

The Value Trail — A Parent's Guide

Ten minutes of reading. One good question per level. No homework.

Three questions before you hand over the tablet. Try them on yourself.

1. What is money? Not examples — gold, dollars, the thing in your pocket — a definition. What is it?
2. What did people use before money existed?
3. If every bank balance on Earth doubled tonight, would anyone be richer in the morning?

Most adults can't answer the first. Most answer the second with "barter" — which is the story textbooks tell, and not what the historical record shows. The third one usually gets a pause.

None of this is a personal failing. Where money came from simply isn't taught. Which means this game will teach you too, and there's no reason to hide that from your child. "I didn't know that either" is the best thing you can say all week.

The idea the game is built on

Money was not invented. Nobody sat down and designed it, and no ruler decreed it into being. People faced real problems — remembering who owed what, trading with strangers who can't be trusted on a promise, holding value across time and distance — and whatever solved those problems best became money, again and again, in place after place.

What survived was never chosen by decree. It won because it had specific properties, and the same properties every time: scarce, durable, portable, divisible, fungible, verifiable. Those six words sound technical. They aren't. Each is a test a child can run — and in this game, your child runs all of them.

Underneath it all sits one older idea: money is a way of keeping track of what people owe each other. The forms change — clay, shells, gold, paper, numbers — the ledger never has.

One question per level

Ask these at dinner, in the car, whenever. There are no wrong answers to collect — the point is the conversation.

Level 1 — The first favor. Has anyone ever owed you a favor? How did you both remember it?

Level 2 — The ledger. What do we write down in this family so nobody has to argue about it later?

Level 3 — Barter. The village ledger worked fine. Why didn't it work on the stranger?

Level 4 — Shells become money. Would you take shells as payment today? Why not — what changed, the shells or the people?

Level 5 — The Emperor's trick. The Emperor never took a coin out of anyone's pocket. So who paid for his army?

Level 6 — The storm. What would change about your life if your savings could rot?

Level 7 — Over the mountain. What's the most value you could carry in one hand?

Level 8 — Making change. Why can't a cow buy a loaf of bread, even when the cow is worth more?

Level 9 — The moneychanger. Why doesn't a shop care which particular bill you hand them?

Level 10 — The touchstone. How do you know the money in your pocket is real? Who checked?

Level 11 — The six tests. Of the six tests — scarce, durable, portable, divisible, fungible, verifiable — which does the money we use every day pass? Which is it weakest on?

That last conversation is the whole game in miniature. Let your child run the tests. Resist the urge to supply the verdict — the game deliberately doesn't, and it's more interesting when they get there themselves.

Privacy, briefly

No account, no sign-up, no email. Nothing is collected and nothing is transmitted — no ads, no analytics, no tracking of any kind. The game runs entirely on your device; there is no server behind it, so there is nowhere for data to go. Progress lives in the browser on that device. To move to another device, the game shows a short save code — it carries stars, scores and game coins, nothing else, and identifies no one. Worth writing down: it's also the backup if the browser's data ever gets cleared.

Practical bits

It takes about an hour in total — eleven levels of three to five minutes, with one longer level in the middle. It saves continuously, so short sittings work fine. Ages 8 and up — there is no ceiling on these ideas; under 9, plan to sit alongside. Several children can share one device — each picks their name at the start and nothing mixes.

Want more structure? The Teacher's Guide turns the game into a three-week unit with a daily plan, discussion prompts and built-in review. It works just as well for a homeschool table as a classroom. [\[LINK TO TEACHER'S GUIDE\]](#)

The Value Trail is made by Wildrise. It is free, and it stays free.