



TEACHER DISCUSSION GUIDE

**STUFF VIDEO PROJECT:
Think Twice
Sole for Sale
Food for Thought**

For middle and
high school



The STUFF Video Project was created by 911 Media Arts Center and students at Foster High School (Tukwila, Washington) with funding from the EPA and King County Solid Waste Division. The video was influenced by the book *Stuff: The Secret Lives of Everyday Things* by John C. Ryan and Alan Durning.

These pre- and post-video questions are guidelines for discussion, designed to raise awareness about the resources from which everyday products are made and to encourage students to consider their personal behaviors and choices as consumers.

THINK TWICE

(6.15 minutes)

Synopsis: Two high school students metaphorically sleep walk their way through an average school day. As each character uses familiar items such as a cell phone, portable stereo, diet breakfast drink and fast food, the viewer learns about various aspects of that product's production, disposal and related environmental impacts.

EALRs

Communication

1.1., 1.2. Uses listening and observation skills to gain understanding.

Reading (Follow-up activities)

2.3. Expands comprehension by analyzing, interpreting, synthesizing information and ideas.
2.4. Thinks critically and analyzes use of language, purpose, and perspective.

Writing (Follow-up activities)

2.2. Writes for different purposes.
3.1. Develops ideas and organizes writing.

THINK TWICE (6.15 minutes)

Key Messages

- Over-consumption is wasteful, and harms the environment by depleting natural resources and destroying habitat.
- Many of the products that we purchase are not necessary for daily happiness and survival. Before purchasing or consuming things, ask "Do I really need this? What impact has the production of this item had on the environment?" What impact will its use and disposal have on the environment?
- Think twice about your actions. Small behavior changes can contribute to a more sustainable planet.

What to Watch For

As you view this video, watch for specific images of how the products shown are affecting our planet and us personally. Notice the behavior changes in the two main characters.

Vocabulary Words/Terms

consumption	sustainability
landfill	leach
greenhouse effect	immigrant laborers
product life cycle	branding



Over-consumption Facts

- The USA makes up five percent of the world's population and yet uses about 30 percent of the world's natural resources and generates 50 percent of the world's solid waste.
- In the past 60 years, North Americans have consumed as many resources as all humans put together in the years previous.
- Advertising directed at children is estimated at over \$15 billion annually.
- Teens (ages 12-19) in the USA spend \$155 billion each year on discretionary items, such as clothing, CDs, makeup and entertainment.
- Over the past decade, credit card debt among 18-24 year olds more than doubled.
- The average person throws away about four pounds of garbage each day. In just four years of high school, the average student throws away almost 6,000 pounds (or three tons) of garbage.
- In King County, we recycle about 50 percent of our solid waste, but estimates indicate that we could increase our recycling level to 75 percent.

Pre-video Discussion Questions

Q. Are you a consumer? What are your favorite things to buy? How do you decide what to buy?

A. Yes, we are all consumers. We all buy, use and eat things. Many of the products we consume are necessary for living, but many are not. People's consumption habits are often influenced by factors such as media and advertising, opinions of family and friends, cost, and aesthetics.

Q. Do you think that the things you buy have any impact on the environment? If so, what impact do you think they have?

A. Everything that we buy (food, clothes, games, etc.) uses natural resources to make it, package it and transport it to stores for consumption. The process of extracting these natural resources can be very damaging to the environment. Throwing things away also has a big impact. Finding ways to reuse and recycle the things we buy lessens the impact that our

Through graphics, photos and voice-over narration, the viewer sees where a product comes from, the resources used to make it, and where it goes when it is no longer wanted or needed. In the end, the characters start to “wake up” and understand that consuming so much stuff affects the planet. They challenge viewers to wake up as well and not to rely on material things for happiness.

products make on the environment. Better yet, buying less stuff can be even more effective.

Post-video Discussion Questions

Q. What do you think are the main messages in the video?

A. See the key messages listed in this discussion guide.

Q. What images did you see that showed how various products affect the planet? How do those images affect your reaction to those products?

A. Extraction of natural resources and the manufacturing process cause pollution and other environmental damage such as destroyed habitat and displaced and dead animals. The video also showed photographs of factory workers affected with physical ailments from exposure to product toxins, unsafe working conditions and dangerous disposal methods.

Q. What do you think the clothes and other things you buy “say” about you (or your peers)?

A. In this culture, clothing might project the following information: financial status, social niche, level of poise or self-assurance, musical preferences, political values (clothing with slogans, refusal to wear fur or leather).

Q. The USA makes up five percent of the world’s population and yet uses about 30 percent of the world’s natural resources. How do you think your buying habits compare to teenagers in other countries?

A. Since people in the USA use more resources per capita than people of other nations, teens in the USA in general probably buy more things than teens elsewhere.

Q. Do you think that advertising reflects or influences teen culture? A follow-up question could be: How do you think advertising either reflects or influences your own behaviors and value system?

A. There is no set answer to this question.



Q. Is it wrong to want to buy things? What questions could you ask yourself in order to make more environmentally friendly buying decisions?

A. No, there is nothing wrong with having things that we really need and want. In the video, the female student points out: “We have to buy things to live and enjoy life. The question is ‘Do we really have to use so much?’” When we shop just for the sake of shopping, or because of what advertisers tell us we need or want, we buy things that we don’t need and create unnecessary waste. It’s helpful to ask these questions when purchasing something new:

- Do I need this product? Do I have another that meets a similar need?
- Can I find a used product, or borrow one that will satisfy my need?
- How long will it last? Can it be repaired if it is broken? What happens to it when I am done with it?
- Is it something I will really enjoy? Can I find a “greener” version that is less harmful to the environment (created or grown locally, made with reusable materials, manufactured with fewer toxins)?

Q. Now that you’ve watched this video, have any of your ideas changed about the things you buy and use? Are there things you might do differently? What actions will you take to make changes?

A. There is no set answer to this question. Follow-up questions might be: Why do you think you don’t do these things now? What would it take for you, or your friends, to change your consumer habits? Name one thing that you consume now that you could easily give up. Now think of one thing that you consume now that you don’t really need, but which you would not easily give up. Where do you draw the line between want and need?

SOLE FOR SALE

(1.50 minutes)

Synopsis: Students interview their peers at school and ask questions such as “Do you know where your shoes are made?” and “How many pair of shoes do you own?” Interspersed within the fast paced interview format is information about average conditions and salaries for the shoe factory worker.

SOLE FOR SALE

(1.50 minutes)

Key Messages

- Over-consumption is wasteful.
- Think about the origin of the products you use.
- Only buy the amount that you need.

Facts about Shoes and Clothing Manufacturing

- The parts of a shoe (leather, cushioning, rubber, and cardboard box) travel over 35,000 miles before getting to Seattle stores as a finished product.
- In Indonesia and other third-world countries, women assemble shoes in factories in crowded and hot conditions for less than two dollars a day.
- One company’s Reuse-A-Shoe program has already recycled more than 13 million pairs of shoes into athletic courts, tracks and playground surfaces.

Discussion Questions

Q. Is it wrong to buy shoes?

A. No, it is not wrong to buy shoes. The key message is that overconsumption is wasteful. We should think about the origin of the products we use and try to limit our consumption to the amount we actually need.

Q. What do you think shoes “say” about a person?

A. Shoes may reveal financial status, social niche/status, aesthetic tastes, or ethical values.

Q. What is the point of asking students how many pair of shoes they own?

A. The interviewer is using this approach to challenge students to think about the extent of their consumption. Many people don’t think about how many pairs of shoes they have in their closets, and of that number, how many they actually use or need.



Q. Why does the interviewer ask students if they know how and where their shoes are made?

A. The interviewer is bringing to light how little most people know about where the items they use are manufactured -- and at what expense to the environment. It’s important to understand the connection between the things we buy and the impact their manufacture has on the environment

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

(2 minutes)

Key Messages

- Different cultures deal with food consumption and preparation in different ways.
- Families in the USA buy more pre-packaged and processed foods than those in many other countries.
- To avoid wasting food, it is important to buy only what we will use.

Facts about Food Consumption, Production and Disposal

- Up to 30 percent of household garbage is made up of packaging (much of this is from food).
- Thirty-four percent (34%) of King County’s solid waste consists of food; 22.2 percent is generated by residents and 12 percent is generated by restaurants and other businesses.

Discussion Questions

Q. Explain this statement: “If everyone on Earth consumed as many resources as the average North American, we would need four Earths to sustain us.” Why do you think that we consume more in this country than in most other countries?

A. People in the U.S. make up five percent of the Earth’s population, but use up 30 percent of the Earth’s natural resources. U.S. residents and businesses generate 50 percent of the world’s

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

(2 minutes)

Synopsis: Students of diverse cultures at Foster High School (Tukwila, Washington) are interviewed about their families' food consumption habits. The students answer questions about shopping, cooking, leftovers and their personal preferences.

total solid waste. The level of overconsumption in this nation can not be sustained worldwide given the limited natural resources. If everyone on Earth consumed at the same level as U.S. residents, we would literally need three more planets to continue to survive. The amount that we consume in this country is affected by factors such as our wealth, cultural norms and consumption habits, the size of the nation and the natural resources accessible to us.

Q. What were the main differences you saw among the different cultural food habits?

A. The main differences mentioned were amount of food bought, fresh foods versus pre-packaged foods, nutritional value of foods, time spent preparing food, and throwing away versus using leftover foods.

Q. Why do you think the interview questions focused on pre-packaged foods, number of grocery bags, Costco trips, and leftover food?

- A.**
- The pre-packaged food question highlighted that Americans often buy convenience foods – those that don't require much preparation, have excess or often wasteful packaging, and are often less fresh and lower in nutritional value. Students from other countries spoke about buying fresh ingredients, rather than pre-packaged ingredients to prepare meals.
 - The grocery bags question highlighted general over-consumption and excess in this country. U.S. families leave the grocery store with more bags (filled with pre-packaged foods that take up more space and require more bags per shopping trip) than do families in other countries. This could be attributed to factors such as wealth, and cultural norms about "stocking up." Students from other countries spoke about buying only what they needed.
 - The Costco question revealed how the concept of "buying in bulk" has changed. Families spend large amounts of money buying large quantities of food at stores like Costco. However, the food is often packaged in individual serving sizes,



or with unnecessary packaging. This is very different from the term "bulk" food, referring to large quantities of unpackaged food, sold by the pound and carried home in plastic bags or reusable containers rather than store packaging. Buying more is not the same as buying in bulk.

- The leftover food question also illustrates the way that different cultures (and different families) have varying expectations about excess food. In general, the U.S. teens said that they often had leftovers, but let them go to waste. Other students said that they either didn't have any leftovers because they ate all of what they had prepared, or that they purposely cooked extra food so that they would have meals for later in the week.

YOUTH ACTION

There are teen activists all over the state, country and world. They make their statements and calls-to-action in big and small ways. Below are a few examples of different types of teen activism.

- A high school student in California started the Commercial-Free Public Education Advisory Board and got her classmates to testify at the local school board against the "branding" at her high school by Pepsi and other major corporations.
- A group of high school students in Bellevue, Washington organized an "Anti-Beauty Pageant" at their local teen center to focus on empowering girls rather than judging them. The students organized a two-day event in which women from a variety of professions taught workshops on topics such as zine writing (self-producing a magazine of ideas and art), self-defense, car maintenance, musical composition, and turntablism (manipulating sounds and creating music using phonograph turntables and a DJ mixer).
- Drama clubs across the country write and direct their own anti-commercial school

FOLLOW-UP RESOURCES

plays, using theater as a means to share their ideas and observations with other students in their schools.

- Each year, classes throughout King County create worm bins to learn about and start to address the problem of food waste. Several of these classes also institute waste-free days to encourage students to eliminate excess packaging from their lunches.
- Young people in the USA, Great Britain, Japan and throughout the world participate annually in international “Buy Nothing Day,” a day set aside to encourage people to take a global holiday from consumerism (see adbusters.org for more information).
- Individuals throughout the nation are making a more conscientious effort to purchase environmentally friendly, “green” products whenever possible.

Follow-up Resources

Books

Stuff: The Secret Lives of Everyday Things by John C. Ryan and Alan Thein Durning

Use Less Stuff: Environmental Solutions for Who We Really Are by Robert Lilienfeld and William Rathje

Websites

The King County Solid Waste Division offers free classroom workshops, project assistance, and other resources and activities for elementary through secondary grade classes.

www.metrokc.gov/dnrp/swd/education/index.asp

The Center for a New American Dream website has great ideas for action projects

www.newdream.org/make/action/index.php

and interesting facts about advertising to children.

www.newdream.org/campaign/kids/facts.html

The Corporation for Public Broadcasting features a web site called “Don’t Buy It: Get Media Smart” with sections on advertising tricks and buying smart.

pbskids.org/dontbuyit/

The Environmental Protection Agency’s Explorers’ Club for Kids website includes information on a wide range of environmental issues for all grade levels.

www.epa.gov/kids/

Just Think offers resources for media literacy for youth, including quick facts about teens and media, health, body image, and more.

www.justthink.org

The Teen Consumer Scrap Book, created by high school students in Washington, compiles information into seven different consumer areas and provides an interesting example of teens as conscientious consumers.

www.atg.wa.gov/teenconsumer/

Earth Day Network offers an ecological footprint survey that calculates an individual’s use of resources.

www.earthday.net/footprint/index.asp#

Recommendations for purchasing products that cause less toxic pollution and waste, conserve resources and habitats, and minimize global warming and ozone depletion, can be found at

www.greenseal.org

www.newdream.org/buygreen/index.html

The Union of Concerned Scientists website offers weekly green tips, publications, and action ideas.

www.ucsusa.org

BUY
NOTHING
DAY!

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES & ASSIGNMENTS

Follow-up Activities and Assignments

Assign the class to read the book “*Stuff: the Secret Life of Everyday Things*” by John C. Ryan and Alan Thein Durning (the book on which this video project was based). Students can then do research and create a photo montage of the lifecycle of an object of their choice.

Discuss the connection between advertising and over-consumption. Assign students to find two “effective” print (magazine, newspaper, internet hard copy) ads to bring to class for discussion. Students can define an “effective” ad for themselves.

Assign students to write a persuasive essay on one of the key themes in the videos (over-consumption, advertising to teens, food and shopping habits, etc.).

Ask students to record in a journal all the advertisements that they see in one day. Have them reflect on their buying habits and choices. Ask students to count the number of shoes and t-shirts they own, and discuss their findings and the implications.

Start a consumer challenge board with weekly facts about over-consumption, environmental impacts, and challenge ideas for the school. Challenge ideas can include creative ways to reduce garbage volume, increase recycling rates, or reuse things (for example, students can organize a “swap” event to exchange books, CDs, computer games, and videos they no longer need).

Sign up for free classroom workshops with the King County Solid Waste Division. Workshop topics include biodiversity, over-consumption and sustainability, and resource conservation. Visit www.metrokc.gov/dnrp/swd/secondaryschool/index.asp.

Get assistance on your projects from a Green Team Specialist to assist you with project



planning, link you with other classes doing similar projects in your area, and provide rewards and recognition for your class after the project is completed. Visit the King County Solid Waste Division website listed above or call 206-583-0655.

Consider becoming a “green school” by participating in King County’s Green Schools Program. Schools set goals in selected environmental categories (waste reduction and recycling; water conservation; energy conservation; hazardous materials reduction and management; reduction of greenhouse gas emissions; environmental purchasing; litter reduction; and addressing environmental issues in the classroom). King County provides assistance and some funding to help the school achieve its goals. See dnr.metrokc.gov/swd/schoolpr/greenschools or call Dale Alekel at 206-296-8457.

This notice will be provided in alternate formats upon request.

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TTY Relay: 711
www.metrokc.gov/dnrp/swd