Fictional Profiles

**Al: United States**

Al lives in Flint, Michigan, a small Midwestern city that has been dominated by the automobile industry for nearly a century. When Al was growing up, his relatives and neighbors worked either in the General Motors (GM) factory or in one of the smaller plants that supplied auto parts. In college, Al earned an engineering degree, and then went to work for the local GM plant. After ten years with GM, Al and two of his fellow engineers opened a factory that produces gaskets for the engines of GM cars. For the last eighteen years, Al has employed more than one hundred people and supplied gaskets to GM, Ford, and Toyota factories in the United States and Mexico. But since the economy began to take a nosedive in 2008, fewer and fewer orders have come in and Al has had to lay off 20 percent of his workforce. Nevertheless, Al is hopeful that the economy will soon rebound. He has started making connections with car manufacturers in India and Germany in the hopes that as the economy improves, his factory will get more business from overseas.

**Arona: Senegal**

Arona is a small farmer who lives in the village of Diender, Senegal. For many years he and his wife scraped by as subsistence farmers, selling any extra vegetables in the local market in order to make enough money to buy necessities like oil and paraffin for cooking. The family’s fortune changed when a European company came in and built a food processing plant nearby. Many agricultural goods in European countries are subsidized, but those that aren’t are much less expensive to grow in developing countries because labor costs are lower. The company approached Arona and asked him to grow beans for export to France. In the last six years, his income has nearly tripled. Some of his neighbors have also benefited from growing vegetables for export. Others have gotten jobs in the plant, canning the beans. Arona has been able to install a basic irrigation system on his land with the help of the company. He and his wife now have enough money to send their youngest son to school. Poverty is still widespread among Senegal’s farmers. Arona hopes that more opportunities will develop for other farmers.

**Edson: Brazil**

Edson is a soybean farmer in the state of Mato Grosso, Brazil. Edson grew up farming; his parents were corn farmers on their small farm in another part of the country. Twenty years ago Edson bought two hundred acres of heavily-forested land on the edge of the Amazon rainforest for a few thousand dollars. Today he owns two thousand acres of cleared land and employs sixteen field hands to help him. Initially Edson planned to grow corn, but worldwide demand has fueled a boom in soybeans. For most of the last twenty years, Edson’s soybean farm has seen record profits. Today, Edson’s farm is worth nearly two million dollars. Recent changes in the global trade environment are set to push his profits even higher. In the United States, subsidies to U.S. corn growers have increased because the U.S. government is promoting the use of ethanol, an alternative fuel that can be made from corn. As a result, demand for soybeans is shooting up. Producers of many food products are substituting soy beans for corn in their recipes. In the last two years, Edson has watched as the amount of farmland devoted to soybeans in Mato Grosso has ballooned. Many people have immigrated from eastern regions of the country for jobs on the farms. Edson has been in the farm business long enough to know that prices will never stay so high for long. He is concerned that when demand decreases, his farm will face much fiercer competition from all of the new soybean producers.

**He Yan: China**

He Yan is the marketing director of a factory in the city of Guangzhou in Guangdong province, China. Her factory makes shower...
heads and faucets and in the 1990s employed as many as five hundred people. But since China joined the WTO in 2001, Yan’s factory has come on hard times. Competition from businesses in places like the United States and Australia have forced Yan’s company to trim its costs and cut its labor force. Today the factory has only 126 workers and there are signs that even more may be laid off. Yan’s boss has been sending her overseas to market the company’s products to clients in places like Germany and France. But tapping into the export market will be difficult. EU standards for the types of materials used in production are much stricter than those in China. Yan’s company will have to completely change its methods of production to produce for these new markets. Yan is worried that if her company cannot adjust it will be forced to close. To be on the safe side, she has been in touch with recruitment officers from some of the more successful export factories in Guangzhou. Yan cannot afford to be unemployed. Her parents and two younger brothers, who live in the rural village where she was raised, also depend on her income to pay the family’s expenses.

Jackson: United States

Jackson has worked in the blast furnace at a steel mill in Ohio for the last thirty-seven years. The last three decades have not been easy for the U.S. steel industry. Over the years, Jackson has watched many close friends lose their jobs and since 1990, he and his fellow workers have taken repeated salary cuts. Jackson believes that the steel industry is crucial to the economic health of the region where he lives; many nearby businesses, including restaurants, stores, and other services, cater to the steel factory and its workers. He believes that if his steel mill closes, hundreds of other people also will lose their jobs. In 2002, U.S. President Bush raised tariffs on steel imports in order to help the ailing industry. With this protection in place, many steel mills restructured their businesses to cut costs and be more efficient. But less than two years later, Bush removed the tariffs, coming under heavy oppo-

Judy: United States

Judy lives in Providence, Rhode Island, a New England city that has a long industrial history. Like many people in her neighborhood, she works in a jewelry factory assembling earrings and necklaces. She is a high school graduate, but with three children to raise, Judy has not found the time for further education. Now in her mid-40s, Judy has worked in the same non-union factory for twelve years. During that time, her salary has barely kept up with inflation. In 2008, she was making $8.75 an hour. Three years ago, a nearby jewelry factory closed down when manufacturing operations moved to Malaysia. Although Judy would like to find a better job, she considers herself lucky to have steady work, as there have been a number of layoffs in her factory. Her oldest son has taken computer courses at school and at night has been teaching her how to use some basic programs. Although Judy is nervous about changing careers, she is concerned that if things continue on their current path, she may be forced to.

Karl: United States

Karl is a fourth-generation farmer in North Dakota. He has been farming his land in the Red River Valley for three decades. The farm has been in the family for over one hundred years. But today many family farmers in the Midwest are no longer able to make a living. Karl, trying desperately to hold onto his land, is convinced that his grandchildren will never have the chance to see it if things continue on their current trend. He sees the truckloads of grain crossing into the United States from Canada and notices all of the foreign-grown produce in the grocery store. Although the
U.S. government provides subsidies to many farmers, most of the money has gone to large-scale farms, allowing them to expand their businesses and buy land from small farmers who can no longer compete. Over the last ten crop seasons Karl has lost such a significant amount of money that he has had to sell off ten thousand acres of land as well as let go of most of his employees.

Lebo: Lesotho
Lebo works at a clothing factory in Maseru, Lesotho, a small country in southern Africa. When Lebo was growing up, her father worked in South Africa for most of the year because there were so few jobs in Lesotho. Her mother grew crops on the family’s land, selling them in the local market in order to make a little extra money to pay the school fees for Lebo and her two older brothers. When Lebo was in high school, the textile industry in Lesotho began to take off, helped in large part by a preferential trade agreement that Lesotho had with the United States. This trade agreement guaranteed Lesotho a certain percentage of the U.S. clothing market. Foreign businesses opened factories throughout the country and Lebo was able to find a job assembling t-shirts after graduating from high school. In 2005, after Lebo had been on the job for two years, many rich countries eliminated quotas they had had to limit the amount of clothing imported from China. Since then, the textile industry in Lesotho has been struggling to compete with the wildly-successful Chinese clothing industry. Thousands of workers have been laid off and many factories have closed. Lesotho still has some protection under the U.S. preferential trade agreement, but that is set to expire in 2015. Lebo has managed to keep her job so far, but the pay is low and she is worried that, in the long run, the textile industry in Lesotho is doomed. Nevertheless, for now Lebo is in a much better position than many of her friends from school who have been unemployed since graduation.

Mahesh: India
Mahesh lives in India in the city of Bangalore. He was the first member of his family to attend college. Today his two daughters attend an exclusive private school. Mahesh’s career as a computer engineer took off in the early 1990s, as Bangalore became an international hub for information technology and innovation. With labor costs cheaper than in the United States, investment from around the world poured into Bangalore. The company that Mahesh works for was founded in 1991 with money from U.S. investors. The company develops software for airplane and nautical navigation systems. Many of the company’s clients are located overseas, in countries like China, France, and Norway. After working for the company for six years, Mahesh is now the lead engineer in one of the company’s subdivisions. In addition to supporting his immediate family, Mahesh also helps his mother and brothers in his home village, located a few hundred kilometers from Bangalore. His family used to own a farm and produce milk to sell in the markets in Bangalore. But competition from subsidized EU dairy farmers has forced many local farmers out of business. Mahesh’s relatives depend on the money he sends back to pay many of the family’s expenses.

Monique: Australia
Monique is a radiologist in South Australia. She does most of her work as a consultant, which means that she is not fully employed by any one hospital. Instead, hospitals pay her when they require her services. She has worked this job for the last twenty-five years, mainly at two hospitals in the city of Adelaide. At various times she has been forced to take on extra work, traveling a few hours outside the city to a hospital in a more remote area. That work meant long hours and many nights away from her family. But a few years back, she got a job with a consulting firm that offers services to hospitals in the United States. Monique was a perfect fit for this position because she had completed her residency training in a hospital in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and so she has U.S. qualifications in her field. Now in addi-
tion to working at a local hospital, she also diagnoses patients from afar. Doctors in places like New York and Chicago fax her x-rays, CT scans, and MRIs, often because it is the middle of the night in the United States and there are no radiologists on duty at their hospitals. In Australia it is daytime and from her office in Adelaide, Monique reads the scans and emails the doctors her analyses. Working with this firm has given her more reasonable work hours and reduced the time she spends at work. She is thinking of taking leave for six months next year to get qualified in Germany because her firm is starting to get requests from European hospitals as well.

**Pavinder: United Arab Emirates**

Pavinder is from Pakistan, but he works on a construction site in Dubai in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Dubai is in the midst of a massive building boom and Pavinder works for a large corporation that is in partnership with a firm from the United States. A number of the architects on Pavinder’s construction site are from the United States. Most of the construction workers are from outside of Dubai, from places like India, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. The work is very difficult and Pavinder works about sixty hours per week, often in temperatures of 120 degrees Fahrenheit. He lives in a trailer with eighteen other workers and usually has only one day off per week. But Pavinder is grateful to have this job. His pay is $225 a month, which is much more than most of his friends make at their jobs back home. He sends as much money as he can back to his family in Pakistan, but Pavinder must also work to pay off a two thousand dollar debt. He owes this debt to the agent who got him the job in Dubai; without his help, Pavinder would still be looking for work in Pakistan. The building project that Pavinder is working on will be completed within the next year and he is concerned that he will not be able to pay off the debt if he does not find work on another site. He is also concerned about deportation. Recently, some of the workers from his project joined in a strike for better working conditions and the government has threatened to deport anyone who is thought to be involved. As an illegal worker, he would have no right to appeal the government’s decision.

**Vicky: United States**

Vicky moved to Atlanta, Georgia four years ago when she found a job there as a sales representative for a telecommunications firm. Vicky, who will soon be thirty years old, has had a strong interest in international business since high school. In college, Vicky spent a year in Taiwan on a student exchange program. Since graduating, Vicky has worked for three different telecommunications companies. At her current job, Vicky is part of a division that markets cellular telephones to businesses. Her division has increasingly found customers in the Caribbean and Latin America, where poor telephone service makes cellular communications an appealing option. Building off of that success, company executives have made plans to expand operations in China. A proficient worker and fluent in Chinese, Vicky would be a key part of her company’s operations. Since the economic downturn in 2008, company executives have discussed plans to close their U.S. headquarters. Vicky now might have to move to China if she wants to keep her job.
The Global Economic Future

*Instructions:* With your partner, answer the questions below from the perspective of your assigned character.Imagine that you are being interviewed for a newspaper article about world perspectives on the global economic future. Later in the period, you will be called upon to share your responses with the entire class.

Your assigned character: ______________________

1. How have the growth in international trade and the globalization of the economy affected the life and the future plans of your assigned character?

2. According to the perspective of your assigned character, have the global economic changes of the last two decades been positive or negative? Explain your answer.

3. What does your assigned character think the future of the global economy holds for him or her?

4. If your assigned character could deliver a brief message to world leaders about his or her economic concerns, what would it be?