

# The Pizza Question, or: What Is Fair?

## Teacher Instructions and Student Worksheet

Source / Credit: Adapted from *polis aktuell*, 6/2017: *Sozialstaat Österreich* (lightly adapted). Updated 16 Feb 2026.

<b>Duration</b>	2 class periods
<b>Recommended level</b>	Upper elementary social studies/civics (roughly grades 3-5)
<b>Methods</b>	Small-group work, discussion, optional role-play
<b>Materials</b>	Paper, pencils/pens, large sheet of paper
<b>Competencies</b>	Action competence, subject knowledge, judgment/decision-making
<b>Main goal</b>	Students explore fairness, distribution, and the basic idea of the welfare state.

## Teacher Instructions

This lesson begins with an everyday dilemma: one pizza, four family members, and different needs. Students first decide what would be fair inside the family and then connect that discussion to broader questions of justice, distribution, and social support.

## Lesson Flow

### Step 1. Introduce the scenario

Read the following situation aloud or summarize it in your own words:

The Waterbauer family is excited for dinner because the whole apartment smells like pizza. Everyone is hungry, but there is only one pizza. Erika, the mother, has just finished five exhausting hours of handball training because she is a competitive athlete. Achmed, the father, missed work because he had to go to the hospital for an X-ray check on his injured foot; he has now learned that he will need surgery next month. Leon is seven years old, very thin, and often hears that he should eat more. He likes the topping, but usually leaves the crust. His sister Samira is fourteen. After eight hours at school and a difficult math test, she is tired and hungry too.

- How should the family divide the pizza?
- What would make the solution fair?
- Should everyone receive the same amount? Why or why not?

### Step 2. Group task: negotiate a fair distribution

Put students into small groups of about eight. At each table, all four family roles should be represented, with two students assigned to each role.

First, the two students sharing a role talk together: How large should their family member's slice be? What reasons support that claim? They sketch their slice on a paper circle.

Next, the group compares all proposed slices. Does the pizza cover everyone's wishes? Can the group agree on one final way to divide it? If yes, students draw the final distribution on a larger circle. If not, they write down the reasons why agreement was difficult.

### Step 3. Share and compare

Each group presents its final solution - or explains why no agreement was reached. Compare the results across the class. Which solutions are similar? Which are very different? What ideas of fairness appear in the discussion?

*Optional variation: Instead of drawing first, four students can act out the family dinner as a short role-play while the rest of the class observes and then discusses the scene.*

### Step 4. Connect the activity to the welfare state

Ask whether students have heard the term welfare state before. Then give a simple explanation: a welfare state helps reduce poverty, supports people when they are sick, helps families with children, protects people in old age, and tries to make society fairer by responding to different needs.

Return to the pizza example and broaden the discussion from the family level to society.

- If a family can distribute food, what might a welfare state distribute or support?
- Can you think of real-life examples of fairness?
- What situations feel especially unfair?

## Activity Cards

### Activity Card 1: Equal for Everyone?

- Imagine the pizza is divided into four identical pieces.
- List two reasons why equal slices might be fair.
- List one reason why equal slices might not feel fair in this family.

### Activity Card 2: Who Needs More?

- Choose one family member who could argue for a bigger piece.
- Use at least two reasons from the story.
- Decide whether need, age, hunger, health, or effort should matter most.

### Activity Card 3: Make a Family Agreement

- Draw one final pizza for the whole family.
- Label each slice with the family member's name.
- Write one sentence explaining the fairness rule your group used.

# Student Reflection Worksheet

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*Use after the group discussion or at the end of the lesson.*

Circle one: Our group chose Equal shares / Different shares / We could not agree

## Quick Reflection

**1. Our group's solution:**

---

---

**2. One reason our group thought this was fair:**

---

---

**3. One new idea I learned about fairness or justice:**

---

---

**4. One thing a welfare state can do to support people:**

---

---

**5. One question I still have:**

---

---