

“The Simpsons” as Illustration of Work-Family Concepts

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Type: Media Examples

Purpose:

Using a television show to illustrate family and work concepts

The Simpsons, the animated situation comedy, is now in its 17th season. Students have literally grown up with the critically-acclaimed show and understand its biting commentaries on American society, current events and family issues. The Simpson family includes the nuclear family of Homer and Marge, bad-boy Bart, socially-conscious Lisa, and baby Maggie, along with a cast of regular characters from the community of Springfield.

Scanlan and Feinberg (2000) introduced the idea of using the television show to teach sociological concepts. While they recommend using the entire 22-minute episode, specific concepts can be introduced or illustrated with a shorter 3-5 minute clip. Seasons 1-7 are now available for purchase or rental so more examples of illustrated concepts from those seasons have been included in the table below. However, episodes are rerun nightly in most viewing areas so that particular episodes can be taped easily. Students may also be a resource for copies of particular episodes.

The following table includes episodes that illustrate family and work concepts. The table is organized in chronological order because the episodes are bundled by season when they are purchased or rented. The official identifier for the episode (code number) and the episode title (in quotes) are also included.

Topic	Season Episode Code Number	Description
Difficulties at gift-giving holidays for low-income families	Season 1 Episode 1 7G08	“Simpsons Roasting on an Open Fire” Homer takes a second job as a Santa because his company does not give the usual Christmas bonus. He hides the Santa job from Marge because he is embarrassed about the lack of a Christmas bonus. He works through Christmas Eve and barely makes the extended family gathering.
Social class;	Season 1	“There’s No Disgrace Like Home”

Family therapy	Episode 4 7G04	Homer is embarrassed by his family when they go to a company picnic held at his boss's home. Mr. Burns is rich, the house is opulent, and other employees' families have good manners. Homer decides to change his family through therapy. The therapist has each family member draw a picture of his/her fears and all draw Homer, while he draws a plane crash. They then experience shock therapy.
Mental health; Depression	Season 1 Episode 6 7G06	"Moaning Lisa" Lisa is depressed. She finds no room in school for creativity and nonconformity. Marge gets the family to focus on Lisa's condition. We see the effects on a family when one member has depression.
Fear of child-care workers	Season 1 Episode 13 7G01	"Some Enchanted Evening" Homer calls a babysitting service and the only sitter who will work for the Simpsons turns out to be the "babysitter bandit" who ties up the children and plunders the home.
Family impact of a work-related move	Season 2 Episode 18 7F05	"Dancin' Homer" Homer is offered a new job in Capital City, so the Simpsons sell all their belongings and move to the big city. He fails at his job after the first night.
Food as love/work; Tense family dynamics during holidays	Season 2 Episode 20 7F07	"Bart vs. Thanksgiving" This episode shows the work involved with holiday feasts. Food is an expression of love and an effort of work. Lisa creates a centerpiece for the table but it is destroyed during an argument with Bart. Bart feels mistreated and runs away from home.
Working with/for family members	Season 2 Episode 28 7F16	"Oh, Brother, Where Are Thou?" Homer discovers his long-lost brother Herb, who is a successful automotive executive. Herb takes in the Simpson family and hires Homer, which ends up bankrupting the car company.
Effects of business failure on family	Season 3 Episode 38 7F23	"When Flanders Failed" The Simpsons' neighbor, Ned Flanders, opens his own business which does not make money. His family has to sell all their possessions and live in their car because of the business loss.

Parents' disappointment with children's occupational choices	Season 3 Episode 41 8F05	"Like Father, Like Clown" Krusty the Clown is grieving because his rabbi father, who didn't want him to become a clown, has disowned him. Krusty wants to reconnect with his father.
Family budgeting; One-breadwinner families; Social class	Season 3 Episode 43 8F06	"Lisa's Pony" Homer tries to work two full-time jobs in order to pay for the cost of Lisa's new pony. He cannot get enough sleep while working eight hours at the nuclear plant and another eight on the graveyard shift of the convenience store. Lisa's riding instructor also gives her highbrow pronunciation lessons free of charge.
Unemployment's effects on family members	Season 3 Episode 46 8F09	"Burns Verkaufen der Kraftwerk" Homer is laid off. He slips into a depression and starts to drink heavily. The family scrimps on expenses. Marge sends Bart to the bar to pick up his father.
Work in the home	Season 3 Episode 50 8F14	"Homer Alone" Marge is exhausted from housework and her family's lack of appreciation. She goes on a vacation by herself. The family does a poor job of fending for themselves in her absence.
Work in the home	Season 3 Episode 53 8F15	"Separate Vocations" The invisibility of housework is shown. Lisa's career tests reveal her ideal future occupation as "homemaker." She is determined to prove the test wrong.
Unemployment, homelessness and the effects on friends/family	Season 3 Episode 57 8F21	"The Otto Show" Otto, the bus driver, gets fired and on the same day gets evicted from his apartment. Bart convinces his parents to let Otto live in the garage. Marge and Homer are uncomfortable with Otto joining the household.
Sexual harassment in the workplace; Spouses working at the same workplace	Season 4 Episode 66 9F05	"Marge Gets a Job" Marge gets a job at the nuclear power plant where Homer works. Homer doesn't like this idea. Marge works harder than anyone else and catches Mr.

		Burn's attention. Burns (the boss) promotes Marge, listens to her opinions, and develops a crush on her. This leads to sexual harassment in the workplace.
The effects on the family of changes in employer-provided medical benefits	Season 4 Episode 76 9F15	"Last Exit to Springfield" Management and the union at the nuclear power plant are fighting about employee dental benefits. Lisa needs braces and Homer is the union representative for this battle.

Sexual attractions in the workplace	Season 5 Episode 90 1F07	"The Last Temptation of Homer" Homer is attracted to a new co-worker, Mindy, and tries to avoid her. He starts to fall in love with her and is tempted to be unfaithful to Marge.
Gambling addiction's effects on the family	Season 5 Episode 91 1F08	"Springfield (or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Legalized Gambling)" Homer gets a job as a blackjack dealer and Marge begins to spend all her time there. She develops a gambling addiction.
Work in the home	Season 5 Episode 98 1F15	"Bart Gets an Elephant" Marge tries to get the family to participate in household chores. She demands that they all help clean on a Saturday.
Disclosing aspects of private family life at work	Season 5 Episode 103 1F20	"Secrets of a Successful Marriage" Homer gets a job teaching an adult education class on successful marriages. He discloses a great deal of personal information about his own marriage with Marge, who feels violated.
The good provider role versus pursuing your dreams	Season 6 Episode 116 2F10	"And Maggie Makes Three" Homer gives up his dream job of working at a bowling alley when Marge discovers that she is pregnant. Homer's dream job will not pay enough to support the growing family. He returns to the job that pays well but is not rewarding.
Gender ideologies and employment	Season 6 Episode 126 2F21	"Springfield Connection" Marge gets a job as a police officer. Homer is insecure about the prestige of his wife's new job. He taunts and makes fun of her when she warns him against parking across three handicapped

		spaces.
Obesity's effects on family and work	Season 7 Episode 135 3F05	"King-Size Homer" Homer wants to avoid the nuclear power plant's new exercise program. He gains weight in order to be classified as disabled and permitted to work from home.
Taking children to work	Season 7 Episode 148 3F17	"Bart on the Road" It's "Take your kids to work day" and Lisa goes to the nuclear power plant while Bart goes to the Department of Motor Vehicles with his aunts Patty and Selma.
Home-based businesses	Season 8 Episode 164 4F08	"The Twisted World of Marge Simpson" Marge starts a home-based business of baking pretzels and then selling them from her car. The whole family gets involved with the business.
Employment move's effects on the family	Season 8 Episode 155 3F23	"You Only Move Twice" Homer moves the family (again) to a new town because of his work. Marge gets bored and starts drinking. Bart and Lisa are unhappy.
Teamwork-building retreats	Season 8 Episode 165 4F10	"Mountain of Madness" The employees the Springfield Nuclear Power Plant go on a teamwork-building retreat. Homer brings his family.
Work in the home	Season 8 Episode 166 3G03	"Simpsoncalifragilisticexpiala(Annoyed Grunt)cious" Marge is overwhelmed by the demands of motherhood. When her hair starts to fall out from stress, the doctor suggests she hire a nanny.
Childcare businesses	Season 8 Episode 170 4F13	"My Sister, My Sitter" Lisa starts a babysitting business which develops into many babysitting jobs around town. At one point Homer and Marge hire her to babysit her older brother Bart, which doesn't go over well.
Ethical conflicts of work	Season 9 Episode 187 5F06	"Realty Bites" Marge becomes a real estate salesperson and confronts the ethical questions of using high-pressure sales and lies to convince people that particular homes will fulfill emotional needs for

		their families.
Quitting a job to pursue a dream	Season 10 Episode 205 5F21	“The Wizard of Evergreen Terrace” Homer has a mid-life crisis and quits his job to pursue the dream of being an inventor. His family supports him on this venture and helps him.
Medicating children	Season 11 Episode 228 AABF22	“Brother’s Little Helper” Bart has been prescribed a behavior drug, Focusyn, because of his antics. He has a bad reaction to the drug and becomes paranoid. His parents and the community are involved in trying to improve his behavior.
Mental health and parenting	Season 11 Episode 232 BABF02	“Hello Gutter, Hello Fadder” Homer gets depressed and decides to devote himself to his children, which results in extra-aggressive parenting. Bart and Lisa can’t take it.
Commercialization of multiple births	Season 11 Episode 233 BABF03	“Eight Misbehavin’” Apu and his wife Manjula use fertility drugs and have octuplets. The expense, time and energy to care for eight babies is overwhelming. The owner of a local zoo makes an offer to help out, but the catch is that the babies are put on display at the zoo.
The invisibility of housework	Season 11 Episode 236 BABF04	“Little Big Mom” Marge breaks her leg during a family skiing trip and has to stay in the hospital. Lisa volunteers to take over Marge’s household duties. She finds it a challenge because Homer and Bart won’t help.
The debasing nature of some employment	Season 12 Episode 253 CABF04	“Homer vs. Dignity” Homer takes on a second job as Mr. Burns’ clown because the family’s financial situation is dire. He performs undignified stunts in order to make Burns laugh. He finally refuses to perform a cruel prank.
Daycare/childcare businesses	Season 12 Episode 268 CABF16	“Children of a Lesser Clod” Homer starts a daycare center at home, even though he has always neglected his own kids. Bart and Lisa devise a way to show the community that Homer is not an appropriate caregiver for children.
Documenting family abuse in animation	Season 13 Episode 287 DABF13	“I am Furious Yellow” Bart develops a cartoon business documenting

		Homer's abuse at home. Bart creates the character "Angry Dad" to chronicle Homer's childrearing abilities and posts it on the internet.
Emancipation from family	Season 14 Episode 302 EABF05	"Barting Over" Bart learns that Homer spent his earnings from a TV commercial he appeared in as a baby. In response, Bart sues for emancipation from his parents.
Family responsibilities shift due to external events	Season 14 Episode 311 EABF15	"Brake My Wife, Please" Homer's driver's license is revoked which increases Marge's household responsibilities even more. She is stressed by the additional work.
Husband not supportive of wife's career aspirations	Season 15 Episode 323 FABF05	"Diatribes of a Mad Housewife" Marge writes a romance novel that is published and widely read. Homer is not supportive of her writing aspirations and lies when he says that he has read her novel. In it, Homer is drawn as a despicable character.
Ethics of deceptive acts	Season 15 Episode 325 FABF07	"Milhouse Doesn't Live Here Anymore" Homer acts homeless and mentally ill to get more money panhandling. He wants the money to buy Marge an expensive present. Marge does not want a present that was funded by Homer's deception.
Family vs. career	Season 16 Episode 339 FABF22	"She Used to Be My Girl" Marge is confronted with her choice of homemaking instead of a career when her high school classmate comes to town. Chloe Talbot is now a successful newscaster and Lisa is enamored with her. Marge questions her decision to devote her energies to family rather than career.
The good provider role	Season 16 Episode 340 FABF21	"Fat Man and Little Boy" Homer is depressed when Bart usurps his role as family breadwinner. Bart's t-shirt business is successful.
Work relationships' threat to family	Season 16 Episode 342 GABF01	"Mommie Beerest" Homer takes out a second mortgage to finance Moe's tavern without consulting Marge. When Marge finds out, she decides to safeguard her investment by becoming an active presence at

		Moe's. She and Moe make the tavern successful and Moe falls in love with her.
Housework-related injury	Season 17 Episode 376 HABF14	"Regarding Margie" Marge suffers amnesia after inhaling noxious fumes from a cleaning project. Since she can't remember her marriage to Homer or family, he has to teach her about their past. When Marge hears about the decisions they made, she thinks about leaving Homer.

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