

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Economics and Personal Finance

## Freakonomics Movie Worksheet

### Summary:

In 2005, economist Steven Levitt and journalist Stephen Dubner teamed-up to write the book *Freakonomics*. Covering a wide-range of topics, the two set out to demonstrate that statistics and figures can be used to believe things we previously believed to know as fact. Now, documentarians Seth Gordon, Alex Gibney, Morgan Spurlock, Eugene Jarecki, Heidi Ewing and Rachel Grady have created a documentary based on Levitt and Dubner's findings that is not only endlessly fascinating, but also immensely entertaining.

Separated into four chapters with interludes, each documentarian (or pair of documentarians in Ewing and Grady) takes on a different section of the book and analyzes it in their own style. First up is Spurlock (*Super Size Me*), who attempts to discover if a person's first name can dictate their success in life. Next, Alex Gibney (*Taxi to the Dark Side*) investigates corruption in the thought-to-be sacred world of Japanese sumo wrestling. Eugene Jarecki (*Why We Fight*) then looks at the incredible drop in crime rates during the 1990s and finally, Ewing and Grady (*Jesus Camp*) aim to learn if cash incentives can motivate underachieving students in Chicago public schools.

### Fundamental ideas offered in the video:

\*Incentives are the corner stone of modern life.

\*The conventional wisdom is often wrong.

\*Dramatic effects often have distant, even subtle, causes.

\*"Experts" — from criminologists to real-estate agents — use their informational advantage to serve their own agenda.

\*Knowing what to measure and how to measure it makes a complicated world much less so.

1. When real estate agents sell their own homes do they make more or less than when they sell clients homes? Why is that?
2. What happened to the child that the mother inadvertently named "Temptress"?
3. What did Dr. Roland Fryer determine to be the cause of Temptress's bad behaviors?
4. What was the conclusion of the experiment using identical resumes using both Black and White names?

5. What might happen if you give a girl a name like Bobbi or Barbie?
  
6. What happened to Robert Lane's sons Winner and Loser?
  
7. Why were the teachers in Chicago cheating for their students?
  
8. What did the instances of cheating among Sumo wrestlers and the teachers in Chicago have in common?
  
9. In Sumo wrestling, why is a Sumo wrestler with a 7/7 record more apt to cheat? How often do 7/7 Sumo wrestlers win?
  
10. What happened to the two whistle-blowers\* who exposed cheating in Professional Sumo wrestling?  
(\*Person who tells the public/authority figure of dishonesty/illegal activities in government, organizations, or companies.)
  
11. Why are the Japanese people really not that interested in exposing the Sumo scandal?
  
12. Why will the New York times not use the word "torture" when Americans are torturing people but have no problems using this word to describe the actions of the Chinese?
  
13. What did early Polio researchers think might have caused Polio and why? What was the matter with this?

14. AS the 1980 s came to a close, what did most people think would happen to the crime rate of the United States? Why?
15. Why did Police Forces say that the crime rate went down in the 1990's?
16. What surprising reason does economist Steven Levitt put forward as the real reason that crime rates went down in the 1990's? What does he use to support this idea?
17. What did Steven Levitt learn about incentives when he tried to potty train his daughter?
18. What does Levitt say not graduating from high school is like in a modern economy? Why do kids not really consider this?
19. In the experiment to get 9<sup>th</sup> graders to succeed in Chicago, how much money did they pay each kid monthly if they met their academic standards? What did Kevin's mom offer to do if her son could meet these standards?
20. Did Kevin meet his academic standards the first month? Does he seem that concerned over this?
21. When they go over the data for the Chicago pay-for-performance project, which kids did it affect and which kids did it not?
22. Why does Kevin say that the money isn't motivating him?
23. What were the final results of the program at the end of the semester? How many more kids did they get to pass? Do you think the results would have been different if more money would have been used?