



Lesson Plan: Does It Make Sense to Buy Your First Car?

Ideal For: Grades 9–12 or beyond.

Duration: 30-60 minutes, depending upon how many activities a class completes.

Overview

Most young people understand cars are expensive, but do they realize that a vehicle's "price" often accounts for only half of lifetime ownership costs?

The activities below enable students to uncover the broader personal and financial responsibilities of vehicle ownership, experiencing first-hand the power of pausing, gathering information, and reflecting before spending their money, or anyone else's.

Objective

By the end of this activity, students will be able to:

1. Identify the major costs and responsibilities associated with owning a car.
2. Distinguish between a vehicle's purchase price and its total cost of ownership.
3. Research real-world cost information related to a potential car purchase.
4. Evaluate whether a car purchase makes sense using the First Car DIMS – DOES IT MAKE SENSE?® Score Calculator.
5. Prepare for and then practice having thoughtful, informed conversations before making major financial decisions.

Materials needed

1. First Car DIMS SCORE® Data Collection Worksheet (one per student), available [here](#).
2. **Student device with internet access** to access the permissionless (no registration, login, or paywall) [First Car DIMS – DOES IT MAKE SENSE?® Score Calculator](#).
3. Optional printer access (or ability to save reports as PDF).

Part 1: Hook (5 minutes)

Ask students: “If someone gave you a car for free, would it actually be free to own?”

Allow students to share responses.

Then ask:

- What costs exist beyond the purchase price?
- How much do you think the purchase price represents as a percentage of the total cost of owning a car? More or less than 50%?

Explain: Today, you’re going to calculate the DIMS - DOES IT MAKE SENSE?[®] Score for a car/ truck to understand the full cost and responsibility of owning a vehicle — and whether it makes sense for you.

Part 2: Data Collection Worksheet (15–20 minutes)

Distribute the **First Car DIMS SCORE[®] Data Collection Worksheet**.

Explain: Before calculating your DIMS SCORE[®], you need real information. Use this worksheet to research and estimate the full cost of owning a car you might realistically consider.

Encourage students to use real sources such as dealership websites, insurance estimates, and local fuel or electricity prices.

Part 3: Calculate the DIMS SCORE[®] (10 minutes)

Once students have completed the worksheet, direct them to the: [**First Car DIMS – DOES IT MAKE SENSE?[®] SCORE Calculator**](#).

Students should enter their collected information and calculate their DIMS SCORE[®].

After calculating their score, students should generate and save or print their DIMS – DOES IT MAKE SENSE?[®] Score Report.

Part 4: Student Reflection Questions (10-15 Minutes)

1. How much does the purchase price account for as a percentage of the total cost of ownership?

- Does this percentage surprise you?
- Was it higher or lower than you expected?

2. Do you feel more prepared to make the decision to buy — or not buy — a car after completing this exercise? Would you like to go back and try the calculator a second time, based on what you learnt from your first try?

Explain your reasoning.

3. What specifically did thinking before buying reveal in the case of considering the purchase of a vehicle?

Consider:

- Costs you hadn't previously considered.
- The responsibilities involved in vehicle ownership
- Whether your original assumptions changed.

4. What questions would you want to discuss with your parent(s) or guardian(s)?

5. Based on your DIMS SCORE® and research, what do you think makes the most sense for you right now?

Explain your thinking.

Part 5: Role-Play Conversation Activity (15 minutes)

Explain: Important financial decisions often involve conversations with family members. This activity helps you practice explaining your thinking using real information.

A DIMS SCORE® Report is designed to help guide a calm, informed, and productive conversation about a possible purchase.

Students should ensure they have:

- A copy of their DIMS SCORE® Report (Agenda)
- Their completed Data Collection Worksheet (Backup)

Pro-Tip: Spare yourself and your parents - why argue about opinions when you can discuss facts?

Instructions

Divide students into pairs. In each pair:

- One student plays the role of the **student**
- One student plays the role of the **parent or guardian**

The student should use their DIMS SCORE® Report and data collection worksheet to explain their thinking.

The parent should listen and ask thoughtful questions.

After 7–10 minutes, students switch roles.

Guidance for Students Playing the Student

Your goal is to explain your thinking clearly and honestly. Discuss:

- The total cost of ownership
- What surprised you
- Whether the purchase makes sense for you
- Your plan for managing costs and responsibilities

Guidance for Students Playing the Parent

Your goal is to understand the student's reasoning.

Respect your child's efforts and ask thoughtful questions such as:

- What costs surprised you most?
- Is your plan to manage ongoing costs realistic?
- What responsibilities come with ownership?
- Why do you believe this decision makes sense — or doesn't?

It is acceptable to conclude that buying a car does — or does not — make sense!

Part 6: Class Debrief (5 minutes)

Ask students:

- What did it feel like to explain your decision using real numbers?
- Did anything surprise you during the conversation?
- Did the DIMS SCORE® Report make the discussion easier?

Explain: Taking time to understand costs and responsibilities before making

Optional Homework Assignment

Students could share their DIMS SCORE® Report and Data Collection Worksheet with their parent(s) or guardian(s) and have a real conversation.

Students may reflect on:

1. What they learned from the conversation
2. Whether their thinking changed

Key Takeaway

Major financial decisions always involve more than just the purchase price.

Taking the time to pause, gather information, and reflect allows you to understand the full cost and responsibility of a decision before you spend a dime, helping ensure that choices are thoughtful, realistic, and aligned with personal circumstances. A win-win-win!

Ways to Reduce Required Class Time:

1. Have students complete the data collection worksheet in advance.
2. Split the activity into two classes: the first for data collection and score calculation, the second for reflection questions and role-playing.