talk” lectures.¹⁸ Often, these clips bring into the discussion even the most disinterested student. Furthermore, even months after a class has ended, students often remember the clips and the classroom discussions. Several times, we have personally been approached by students outside of the classroom who, if they remembered nothing else from their principles of economics classes, remembered a specific *Simpsons*’ clip and the lesson to be learned.

Although the clips suggested here are extremely useful in teaching students how to use economics principles to analyze public policy issues, there are some pitfalls to avoid in utilizing them. First, often students will try to urge instructors to play more of the episode or the entire episode. This is usually not necessary to understand the relevant issues and many of the students have already seen the episodes in their entirety anyway. For instructors who are not avid *Simpsons*’ fans, this should not be too much of an issue though. Second, it is sometimes difficult to keep the discussion both focused on the issues and for the instructor to remain politically unbiased on the issues. In our experience, classroom discussions of the clips tend to go much smoother when the instructor defends and attacks several sides to an argument. Additionally, in our own experience in using these clips, discussions tend to move smoothly from a popular TV cartoon to relevant policy issues without becoming bogged down in pop culture references.

The episodes and economic principles presented here cover only a small range of the possible topics that can be discussed through episodes of *The Simpsons*. Considering that over 400 episodes of the show have already aired, instructors particularly interested in the show will undoubtedly be able to find numerous additional examples of public policy topics that have economic consequences addressed in various episodes. Possible additional topics include outsourcing, government debt, and education policy, among others. By using these television clips, instructors will find that students become more interested and active during discussions, particularly in comparison to standard “chalk and talk” lectures. By concentrating discussion around fictional characters and stories, it is often easier for instructors to promote *active learning* through classroom participation and application of economic principles, particularly compared to more traditional approaches.

Notes

¹ For additional information about *The Simpsons*, the authors recommend the official *Simpsons* Fox website <http://www.thesimpsons.com> or *The Simpsons* Archive <http://www.snpp.com>. The authors would like to thank the devoted fans who contributed their efforts to *The Simpsons* Archive for their compilation of information on each episode of the series. It proved invaluable in checking many of the scenes and quotations described in this article.

² *The Simpsons* are being released on DVD at a rate of about one season per year. Currently, the first ten complete seasons are available on DVD. Episode guides of nearly all of *The Simpsons* episodes are available at the Simpsons Archive.

³ Sexton (2006) suggests consulting Simpson (2001) or Talab (1999) for more information on using copyright material in the classroom.

⁴ For example, see Mankiw (2007) as well.

⁵ “King-Size Homer,” Production Code 3F05. Online episode guide available at: <http://www.snpp.com/episodes/3F05>. Season 7, disc 2, suggested clip: 0:30 – 3:20.

⁶ In our classrooms we use *Simpsons* clips as an engaging introduction to these policy topics. Thus these suggested discussion questions are designed to be fairly open-ended because we want to encourage different student responses. In many cases, therefore, there is no “right” answer to a question. If a reader is particularly interested about our thoughts on a particular question, we would encourage him or her to contact either author directly.

⁷ “Two Cars in Every Garage, Three Eyes on Every Fish,” Production Code 7F01. Online episode guide available at: <http://www.snpp.com/episodes/7F01>. Season 2, disc 1, suggested clip: 1:20 – 3:10.

⁸ “Homer vs. The Eighteenth Amendment,” Production Code 4F15. Online episode guide available at: <http://www.snpp.com/episodes/4F15>. Season 8, disc 3, suggested clip: 5:50 – 9:50.

⁹ “Much Apu About Nothing,” Production Code 3F20. Online episode guide available at: <http://www.snpp.com/episodes/3F20>. Season 7, disc 4, suggested clip: 9:00 – 11:40.

¹⁰ As Moe the Bartender so eloquently puts it, “You know what really aggravates me? It's them immigrants. They want all the benefits of living in Springfield, but they ain't even bother to learn themselves the language”

¹¹ “Lisa the Tree Hugger,” Production Code CABF01. Online episode guide available at: <http://www.snpp.com/episodes/CABF01>. Not yet available on DVD.

¹² “The PTA Disbands,” Production Code 2F19. Online episode guide available at: <http://www.snpp.com/episodes/2F19>. Season 6, disc 3, suggested clip: 4:10 – 7:10.

¹³ “Homer Simpson in: ‘Kidney Trouble,’” Production Code AABF04. Online guide available at: <http://www.snpp.com/episodes/AABF04>. Season 10, disc 2, suggested clip: 8:40 – 11:20.

¹⁴ “Springfield,” Production Code 1F08. Online episode guide available at: <http://www.snpp.com/episodes/1F08>. Season 5, disc 2, suggested clip: 4:00 – 6:10.

¹⁵ Kennedy (2000) argues that the difference between real and nominal interest rates is the single most important concept taught in principles of macroeconomics.

¹⁶ “Trouble with Trillions,” Production Code 5F14. Online episode guide available at: <http://www.snpp.com/episodes/5F14>. Season 9, disc 3, suggested clip: 9:10 – 11:45.

¹⁷ The show actually revolves around Homer’s attempt to reclaim the bill for the United States government after he is recruited by the FBI in order to pay for his tax fraud.

¹⁸ While we did not collect comprehensive data on the effect of this approach with our students, anecdotally we strongly believe that this approach gets students to think like economists. In our student evaluations, for example, student regularly point out that the Simpsons episodes help to bring the issues in class into context. In addition, students will often follow-up with us after the class has ended to suggest new episodes and examples of other topics for us to use in class. Anytime students "see" economics well enough to begin making suggestions for pedagogical improvement, we feel the approach is having an impact.

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