Document 1: Student Comprehensive Lab Pack

Name: _____
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🌾 Unit Study Lab: Rationing & Community Economics

Inspired by *The Long Winter* by Laura Ingalls Wilder

📖 Part 1: Historical Background & Core Concepts

In *The Long Winter*, the residents of De Smet, Dakota Territory, discover that an unseasonably early blizzard has permanently blocked the trains from reaching their town. With seven months of winter ahead and zero supply shipments coming, the town's survival depends entirely on how they manage a fixed, dwindling stock of food and fuel.

When a community faces a total cutoff from external trade, it moves from a traditional economy to a system of **strict rationing and cooperative resource sharing**. Storekeepers like Mr. Loftus and town leaders face intense pressure to balance individual survival, business profit, and the common good of the community.

Key Economic Terms:

- **Finite Stock:** A fixed, limited supply of goods that cannot be replaced once consumed.
- **Rationing:** Actively controlling the distribution of scarce resources so they last longer.
- **Price Gouging:** Raising prices on essential goods to unfair levels during a crisis or disaster.
- **Hoarding:** Storing up large quantities of scarce goods for personal use, depriving others.

📊 Part 2: Community Resource Dilemma Matrix

Directions: In *The Long Winter*, different characters react differently to the crisis. Read each scenario below based on the historical events of the novel, and analyze the immediate risks and alternative actions.

The Community Crisis Scenario	The Immediate Risk if Unchecked	Alternative "Community First" Action
1. The Storekeeper's Dilemma A merchant has a private hoard of wheat. Desperate townspeople need it to survive. The merchant wants to charge an inflated price ($3.00 a bushel instead of the standard $1.00) because demand is high.	**Analyze the Risk:**	**Propose a Solution:**
2. The Individual Hoarding Crisis A few wealthy families attempt to buy out all the remaining flour and kerosene at the town grocery store on Day One of the blockade to protect themselves.	**Analyze the Risk:**	**Propose a Solution:**
3. The Fuel Depletion Crisis The town runs completely out of coal. There is no timber on the open prairie. Individual households begin freezing in their own separate, uninsulated homes.	**Analyze the Risk:**	**Propose a Solution:**

🧠 Part 3: Critical Thinking & Moral Dilemmas

Directions: Answer the following questions in complete sentences, weighing economic concepts against moral duties.

1. **The Merchant's Duty vs. Community Survival:** In a free market, prices typically rise when supply is low and demand is high. However, during the blockade in *The Long Winter*, the townsfolk grow furious when a storekeeper raises the price of wheat significantly. Explain why normal laws of supply and demand fail ethically during an extreme survival event. Who should control the price of food when a community's life is on the line?

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2. **The Sacrifice of the Young Men:** When the town is on the brink of starvation, Almanzo Wilder and Cap Garland risk their lives to travel miles through freezing blizzards onto the open prairie to find a rumored stash of seed wheat from an isolated settler. Evaluate their choice. Is it the responsibility of individual citizens to risk their lives for the community, or should the community have a structured system to handle resource recovery?

🏠 Part 4: Personal Rationing Simulation (Homework Extension Activity)

Directions: Imagine your modern community is hit by a disaster that completely cuts off electricity, water, and grocery deliveries for **two full weeks**. Work with your family to audit your current kitchen inventory and plan a strict baseline rationing schedule to make your food last.

1. **The Finite Food Audit:** List three high-energy, shelf-stable items currently in your home that would be vital to ration (e.g., rice, peanut butter, canned beans).
    - Item A: _____ Total Quantity: _____
    - Item B: _____ Total Quantity: _____
    - Item C: _____ Total Quantity: _____
2. **The Daily Allocation Plan:** If you must feed everyone in your household for 14 days without opening a refrigerator or stove, how will you limit your portions? Outline a bare-minimum daily breakfast, lunch, and dinner routine using *only* your finite items.
    - **Breakfast Portion:** _____
    - **Lunch Portion:** _____
    - **Dinner Portion:** _____
3. **The Community Share Action:** If a family down the street ran out of food entirely on Day 5, would your family share your limited stock, or preserve it strictly for your own household? Explain the trade-offs of your choice.

🔑 Teacher Answer Key & Evaluation Guide

For Rationing & Community Economics Lab

📊 Part 2: Community Resource Dilemma Matrix Key

- **Scenario 1 (Storekeeper):**
    - *Risk:* Price gouging leads to social unrest, violence, or the starvation of poorer families who cannot afford the inflated rates.
    - *Solution:* Town leaders can intervene to negotiate a fair, fixed cap on prices, or purchase the supply collectively to ensure equal distribution. (Historically, code-red community pressure forced the merchant to sell at a fair price).
- **Scenario 2 (Hoarding):**
    - *Risk:* Store shelves are emptied immediately by a select few. The rest of the town is left completely empty-handed, fracturing community trust and creating immediate panic.
    - *Solution:* Storekeepers can enforce purchase limits per household (e.g., "only one sack of flour per family per week") to artificially extend the availability of the stock.
- **Scenario 3 (Fuel Depletion):**
    - *Risk:* Families freeze to death individually, or burn vital structural elements of their own homes (like roof boards or fences) out of desperation.
    - *Solution:* Consolidating families into a single communal building (like a church or store) to pool fuel resources, or using alternative manual processing (like twisting slough hay into tight fuel logs, as done in the novel).

🧠 Part 3: Critical Thinking Model Answers

1. **The Merchant’s Duty vs. Community Survival:**
    - *Model Answer:* Normal economic laws fail ethically because consumers do not have a choice; they must buy food or die. Charging excessive prices for survival goods during a crisis is considered price gouging. In an extreme blockade, community survival must override unregulated profit, meaning civic leaders or collective agreements must regulate prices to maintain peace and save lives.
2. **The Sacrifice of the Young Men:**
    - *Model Answer:* While Almanzo and Cap's actions were incredibly heroic, relying entirely on individual volunteers is dangerous and unpredictable. A truly prepared community should have a structured, organized plan or designated emergency teams to manage resource acquisition rather than relying on the random bravery of teenagers.

📝 Part 4: Personal Rationing Simulation Guidance

- **Evaluation:** Check for logical consistency. The student must list genuinely shelf-stable foods (not frozen or refrigerated items) and demonstrate a realistic understanding of portion control over a 14-day timeline. The reflection on sharing should reward honest analysis of the trade-off between personal survival and civic duty.

📐 Grading Rubric (10-Point Scale)

Criteria	Highly Proficient (3 Points)	Developing (2 Points)	Emerging (1 Point)
Dilemma Matrix	Accurately identifies systemic community risks and proposes logical, cooperative solutions for all three scenarios.	Fills out the matrix completely, but solutions rely on outside help arriving or ignore basic human survival needs.	The matrix is mostly incomplete or suggests unrealistic options (like forcing individuals to go without food).
Economic Ethics	Answers demonstrate an advanced grasp of crisis economics, price gouging concepts, and the ethical limits of free markets.	Answers show basic comprehension of the plot points, but struggle to explain the broader economic tension between profit and survival.	Answers are overly brief or fail to address the core moral dilemmas presented by the text.
Rationing Simulation	Completes the entire household food audit with non-perishable goods and creates a highly realistic, metrics-driven 14-day allocation.	The audit is filled out, but includes items requiring refrigeration/cooking power, or lacks a clear 14-day scaling strategy.	The simulation is left blank or lacks parent/guardian consultation regarding true household inventory.

(Note: 1 point is automatically awarded for formatting compliance and submission details to reach the 10-point cap.)