Applications of the Resolution  
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This article is about applying the resolution to real life. When the judge receives your arguments, how will he compare them to what he has already seen and experienced? When he’s writing his ballot, the judge will tell himself a story about why one side deserves the vote. This article gives you the tools to ensure that in that story, your side is the hero, not the villain.

This resolution sounds a little bit like a question you’d get on an economics test. Trade is a complex issue that could fill thousands of words, and you lucky debaters have to condense it into 13 minutes of speaking time (not counting cross-ex). You don’t have time to compare statistics on all the world’s trade deals of the last 50 years. Even if you did, few judges would be able to follow along.

When it comes to trade, it’s hard not to overload yourself. Resist the temptation. Your best bet is to give the judge something familiar and relatable. Tell simple stories with obvious impacts. Applications can feel like heavy lifting, but if you use them well, your path to victory will be a walk in the park.

# For Affirmatives

When it comes to familiarity, you’re in luck. Most judges are very familiar with how free trade has let them down. The idea is that if counties agree to deregulate their trade, businesses will have greater capacity for profit and the economic growth will improve everyone’s lives. The reality, however, isn’t as pretty. The philosophy of free trade results in trade deals such as NAFTA—the North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement. Jeff Faux, founder of the Economic Policy Institute, explains:

By establishing the principle that U.S. corporations could relocate production elsewhere and sell back into the United States, NAFTA undercut the bargaining power of American workers, which had driven the expansion of the middle class since the end of World War II. The result has been 20 years of stagnant wages and the upward redistribution of income, wealth and political power.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Free trade is seen as something that took power away from the American middle class. Use that resentment to your advantage. Debaters will find a lot of power in applications that tie your judge’s major economic concerns to the negative side.

But this isn’t just a problem for the United States. Free trade is also used to pressure poor countries into selling their sovereignty. In 2008, El Salvador blocked environmentally harmful mining practices. They were then sued for violating trade agreements. Similarly, cheap meat and produce from the US puts Jamaican farmers out of business.[[2]](#footnote-2) Free trade leaves these countries powerless to protect themselves. The way they are being treated is, in a word, unfair. Affirmatives will find a lot of opportunities by researching the plight of the developing world. Dropping regulations and letting the private sector run itself leaves vulnerable populations defenseless.

The fundamental flaw of free trade is that it rests on the false notion that people, when left on their own, will make the right choice. If your English teacher (or your mom) ever made you read *Lord of the Flies*, you probably already know where I’m going. In *Lord of the Flies*, a group of boys are stranded on an island to fend for themselves. Their attempts to govern themselves works at first, but eventually, they descend into savagery and even murder. When you value freedom over fairness, you let people become the worst versions of themselves. For those who prefer value-centric cases, this is the story you want to tell. Remind the judge that human depravity is an unavoidable reality in classic literature and trade deals alike.

But what good is it to demonize free trade if fair trade can’t offer a solution? Convincing the judge to choose fair trade means telling them to trust regulation and not free market principles. It’s a tough sell, to be sure. To make matters worse, fair trade is unfamiliar. It’s a fairly uncommon term with ambiguous implications. But you’re writing the story, and your best bet is to present fair trade as everything free trade isn’t. If free trade neglects the middle class, give examples of fair trade rescuing it. If free trade exploits the needy, fair trade protects them.

For some application ideas, we can look at the lives that fair trade enriches. Human Rights Correspondent at *The Independent*, Sarah Morrison, reports whether people really feel like fair trade is fair. A Columbian miner said that fair trade certification “is about legitimising my work – that is very important.” That sentiment was echoed by an Indian farmer who help found his local fair-trade alliance, saying “it ensures the credibility of the system.” A Latin American banana farmer called fair trade “a way of keeping poor producers like myself earning a living.”[[3]](#footnote-3)

Harriet Lamb of the Fairtrade Foundation defended fair trade against free trade criticism, explaining:

Free-market economists complain that Fairtrade benefits only a small number of farmers, penalising those outside. This is plain wrong. In fact, the evidence suggests that the opposite is true. Research in Bolivia, for example, found that coffee producers outside Fairtrade were able to negotiate higher prices: Fairtrade had become a price setter. Fairtrade farmers also share their knowledge in trading. For those inside the system, our research shows that through the minimum price guarantee, farmers have more secure and stable incomes. A group of rice farmers in India invested their premium in buying a tractor and a land leveller; productivity increased by 30 percent.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Advocating for fair trade might sound intimidating at first, but the success stories speak for themselves. Fair trade is about putting people first, defending the defenseless, empowering the powerless. It doesn’t exploit the poor or give handouts. It gives them the protection they need to provide for themselves.

# For Negatives

So now that the affirmative has demonized you for 6 minutes, what do you do? As negative, your job is to re-write the story. Tell the judge that, while it may sound like the world was dark and gloomy before fair trade swooped in and saved the day, the reality is that fair trade is a bit of a utopia—a place that doesn’t exist. As Charles Wolf, Jr. of the RAND corporation puts it “‘Fair trade’ has never had clear, quantifiable standards for judging what’s fair.”[[5]](#footnote-5)

The blurry lines make it unreliable, sometimes harmful. Its tactics look a lot like they’re helping those in need, but when you look at the big picture, fair trade often stifles poor communities’ opportunities for growth. The entire point of fair trade is giving the underserved an artificial advantage. Meaning anyone who’s not poor enough to be eligible is at an artificial disadvantage. According to economist Paul Collier, fair trade gives producers “charity as long as they stay producing the crops that have locked them into poverty.”[[6]](#footnote-6)

As negative, your narrative stars poor producers as Snow White and fair trade is the poison apple. Acknowledge the truth in the affirmative’s arguments. Yes, people do horrible things, but remind your judge that those horrible things don’t stop with an affirmative vote. If anything, they get worse. Consumers pay higher prices for what they think is a good cause, only to be contributing to a system that further impoverishes people.

Examples of fair trade excusing abuse and neglect are abundant. A report by the SOAS University of London found that fair trade has failed the developing world’s neediest workers. The researchers write:

Where Fairtrade flowers were grown, and where there were farmers’ groups selling coffee and tea into Fairtrade certified markets, wages were very low – especially women’s wages. In fact, wages in other comparable areas and among comparable employers producing the same crops but where there was no Fairtrade certification were usually higher. This was not because the Fairtrade certified cooperatives were in more marginalised, deprived areas.[[7]](#footnote-7)

A similar investigation by the BBC into fair trade tea producers uncovered the tragic living conditions laborers must endure. In India, they found that:

Living and working conditions are so bad, and wages so low, that tea workers and their families are left malnourished and vulnerable to fatal illnesses.

There was also a disregard for health and safety, with workers spraying chemicals without protection, and on some estates, child labour being used.[[8]](#footnote-8)

Choosing fair trade might sound like taking the high road. In real life, however, it’s anything but. If the affirmative wants to protect the developing world, your job is to show the judge who they really need protection from.

You can also talk about the issues that, for your judges, will hit much closer to home. As I mentioned earlier, free trade has been blamed for crippling the US middle class. The Trump administration responded with tariffs that they claimed would ensure fair trade with other countries. This well-intentioned move could hurt the very people it is designed to protect by raising prices and risking a trade war. According to Business Insider, it even puts us at risk of a global recession.[[9]](#footnote-9) Fair trade makes lofty promises, but rarely does it fulfill them.

Free trade, on the other hand, is much more reliable. Your advocacy should paint the picture of an economic model that just makes sense. It lets companies put workers where they’re most productive, creating more efficient industries with higher pay. It puts domestic industries on the global stage so they can develop the capacity for global power. It levels the playing ground by removing artificial advantages and disadvantages. Show the judge that anything fair trade does free trade can do better, and there are plenty of examples to help you along the way.

Free trade increases a country’s quality of life. A Heritage Foundation report found:

Countries with the most trade freedom have much higher per capita incomes, greater food security, cleaner environments, and less politically motivated violence.[[10]](#footnote-10)

Not only that, but free trade agreements can be tools to improve living standards overseas. The economic benefits act as leverage so that, unlike in the case of fair trade, producers actually see the labor improvements they were promised. This is exactly the US has done in trade deals such as US-Colombia FTA. Billy Melo Araujo of the Conversation reports:

The US decided not to ratify the agreement until it was satisfied that Colombia had adopted a number of reforms, from improvements to enforcement of labour laws to the protection of trade union officials and the criminalisation of anti-union acts.[[11]](#footnote-11)

Fair trade creates rules to stop people from doing bad things, but free trade makes people want to follow those rules.

This is a resolution that requires deep understanding of economic issues, touching a broad range of impacts. The research will be intense but rewarding. There are countless compelling stories to be told. Tell them well.

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2. Adam Hochschild. “Fair Trade Agreements Would Be More Effective Now than Reparations.” The New York Times. OCTOBER 8, 2015. Accessed Jul 1, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2015/10/08/are-transatlantic-slave-trade-reparations-due/fair-trade-agreements-would-be-more-effective-now-than-reparations> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Sarah Morrison. “Fairtrade: Is it really fair?” The Independent. May 6 2012. Accessed July 2, 2017. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/politics/fairtrade-is-it-really-fair-7717624.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Charles Wolf, Jr. “If Not Free Trade, Then What?” The RAND Blog. Accessed November 4, 2016. Accessed June 29, 2018. <https://www.rand.org/blog/2016/11/if-not-free-trade-then-what.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Paul Collier quoted by Andrew Chambers. “Not so fair trade.” The Guardian. December 12, 2009. Accessed Jul 1. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/cif-green/2009/dec/12/fair-trade-fairtrade-kitkat-farmers> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. “Research finds Fairtrade fails the poorest workers in Ethiopia and Uganda.” The SOAS University of London. May 24, 2014. Accessed June 2, 2018. <https://www.soas.ac.uk/news/newsitem93228.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Justin Rowlatt and Jane Deith. “The bitter story behind the UK’s national drink.” The BBC. September 8, 2015. Accessed June 2, 2018. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-34173532> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Bob Bryan and Elena Holodny. “Trump’s considering a tariff that could put the economy on a path to ‘global recession’.” Business Insider. Jun. 30, 2017. Accessed June 30, 2018. <http://www.businessinsider.com/trump-steel-tariff-china-germany-japan-global-recession-2017-6> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Bryan Riley and Patrick Tyrrell. “2018 Index of Economic Freedom: Freedom to Trade Is a Key to Prosperity.” The Heritage Foundation. November 21, 2017, Acessed July 2, 2018. <https://www.heritage.org/trade/report/2018-index-economic-freedom-freedom-trade-key-prosperity> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Billy Melo Araujo. “Trade deals, labour conditions and the gap between talk and action.” the Conversation . September 28, 2017. Accessed July 2, 2017. <https://theconversation.com/trade-deals-labour-conditions-and-the-gap-between-talk-and-action-83730> [↑](#footnote-ref-11)