



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2010 Volume I: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Consumer Culture

Environmental Consumerism

Guide for Curriculum Unit 10.01.03
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The consumption of goods is a fixture of our culture. Only by producing and selling things and services can our modern economy thrive. Yet consumption can cause havoc for the environment. This calculation includes what happens from the conception of a good to its disposal. The production, processing, and consumption of commodities require the extraction and use of natural resources like wood, ore, fossil fuels, and water. Factories then often create toxic byproducts. This multidisciplinary unit includes lesson plans designed to enhance literacy, history, math and science as it guides students' understanding of what consumerism is, how their lives are affected by it, and consumption as a contributor to environmental decline.

Students will learn that each person can make a difference in sustaining our world by "going green." They will recognize the three R's Reduce, Reuse and Recycle. This unit will create an awareness of the global implication of everyday decisions. Students will be able to identify the differences between needs and wants and how daily choices affect what is available for others. This unit will answer questions like: What is consumer culture? How do my daily decisions affect the future? What changes can I make in my own life to sustain our environment? The students will understand the life cycle of trash, particularly when examining plastic versus paper. Students will look at the production, advertising, packaging, toxicity, and cumulative impact of the environmental damage caused in the process. Students will weigh the benefits and consequences of the product versus the cost of production and environmental impact.

By the end of the unit, students should be able to answer the question, "Does our way of living depend on commodities that are damaging to the Earth to produce?" They will then devise ways to help conserve resources and minimize waste. This unit will examine some consumerism pitfalls and give students the responsibility for taking action to help sustain our environment.

(Developed for Science, Mathematics, and Literacy, grade 4; recommended for Science, Mathematics, and Literacy, grade 4)

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