

Teacher Lesson Plan: The \$80K Career Challenge

Grade Level: 9–12

Theme: Pathways to Your Passion (Certification & 2-Year Degrees)

Lesson Objective

Students will explore careers and discover that many high-paying careers do not require a four-year degree. Students will identify career pathways including certifications, apprenticeships, and associate degrees.

Materials Needed

- Student devices (Chromebooks or laptops)
- Student worksheet or paper
- Career exploration websites are provided on the student worksheets:
 - <https://texascareercheck.com>
 - <https://www.mytexasfuture.org/career-explorer/>

Teacher Introduction

Explain to students that many people believe the only way to earn a strong salary is by completing a four-year college degree. In reality, many careers offer excellent salaries through certifications, apprenticeships, or associate degrees.

Introduce the challenge: Students must find three careers that earn \$80,000 or more and do NOT require a four-year degree.

Student Activity

Students will research careers using the provided websites and identify careers that meet the following criteria:

- Median salary of \$80,000 or higher
- Requires certification, apprenticeship, or associate degree
- Does not require a bachelor's degree

Students will record their findings on the provided worksheet.

Discussion & Reflection

Ask students the following questions:

- Which career surprised you the most?

- Did any careers require less education than you expected?
- Would you consider a certification or trade pathway?
- Why is it important to understand multiple career pathways?

Optional Extension

If time allows, students can identify:

- The highest-paying career they found
- The career with the shortest training time
- A career they might consider exploring further

Key Takeaway Message

There are many pathways after high school. Students can pursue a four-year college, community college, trade school or certification program, apprenticeships, or military service. Every student can find a pathway that matches their interests, strengths, and goals.