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Stuff Lives: Building Ethical Consumers through Object Study and Environmental Philosophy

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by Nadiya Hafizova

Introduction

This unit is an interdisciplinary, art-infused balm to environmental science courses that may overwhelm with data, yet leave the student feeling powerless to affect change. Students may be more galvanized into action when asked to connect emotionally and spiritually with the philosophical repercussions of our consumerist society. By giving objects voices, personalities and roles, students will be awakened to a more mindful consciousness around how to use, care for and respect the products of our environment. At the beginning of the unit, students will compose a draft of an environmentalist philosophy or contract for how to use the environment. After going through a sequence of lessons that include a Fishbowl discussion, reflecting on sentimental artifacts, exploring cultural idioms, imagining a dystopian future world of scarcity, personifying objects as agents of social change, and examining historical pieces of environmentalist propaganda and manifestos, students will revisit their environmental philosophy with more nuance. Their takeaway object will be a sculpture or portrait made of their own trash to represent their new ethic.

Students will investigate environmental philosophy, applying skills in eco-critical thinking to assert their own perspective on the core question, “How do I aspire to use stuff?” This unit starts with a survey of historical and multicultural environmentalist ideologies, recognizing there is a spectrum of viewpoints and not one single dogma. This content is accessed through the object-analysis framework to ground potentially theoretically heavy conversations in tangible consequences. Showcasing the spectrum of political thought aligns with content also taught in Civics, but more importantly allows for the visibility of various beliefs that students may accept or reject. This unit has multicultural and global representation, ranging from Western to indigenous, capitalist to communist countries, religious to secular, industrial to nonindustrial, while also leaving room for students to research an area of interest to them. This not only allows for culturally relevant pedagogy, but also increases the transferability of this content into other social studies courses, such as Modern World History. The unit culminates in students collecting a week’s worth of trash (cleaned, excluding personal hygiene items) and using it to create a sculpture representing their own environmentalist philosophy, partnered with an explanatory paper on the symbolism of each choice to serve as a declaration of their views.

I initiated the Environmental Studies class in the district as a social science counterpart to students’ typical

experiences with environmentalism from a scientific lens. I work as a social studies teacher at Engineering and Science University Magnet School, a STEM interdistrict 6-12 school that attracts a wide range of students with different abilities and needs, socioeconomic statuses and cultural backgrounds. Students, by and large, are interested in the STEM subjects, or else may be attending the school for its smaller size and magnet school feel. The Environmental Studies class is a semester elective course for mostly 11th and 12th graders. Most students are enrolled in the course to fulfill a graduation requirement, and few come into the course recognizing it as a humanities subject and credit. They read it as an environmental science course, and so it is my duty to explain how the focus is different. Instead of digging through the chemistry and biology of environmentalism, students home in on cultural, historic, economic and political barriers to meaningful progress on sustainability goals. I have found students well versed in STEM struggle to have fluidity in the political due to the siloing of our subjects. In a typical climate change unit, the science may be well understood, but students struggle to answer "What now?" beyond "Raise awareness." This class is intended to answer the question, "How do we transform our scientific knowledge into civic action?" and to encourage students to consider the philosophical practice of environmentalism by examining themselves as a consumer of contextualized objects. (Lessons in this course may also, then, be broken apart to be used in other courses, such as Civics, Economics, AP Human Geography, Modern World History, or even English.) By considering objects through the lens of material cultural studies, objects cease to be stagnant products of commerce but living records of cultural values and political intent. This is perhaps the most essential understanding a student can have while sitting in a room surrounded by "stuff": "stuff" doesn't happen 'just because'-- every little item is the product of an active choice. The more we can encourage our students to think critically about the choices of the past, the more we can ensure the choices of the future reflect the authentic values of the populace.

Some essential course questions of this curriculum unit include: To what extent is it the responsibility of the individual versus the "system's" responsibility to make progress on climate change? What are the various roles an individual can take? What are the barriers to systemic change and how are they overcome?; To what extent has the human-environment relationship been mutually beneficial, and how can it be optimized?; How can sustainable solutions honor our need for convenience and cost-effectiveness to ensure long-term implementation?; How has the modern mindset contributed to unsustainable practices? What has to shift to ensure the longevity of our ecosystems?; How do the answers to sustainability issues become politicized? Is bipartisanship possible? Currently, the environmental studies class I teach has an economic-history lens, and this unit intends to increase its interdisciplinary nature with more references to skills and content related to environmental philosophy through psychology, literature, and art.

Rationale

This unit aims to help students locate themselves on an ideological spectrum regarding environmental issues and to develop an ethic to serve as a framework for their overall participation in a globalized economy. I conjecture that when students are asked to express a well-reasoned philosophical stance on the *question of use*, they will have a clearer understanding of the values that inform their daily practices, and will question to what extent those values align with their aspirations. This curriculum is deeply rooted in encouraging students to be mindful, intentional, and critical about the systems they engage in, and therefore necessitates the same commitment from the instructor. In order to effectively *guide* students, instructors must have an awareness of

their own limitations when it comes to living sustainably, and be able to openly discuss their areas of growth and barriers to change. This is not intended to be a “gotcha” or “you’re not green enough!” witch-hunt but a place of modeling introspection and commitment to authenticity. Only in giving yourself and others grace can progress be achieved, as a humanistic instead of a punitive approach will develop more long-term intrinsic motivation and a stronger locus of control in the context of social change.

Overall, students will leave the class with a strongly developed personal philosophy regarding the nature of use and consumption. Not every student will have the same perspective on their individual role in our political ecosystem, but increasing their awareness of the stories of everyday objects lends itself to more meaningful critical engagement with their surroundings. Rather than scrolling through a feed, students will be able to bite into their realities. Objects are viewed as passive entities in our everyday lives as opposed to catalysts of social change, whether that change be positive or negative. An object-centered approach where we name the context of an objects’ creation, therefore, forces us to confront the effects of our demands. By creating more opportunities for students to engage in more philosophical dialogue and content**,** they will leave the class consciously immersed in the complexities of our globalized world rather than passively swept under. Ultimately, what we choose to consume is a political act, whether it is mindless or mindful. Hopefully, we as teachers can encourage students to develop an intentional code of ethics authentic to their own unique values, rather than that of the algorithmized herd.

How to Use Nature: A Background on Some Environmentalist Ideologies

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Reviewing some of the scholarship on environmental ethics allows the teacher to have better fluency in some of the core compelling questions of the unit, and to engage in open-ended philosophical conversations that embody nuance and honor the complexity of these problems. The ideological underpinning of this unit rests in a synthesis of various scholars who reject dichotomous thinking and artificial divisions between the human and non-human. Much of this critique stems from the realities of the Anthropocene era, in which humans have critically altered the global landscape in both damaging and irreversible ways. The post-industrial world, therefore, and the catching up of developing countries, necessitates a reckoning with our culture of use. The authors examined find consensus in diagnosing our current environmental crises as a product of a much larger and ongoing global spiritual crisis regarding the roles and responsibilities of a human living within this world. Each author comes from a different discipline, yet their message is consistent. To solve this spiritual crisis, non-human voices must be articulated and their agency integrated into human political systems, thus protecting our collective health and wellbeing. Historically, dominion over nature to enable humankind’s ascent was the prevailing ethic, and we are approaching the capacity of that philosophy. As these authors argue, our culture is sick, and the healing lies in a mentality shift of how we see objects, animals, plants, and even each other beyond a transactional dichotomy and towards a spirit of coexistence and reciprocity.

Anthropocene is the Scene

Anthropocene is a term used to define the geological period in which humans have had an immense impact on the environment, and whose influence can be compared to other seismic natural forces. During the anthropocene, the environment has been primarily interpreted as something to be dominated and controlled and extracted from for human material needs. Historically, dominion over nature was necessitated by nature’s overwhelming ability to cause harm; now nature’s capacity to harm has been enhanced by the very same

quest for dominion. The exact date of the start of this period is debated, yet it aligns with the rapid industrialization and population booms of the late 19th and 20th centuries. Great Britain ushered in industrialization in the 1750s, introducing smog and pollution in the waterways from coal burning and iron smelting. Cancer became a more prevalent reality, as did the booming of the population, fueling the cycle of use, and subsequently, abuse. With each decade, increasing C02 rates have increased temperatures, changing habitats in profound ways. Along with widespread industrialization, the citizen-as-worker became citizen-as-consumer in the developed world. The Ecological Footprint Calculator is an eye-opening online tool that asks users about their daily habits and shows that if every person in the world lived like an average American, we would need 5.0 earths to support those daily habits. What we establish as the norms of a modern society, such as commuting, eating meat, and daily electricity use for phones and computers are, in fact, bringing us closer to an abnormal world. The question then becomes, what norms are we willing to exchange to preserve our conception of modernity?

Western Spring Awakening

The political movements of the late 1960s in the United States ushered in a radical departure from the "use and dump" grind of industry in the United States. Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) alerted the public to the negative effects of the bioaccumulation of toxins from agricultural pesticides such as DEET by imagining a world with no birds, as their shells were becoming too weak. Cesar Chavez grounded environmentalism in the labor rights of migrant farm workers, and ardently organized for stricter pesticide regulations for decades. Laws, such as the Clean Air Act (1963) and the Clean Water Act (1972), introduced previously unconsidered guardrails, and were a result of labor rights movements and the countercultural activism of the era. The year 1970 was the start of the governmental Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), representing establishment acknowledgement of the potential negative consequences of American industry. Ecological disasters, such as the dumping of toxic waste in Love Canal, precipitated new regulations like the Superfund Law (1980) which, up until the 1990s, taxed corporations to fund environmental cleanups and brownfields. The populace was physically sick, forcing not just a domestic, but also a global cultural reckoning with industrialism.

"I need" vs "We need": Reciprocity and Indigenous Kinships

The most visible environmentalist thinkers have been those associated with white hegemonic power—John Muir and Aldo Leopold, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and David Thoreau—despite much inspiration being taken from indigenous ways of being. Aldo Leopold, for example, maintained a commitment to a "land ethic" or a harmony between human and land through the processes of conservationism. (The conservationist movement, it should be mentioned, has also been co-opted by men such as Theodore Roosevelt through the lens of protecting sport hunting, a popular pastime of the elite predicated upon white dominion over wilderness; and US national parks have a dark history of eugenicist supporters who advocated the removal of indigenous peoples from the land for white recreation.) Leopold's experiences in New Mexico shaped his perspectives, but scholars like Kyle Pwys Whyte caution viewing him as an indigenous translator or "Rosetta Stone" for the diverse practices of various tribes, naming distinct differences between North American environmentalism and indigenous practices.

Indigenous identity is located in a symbiotic relationship to the land and is highly relational, unlike Leopold's more individualistic approach. Shelbi Nahwilet Meissner, a Payómkawichum and Kúupangaxwichem assistant professor of philosophy at Georgetown University relates the importance of a contract, or intentionality of use. A core term in understanding this philosophy is extending the idea of kinship beyond biological relations to "describe the relationships between all entities that share responsibilities for one another" and the

“knowledge-sharing” that it entails (18). Meissner’s synthesis of various indigenous scholars indicates that attempts at environmentalism are incomplete and ineffective if they do not prioritize a practice of shared responsibility, animation of the inanimate, and an ethic of “gifting” rather than mindless taking (17).

Many of the practices Meissner recommends revolve around restoring context between humans and the natural world. In a spoken word piece by Leanne Simpson called “How to Steal a Canoe,” the poet describes rubbing water on canoes stored at a university warehouse to reconnect them with their ancestry and spirit, culminating in collective action to restore one of the canoes to its ancestral lake. This caring for an object may seem foreign in this world of planned obsolescence, but it is this exact act of treasuring an item for the cultural symbolism and power it retains that embodies the sacred contract these authors pine for. It is reminiscent of Marie Kondo’s thanking of items that no longer spark joy, a practice that ignited the American public’s consciousness of the capacity of items to hold memory and emotion.

The sustainable indigenous ethic is also deeply rooted in the method of extraction, as seen in Meissner’s mention of indigenous California basketweavers’ practice of intentionality. This stems from the belief that the “plant relatives” used are “ancestors who became plants” (19), which creates a consciousness away from wanton waste and towards nurturing continuity. They harvest what is needed and leave enough to honor the “needs of others." These ‘others’ include the plant itself and its need for seeds for future generations, for other animals who subsist off it, and for other clans and communities. This reorientation away from “I am taking this because I need it” to “I am taking some because we all need it” precipitates a strong cosmic recalibration of our place in this world.

Islamic Critiques: Secularization Severs the Sacred Within

A common theme in many of these readings is the critique of Western rationality and imperialism as sources of this global cosmic division between humans and nature. In “The Analysis of the Relationship between the Environmental Crisis and the Contemporary Human’s Spiritual Crisis (with Emphasis on the Ideas of Seyed Hossein Nasr)” (2018), Tohidnia et al. locate the spiritual foundations of the environmental crisis in a deviation from tradition, precipitated by the Western dissemination of post-Enlightenment ideals. They push back on the idea that religion enables the perspective that humans are “God’s caliph on earth and that all nature should be subservient to man…caus[ing] human beings to be arrogant towards nature” (88), which is typical of cultures of empire. Tohidnia et al. counter that, as “the world of nature [is] sacred and full of the manifestation of God’s grace and love, as well as divine entity,” humans must protect it (88). Tohidnia et al. are inspired by Seyed Hossain Nasr, an Iranian- American Islamic scholar, who has advocated for the “[reviving of] the sacred knowledge within human beings” as embodied by tradition. Nasr believes that the environment is not just an abstract “other” beyond the confines of a city, but within a human itself.

‘Sacred knowledge,’ for Nasr, indicates a contextualization of humankind outside of the everyday quotidian into a place of continuity with a traditional way of understanding and defining existence. Tradition is not an amalgamation of mere customs and rites, but a “set of principles” that are a “manifestation of divine essence…[which] includes sacred science…rooted in the essence of truth” (91). According to Nasr, these principles were flattened in the “secular humanism of the Renaissance," where “knowledge has gradually been deprived of spirituality and sanctity, and relativism in knowledge has replaced certainty” (92). In the opening up of possibilities about the purpose of existence and ways in which to conduct life, Nasr claims humankind has lost a unifying ethic or code to live by. In his line of thought, the western “mechanical view of the universe” dishonors our inherent “heavenly aspect” that indigenous philosophers might understand as reciprocality.

Similarly to Meissner, Nasr and Tohidnia et al are critical of Western epistemology, citing it as “unholy” and “unacceptable” (92) and locating it at the root of disharmony. Tohidnia describes those living outside of the world of tradition as “faithful to their inner truth”; they are the “normal and natural ones” who are not “moving against their existential structure” (93). The modern human, according to Nasr, originates in the West and is aberrant:

> In his view, the difference between traditional and contemporary man is that the former is aware of his true nature and lives according to it, while the modern man, by forgetting it, has taken a rebellious path and is out of his normal state. (92)

This tendency to point the finger wholly at Western actions and culture feels shortsighted and obfuscatory of non-Western cultures' complicity, both passive and initiative, in dichotomies of extraction and exploitation. The notion that greed and exploitation is a uniquely Western trait has the potential to occlude injustices within the non-Western world. Shifting all accountability of an injustice as part of an inherited legacy of Western action pardons the transgressor as one without free will fulfilling a fate laid out by past injustices. The Saudi Arabian oil industry, for example, may be explained as existing to fulfill the voracious needs of the Western industrial capitalist machine, or as a way to validate and entrench Arabian hierarchies.

Filthy Capitalists?: Communist Counterexamples

Critiquing capitalism as the singular source of the world’s ailments is divorced from the reality of humans as consumers, and looking towards global industrial examples (such as those in Russia and China) forces us to reckon with what we treasure as a basic standard of living.

In Russia, the environmentalist movement was motivated by honoring the national spirit and political activism against Soviet abuse. With the Soviet Union’s large expanse, much of the conversation about nature lay in an exhalation about *priroda* (nature, which shares its root *rod*- with birth, parents, relatives, etc.) The use of the word *priroda* elicits a spiritual sentiment, evocative of something primal and innate. The creation of zapovedniks throughout the 20th century, or reserves legally protected from economic activity essential to Soviet cultural heritage, ran parallel to Soviet demands for efficient extraction. The communist system was obsessed with industrialization and production quotas. Russia was slow to industrialize, yet when it did, it did at an exploitative rate of both workers and the environment.

A key example of communist industrial grind can be found in the city of Dzerzhinsk, in my home region of Nizhny Novgorod. During WWI, it served as a hub for the production of mustard gas and other chemical weapons. Following the wars, it was converted into producing DDT, the same pesticide Cesar Chavez and Rachel Carson rallied against. At night, the fumes of industry would settle at ground level, and had the workers not slept in raised beds, they would have been asphyxiated like the chickens they lived off of. The lack of environmental regulation also resulted in the creation of the White Lagoon, a toxic sludge lake that exists to its present day, and the mass polluting of the aquifer and waterways. To this day, locals cannot drink the groundwater, and the life expectancy of a Dzerzhinsk resident is 42 for men and 47 for women, according to a Blackstone Institute 2007 study. When asked by researchers why they stay, the residents shrug, and dismiss it as “just a fact of life,” displaying the immense political apathy they cultivated living under an immutable government.

The ability to create meaningful change was dampened after the fall of the Soviet Union, which scholars such

as Jane Dawson argue can be attributed to the eco-nationalism movements of the Soviet states, such as Ukraine post-Chernobyl in 1986. The Chernobyl disaster, a product of Moscow's prioritization of production over safety and power over transparency, was the final nail in the coffin of colonial rule during the vulnerable time of perestroika, especially as the state's initial decision to keep the disaster a secret delayed crucial action. Environmental activism has a powerful global history of recalibrating abuses towards the goal of recentering societies towards reciprocal relationships.

Animals as Commodities in an Industrialized Globalized System

Val Plumwood's chapter on the "The Ethics of Commodification" in her 2002 book *Environmental Culture* also critiques prevailing environmental theories that stress the person/property divide. Her approach brings to mind Chicana queer feminist Gloria Anzaldua's blending of worlds in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987), where a new consciousness, or a new faith can emerge without entrenched conceptual borders. Plumwood proposes a "major revisioning and restructuring of economic life" (Plumwood, 166). Plumwood's avenue for theoretical exploration lies within the treatment of animals. She reviews neo-Cartisian environmental ethics, and states that their approach to animal defense is "an attempt to extend the privileged category of the human in the human/nature dualism rather than try to break the human/nature dualism down" (143). She aligns with Meissner by stating that this approach does not fit "with an ecological awareness of kinship and continuity of planetary life" (144). She critiques the dominant western approach to exclude non-humans from ethics, and demands reflection on the "act of exclusion itself" as a way to reveal fundamental societal values (146). She advocates for the acceptance of the intrinsic value of non-humans, as opposed to the "anthropocentric ranking regimes that based the worth of a being on their degree of conformity to human norms or resemblance to an idealised 'rational' or 'conscious' subject" (147). She demands a revision of the "use/respect boundary" as a way to exercise humanity to the non-human (a phrase she may object to, as her principles rest in the intrinsic value of the nonhuman for what it is, rather than locating humanness in the nonhuman) (155).

In critiquing factory farming, Plumwood illuminates our societal malady of abstracting consumption to the obfuscation of injustice. Our removal from the killing process also removes us from seeing meat for the "communicative being it once was" and confronting the ramifications of our wants (157). This "radical dissociation" we make on a daily, hourly, arguably continual basis can erode our sense of responsibility and kinship with this planet (157). Although Val Plumwood was a vegetarian, she seems to be open to animals as food, since, as she states, "all ecologically embodied beings are food for some other beings" and it is necessary to "rethink farming as a non-commodity" where we "respect animals as both individuals and as community members" (156). Rather than "drown in the anonymous collectivity" of meat, intentional consideration of our kinship precipitates an intentional ethic of use. In naming the animal, so to speak, we can see its shape and feel its impact, removing the convenience of our packaged, factory-farmed world in exchange for an honest consciousness around the consequences of our intent. The power of a contract lies in the communication of expectations rather than in their assumption.

Radically Conscious: Honoring the Vitality of the Living and Nonliving

Jane Bennett's *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (2010) sets the framework for unmuting objects and/or the nonhuman to locate them within our political ecology, sometimes through anthropomorphization. After a humorous discussion of Darwin's worms culminating in the realization that worms "inaugurate human culture" (96) and make human history possible, Bennett sets forth advocating for a "polity with more channels of communication between members" to "extend awareness of our interinvolvements and interdependencies"

(104). Worms' engagement in reforming matter enabled agriculture, making them an essential actant in our path to civilization; although Bennet cannot fully “horizontalize” (104) or demolish the ecological hierarchy over which humans preside, the process of anthropomorphizing is an essential exercise in re-evaluating how we have historically valued the nonhuman world. The mentality shift she strives for lies within removing the subject/object divide and replacing it with an emphasis on similarities and “structural parallels between material forms in ‘nature’ and those in ‘culture.’” This removal of the manner in which we have organized the world breathes new life into environmental possibilities.

Bennett expresses this philosophy as that of a “vital materialist” engaging in honoring the intrinsic vitality within all, that objects and creatures alike are dynamic forces within an interconnected world. To obliviate the force of an object is to truncate its capacity to exist. This cosmic truncation becomes a recurring theme in much of the environmentalists’ ethic; a wound simultaneously ignored and reinforced through neglect. The question then becomes less a matter of which bartering system - capitalist, socialist, communist - is better for the environment, and thereby humanity, but more an examination of the intent behind the bartering. The *how* of exchange, not in the logistics, but traced back even further towards the mindset, is what distinguishes an exploitative practice from a regenerative practice. The cat is out of the bag, so to speak– we are a world of consumers, so can the industrialization cycles of economic development be reconfigured or must we ardently advocate for their demolition?

Lessons and Classroom Activities

ESUMS follows a block schedule. Lessons described are intended for an 80-minute period, and may take 1-2 sessions to complete.

A Note on Sequence: Prior Knowledge

This is the second unit in a four-unit semester course. In the previous unit, students unpack the 20-minute documentary *The Story of Stuff* (2007) by Annie Leonard by recreating the packaging for everyday objects to show the hidden negative externalities that go into their production. Unit two builds off the knowledge gained during those activities. *The Story of Stuff* is the cornerstone text for this unit and course, as it interrogates our modern-day consumption habits and their sustainability. Although it is from 2007, it is still highly relevant to this day, and students even acknowledge that the situation is likely worse. (A potential side activity to explore is to have students update the content). In the film Annie Leonard guides the viewer through each stage of production (the economic sectors) and showcases the hidden social costs at each step. It is a lot of content all at once, that for many students has been eye opening and overwhelming. For this reason, unit one and unit two serve to break down the core ideas of the film, with unit one using an economic-historical lens and unit two delving into a more philosophical and abstract approach. The aim is to expose the students to the essential question: “What does it mean to be a consumer in the modern age?”

Lesson 1: What are ethics?

Objective: Students will read three brief samples of statements of ethics on various subjects, compare and contrast them, and begin a draft of their own environmental philosophy. This philosophy will be revisited and expounded upon in the final assessment to see how their beliefs develop over the course of the unit.

Teaching Plan:

Do Now: What does it mean if something is ethical? What is an example of an ethical action? What is an example of a nonethical action?

Students are encouraged to think of examples beyond the context of environmentalism that are relevant to their daily lives.

The teacher reviews the student-generated definition of ethics. Follow-up questions may include:

1. Why might we need to define what our own code of ethics is?
2. What are cultural ways that ethics have been defined in different contexts? (if students struggle, prompt them to think of at home, in schools, in religious spaces, among friends, etc.)
3. What are the social consequences of not adhering to the group's code of ethics? What happens when the individual's code of ethics is at odds with the community's?
4. Who gets to define what the code of ethics for a community is?

These follow-up questions may be prompts at different tables written on large pieces of paper. Students may circulate and add their own ideas. The teacher may need to model how to respond to peer comments so that the ideas are in conversation rather than a series of isolated statements. (for example, "I would like to build off this [circled idea of a peer's] by adding more detail, asking a question, disagreeing, agreeing, connecting to a real world example."). In order to do so, consider including the requirement that you respond to the text of another student two or more times per station, and add your own idea only once. This serves to have students validate each other's thoughts, encouraging intellectual risk-taking in a structured and "safe" way.

Students come back to their seats and dissect samples of three statements (such as mission statements of various organizations or government pages, a short speech of a social change-maker depicting their values, or religious tenets) with a partner.

Students must complete a worksheet for each one to answer the following:

1. Summarize the main idea of the statement in a sentence.
2. What are three supporting reasons for their claim?
3. Who is the individual creating this ethic? How might their background influence their perspective?
4. What are you left wondering? Attempt to answer through research, cite your sources!

Students then move on to draft a 1-page environmentalist philosophy. The prompting directions are as follows:

1. To what extent is the natural environment important to you? Why or why not?
2. What factors into your decision-making when you choose to buy or use stuff?

3. What values do you think we as a community should have when using the environment for our needs? What makes you say that?

Lesson 2: Ideological Spectrum and Eco-Media Literacy

Follow Antonio López's lesson on the spectrum of environmental ideologies. Honestly, it's really good and I don't see a need to reinvent the wheel when trying to lay a foundation of knowledge.

López, Antonio. "Environmental Ideology: A Spectrum of Environmental Worldviews" ecomedialiteracy.orghttps://ecomedialiteracy.org/environmental-ideology-a-spectrum-of-environmental-worldviews/.

Then, students look at the Environmental Ideologies Map (https://eidmap.commedia.wiki/#/). Define for the students what "hegemony" and "counter-hegemony" mean. Students choose two different ideologies to look up and define through credible research and then share their findings with a group of 3-4. They should hypothesize why someone might hold that view, such as how their background shaped their values. Together, in a group, they work to make a declarative "I" statement in the context of the environment for each ideology. They write the name of the ideology, a visual representation and a speech bubble with the statement on a piece of scrap paper. The teacher collects the statements and then plays a game of "Four Corners" where students must move to either a corner for "I strongly agree, I agree, I disagree, I strongly disagree" and explain their choices. I like to include the center for "mixed opinion" to allow for the changing of minds. The teacher should present the map on the board while playing the Four Corners.

An example of a statement could look like this:

Extractivism. Definition: The extraction of natural resources (such as mining, fishing, logging, drilling, etc.) is the top priority for fueling economic profits and growth, often at the expense of workers and the environment. Visual: Fallen trees. Statement: I think the environment's resources are for our taking without any limits so that we can make money, live comfortably and have plenty of products to buy and use, even if it means we cause damage along the way and not everyone gets to benefit.

Exit ticket: Where do you think you fall on the ideological spectrum today?

Lesson 3: Meeting Stuff in a Fishbowl

Objective: Students will participate in a Fishbowl Discussion critiquing various ideological statements as depicted through the voice of objects.

Teaching Plan: In a Fishbowl, desks are arranged in a U-shape around a center grouping of 6-8 desks that make one large table. Students in the center of the fishbowl are the ones talking ("Deep Diving"), while students on the outside ("Tap on the Glass") take notes. In order to receive participation credit, students must make 10 points worth of comments. Comments are tiered; see description below. Every student must be in

the middle once to make one verbal statement. This encourages intellectual risk-taking, yet provides structure, gamifies participation, and honors student choice while encouraging students to go outside their comfort zone. Students easily exceed the 10-point margin, and halfway through, the teacher must let students know if they have not generated enough points verbally. At the end, an exit ticket gives students an opportunity to isolate another peer's comment as impactful for them. This validates students who may not typically speak, and encourages them to speak more. Fishbowl worksheets available here: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ljAvgyE0Go5TqaT8CcLtm9Mw8rFC64pjXEBn-JP5ZNc/edit?usp=sharing.

The teacher provides a slide with about 4-6 prompts. Discussion is entirely student-led, from initiating questions, defining terms, and even switching the slides. The teacher must not participate at all. In this Fishbowl, the prompts show an everyday object and share a statement regarding its autobiography and the ethics that caused its creation. Students must explain to what extent they like or dislike what they see and why, what it makes them wonder, and/or how it changes their perspective on the object.

Teachers can have a choice of the objects, or survey students for objects, but for a well-rounded representation, should include the following:

1. An object made as the result of industrial processes and environmental exploitation (e.g cell phone)
2. An object made according to a philosophy of ethical capitalism (Raaka fair trade chocolate)
3. A religious object (a relic)
4. A homemade object or gift (grandma's knitted socks)
5. An aesthetic object (a painting)
6. A natural object (a tree)
7. A luxury object (Iberico ham)
8. A functional object (a battery)

Here is an example of what an object voice may sound like:

Hi! I'm Raaka unroasted chocolate. Unlike my siblings at Hershey, or even the Fair Trade clan, the cacao beans I come from are grown using sustainable methods, such as without the use of chemical pesticides and fertilizers. Even more impressively, the farmer who grows and picks the cocoa beans I'm made with gets paid by Raaka up to three times as much per kilogram when compared to the farmers who grow cocoa beans for Hershey's. This of course means one chocolate bar costs $8 instead of $1.30. I know– the price is steep, but more of the money goes directly to the farmers than to some corporate bigwig. Raaka also loves to share how I grew up by writing my story on the inside of my wrapper to educate anyone who buys me where I come from– they call it transparent trade! My siblings at Hershey's come from painful pasts of exploited child workers and damaged soil– not a very pretty story to share. Raaka wants both the farmers and the land they depend on to be able to thrive and to stay safe and healthy. I may not be as sugary as a Snickers, but the good I'm doing for humans and ecosystems alike is just as sweet!

Transparent Trade at Raaka: https://www.raakachocolate.com/pages/transparent-trade

Lesson 4: Objects of Our Affection

Objective: Students will choose an object to which they have a strong sentimental attachment and create an adage or maxim to attach to it.

Teaching Plan: The day before, instruct students to bring an object to which they are highly attached and would be very sad if it went missing. For the sake of object analysis framework, encourage students to avoid photos.

Do Now: Show the trailer for Sparking Joy with Marie Kondo: https://youtu.be/x4Nrd68bhH0?si=m_fuxTO_OXVGDkFD. Ask the students if they are familiar with the show and what they understand her goals to be.

Students complete the Object Analysis Worksheet for their object (https://docs.google.com/document/d/1W4vR7onh6Sn22lIutW94BcTMYPBMlwml6PwWhbUtA0A/edit?usp=sharing). Teachers may model this with their own object.

Then, students will sort through printed out/written adages and maxims. On a piece of poster paper, they will sort the adages into various categories that make sense to them. Teachers may suggest the following: adages about efficiency, spirituality, humor, family, productivity, love, loss, healing, etc.

Here is a beginning list of adages that may be used. All of these adages include some reference to objects. The purpose of these adages is to showcase various perspectives on how to use objects and display some sort of cultural value.

List of Adages - encourage students to add their own and/or include non-English ones as well

- A stitch in time saves nine
- Waste not, want not
- Hit the nail on the head
- Everything and the kitchen sink
- One man’s junk is another man’s treasure
- Throw a wrench in the works
- Sweep under the rug
- Have a lot on one's plate
- Wear your heart on your sleeve
- Born with a silver spoon in one's mouth
- Cash cow
- Kick the bucket
- Burn the candle at both ends
- Out of the frying pan into the fire
- Tener mala leche
- Importar un pepino
- Ser pan comido

Once students are done, as a group, teachers and students will discuss what these adages reveal about their

cultural values.

Then, students will create a short adage that encapsulates why they value their object of choice.

Lesson 5: Materials Matter

Objective: Students examine photos of indigenous objects, watch a video about plastics, read the company website for mushroom packaging and hypothesize the values these objects embody.

Teaching Plan:

Do Now: Exchange your object with a person in the class. Describe the object you see using the Object Analysis Framework (may want to present the process on the slides). Then, ask your partner why this object is important to them. How does the context they provide shift your understanding of the object?

The teacher then presents photos of various objects from various indigenous cultures, such as the ones included below, concealing names of objects and identifying information. (Teachers may use from this album, or from their own findings: https://photos.app.goo.gl/torLAGc4AkxswkKj6. The fish skin robe (Figure 1) is made by Nanai women and reindeer boots are likely made by the Evenki people, both from the Amur River region in Siberia, kept at the Peabody Museum of Natural History at Yale University. The rest of the objects in the photo album are from the Morris Thompson Cultural and Visitors Center in Fairbanks, Alaska. The visitor center contains gifted items from various indigenous tribes near Fairbanks in honor of indigenous civic and business leader Morris Thompson, a Koyukon Athabascan who served as “bridge between cultures.” Students use the Object Analysis Worksheet with a partner (https://docs.google.com/document/d/1W4vR7onh6Sn22lIutW94BcTMYPBMlwmI6PwWhbUtA0A/edit?usp=sharing) to hypothesize the values these objects embody.

Figure 1: Fish-skin robe from Goldi, Siberia made by Nanai women in the Amur River region. Kept in the Anthropology Collection at the Peabody Museum of Natural History, Yale University, New Haven. Similar to Nivkh fish-robes housed at Minneapolis Institute of Art (for more history and context: https://new.artsmia.org/stories/cleaned-and-repaired-fish-skin-coats-from-siberia-reveal-indigenous-knowledge).

Figure 2: Grass woven bottle, unknown artist, Aleut Corporation, Alaska. Gifted to the Morris Thompson Cultural and Visitors Center in Fairbanks, Alaska.

Figure 3: Birch Bark Basket with spruce root tips, Athabascan, Sophie Cleveland, Shungnak, Alaska. Gift of NANA Regional Corporation to Morris Thompson Cultural and Visitors Center in Fairbanks, Alaska.

As a group, students share their understanding. The teacher then asks: What does it mean to be “tied to the land”? What do you know of indigenous history in America? After students share their ideas, the teacher will summarize the history of indigenous peoples in America with emphasis on land removal as a deep cultural and spiritual wound. The teacher asks, “How do the way these objects make them similar to or different from the objects you chose?”

Students then watch Mark Miodownik- Plastics: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z_npXGRjW1s. Students discuss the following questions:

1. What did you already know?
2. What was surprising? Why?
3. What values do we embody when we use plastic?

(For teacher reference, full audiobook of Mark Miodownik's *Stuff Matters: Exploring The Marvelous Materials That Shape Our Man-Made World* (2014) is on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0K_UiqcjcaQ. Chapter 3 is the Plastics chapter starting at 3:29:50).

Lastly, students skim the Mushroom Packaging company's website: https://mushroompackaging.com/ with an emphasis on the "About–Who we are" page as an example of a statement of values. For an exit ticket, students answer the question: Should we change our values around how we make our current day objects, and if so, why and how? If not, why not?

Lesson 6: Stuff Unmuted

Objective: Students will read Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's poem "How to Steal a Canoe" and then write an object autobiography of the object they chose in the previous lesson. The object autobiography can be prose or poetry, and may come from an emotional space and/or research of the material origins.

The teacher distributes "How to Steal a Canoe" and/or plays the animation performance video. Students answer worksheet questions regarding how the poet chooses to write the biography of the canoe. (Link to written poem: https://arcpoetry.ca/editorials/how-to-steal-a-canoe/; link to animation: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dp5oGZ1r60g.)

Worksheet questions include:

1. What happens in the poem?
2. What emotions are brought up in the poem? What lines make you say that?
3. How does the poet animate the inanimate? How does the poet make the canoe seem like an alive being?
4. What tree has white skin? (Birches, traditionally used in creating waterproof vessels.) What might be another reason the poet chose to refer to white skin? How do the different reasons compare?
5. Why did the poet write this poem?

Students are then instructed to write or speak a page-long biography or autobiography of their object. Students must consider the historical contexts of their objects. Students must use I statements in the voice of the object if doing an autobiography, or direct their biography as addressing the object using the pronoun "you." Suggestion: provide samples from *Evocative Objects: Things We Think With* (Turkle, et. al) to help students. https://books.google.com/books/about/Evocative_Objects.html?id=u82t0sCZDpwC. Extension activity is to analyze some of the essays for purpose and methods of conveying messages.

The remainder of the class consists of students sharing their object autobiographies.

Exit ticket: How does hearing an object's voice change how you interact with the object?

Lesson 7: A Dystopian World

Objective: Students will choose one object essential to everyday modern life and pretend that the materials to make it are scarce via a skit.

Teaching Plan:

Do Now: What are your fears about how the world would look if we do not address environmental concerns? Why do you think this? What are some defining features of this future?

The teacher then asks students to define scarcity and to think up examples of scarce items and not scarce items. Follow-up questions are:

1. What happens when you run out of something? Has this ever happened to you before (consider pandemic)?
2. What happens when there is a shortage?
3. What happens when you can't access an item you want or need?
4. What helps humans adapt to these situations? What does not help humans adapt?
5. Are the substitutes always better, the same, or worse than the original?
6. What makes for an acceptable substitute?

Share with students the concept of smekalka from Soviet culture, where due to shortages in the planned economy, citizens created inventive and unorthodox solutions to material needs. It then embodied an ethos of resilience that Soviet citizens faced during communist rule (for more information: Smekalka, the perpetual solution to any problem -https://www.zois-berlin.de/en/publications/smekalka-the-perpetual-solution-to-any-problem). This could also be an opportunity to discuss various economic systems and their strengths and weaknesses, leaving room to deliberate the question: "How do we get the stuff we need and want? How should we get the stuff we need and want?"

Students are then instructed to create a 4-5 minute (or more, depending on class size) skit depicting a world without an everyday essential modern item. One person in the skit must act and voice the character of the object. In a short writeup, students must explain the following:

1. Why they chose what they chose
2. Who the characters are and what their backstory is
3. What the conflict in the skit is and why that is the case
4. How the characters adapt
5. Whether the resolution is positive or negative

Exit Ticket: How did your thinking change about the object you chose?

Lesson 8: Social Change Ecosystem

This is an adaptation of a prior lesson used to teach abolitionism in Black and Latin History, and revolutionary figures in Modern World History. Instead of students looking at historic social change-makers and how they weave together into an ecosystem, they will anthropomorphize everyday objects. This activity is in line with Bennett's conception of objects with agency.

Objective: Students will personify objects as agents of social change and assign roles according to Deepa Iyer's Social Change Framework.

Teaching Plan: In groups of 2-4, students will choose a room in their home. They will create an exhaustive list of all the objects that may be in that room. Then, with their group, they will fill out a Social Change Template for at least four of the objects. They will have to explain the rationale for the objects they chose, and the objects they did not choose. Then, they will post the templates on a wall to showcase the different roles objects may take. This can be done digitally as well using concept map tools such as MindMup. Lastly, they view the work of other groups, and with post-it notes add "I notice" statements. Social change may not necessarily be viewed as positive and can be adverse. For example, a cotton t-shirt may have negative consequences for workers and the environment. During discussion, the teacher will ask: "Is there a preponderance of one type of role our modern day objects fit into? Which objects and roles are not represented?"

Exit Ticket: How does viewing objects as agents of change affect how you interact with them?

Slides:

https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1M9ZvpmSnOeW9HTnLaPdJFguzwVxVyp1q3jI9R2LIuhk/edit?usp=sharing

Worksheet:

https://docs.google.com/drawings/d/1kwDv_iZjVpnPJ3hsS8wmM7tn9j69K0eKJ8reZpIdDgo/edit?usp=sharing

Visual Representation

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1uCjm9QAHY6MMUDXlG-22xo47NlrpKYiO/view?usp=sharing;

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1lYc85Y2asWvito1LXcLp54T_1rnTp1cM/view?usp=sharing;

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1WEvjmF1WIBAa3RwlXWyEeaxQRuHS_RZP/view?usp=sharing

Materials:

- Large blank wall space OR large bulletin paper OR if digital, Mindmap
- String/yarn, OR marker (depending on whether you want to create the web as drawn or more 3D)
- Each student receives a copy of the Social Change Ecosystem Map and Roles description
- Prior classwork/notes
- Access to Printer AND/OR artistic talents of students (if not using digital Mindmap)
- Paper (construction or printer)

- Template print outs
- Tape
- Internet

Lesson 9: Say What you Will! : Propaganda and Manifestos

Objective: Students will take a field trip to the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library to look at historic artifacts related to environmental movements. The Beinecke Library is open to the public for research and has an extensive catalogue to peruse (link here: https://archives.yale.edu/repositories/11).

Teaching Plan: Here is a list of potential items to view with students, yet more remains to be discovered. It is important to have some background familiarity with the individuals included in the list. Students are encouraged to use the object analysis framework when looking at the objects (printing out or shortening the Object Analysis Framework would be wise). The compelling question to discuss is “How do individuals convey their values through language, images and materials?”

List of items to potentially view:

- Rachel Carson Papers. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. See: "A Buddhist Tribute to Rachel Carson", May 2, 1964. Call Number: YCAL MSS 46, Series III. Rachel Carson was a major environmental activist of the 1960s and 1970s, writing *Silent Spring* (1962) which brought attention to the negative effects of pesticide use to the wider public.
- Richard Erdoes Papers. Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. See: Posters, [circa 1970s-1980s], Part of Collection — Box: 191, Folder: 1221. Call Number: WA MSS S-2609, Series VIII. Also see: Water rights, environmental issues, 2003-2005. Part of Collection — Box: 271. Call Number: WA MSS S-2609, Series II. Richard Erdoes was an artist and author who advocated for Native American civil rights.
- Paul Kagan Utopian Communities Collection. Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. See: The Farm, a Tennessee settlement of nonviolent vegans.
- Jon Lewis Photographs of the United Farm Workers Movement. Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Call Number: WA Photos 466. A collection which includes photos documenting the California Grape Strike led by Cesar Chavez in 1966 against pesticide use.
- National Farm Workers Association Artwork And Related Material. Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Call Number:WA MSS S-3675 (Oversize).
- Rat subterranean news. Published / Created: 1969-1971. Call Number: 2010 Folio S62. [Vol. 1, no. 1] (Mar. 4, 1968)-[v 3, no. 2] (March 20, [1970]. An underground leftist newspaper; pay attention to pages 37 and 38 for commentary on ecology, ecocide and Earth Day.

Lesson 10: The New Self and My Environmental Contract

Objective: Students will create a portrait of themselves or landscape sculpture out of the trash collected for the previous several days to symbolize a revised environmental philosophy.

Teaching Plan: After Lesson 4, have students collect their trash, including materials used in food preparation, but not food waste. Instruct them to clean containers, and to not include waste from personal hygiene.

Students will first revise their environmental philosophy. They may use words such as contract, ethic, philosophy, manifesto, values, promise, guide interchangeably to describe it in a way that authentically reflects their ardency.

Questions to consider when revising:

1. What were the most meaningful ideas we discussed and why? Who or what might you want to reference in your environmental philosophy?
2. How do you want to approach the objects you use? What will you consider? What will be your guiding principles around whether or not you use something?
3. Do you believe the environment to be valuable? Why or why not?
4. What factors into your decision-making when you choose to buy or use stuff?
5. What values do you think we as a community should have when using the objects and the environment for our needs? What makes you say that?
6. Summarize your view by completing the following– "I am a ….ist" (feel free to refer to the Environmental Ideologies Map, or create your own term!)

Then, students will create a portrait of themselves or a sculpture representing their environmentalist ethic. They will write and share a short description of the symbolism when presenting.

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Appendix on Implementing District Standards

Common Core English Language Arts Standards - History/Social Studies - Grade 11-12

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.1

Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.2

Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7

Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

C3 Framework for Social Studies Standards

D2.Eco.2.9-12. Use marginal benefits and marginal costs to construct an argument for or against an approach or solution to an economic issue

D2.Eco.15.9-12. Explain how current globalization trends and policies affect economic growth, labor markets, rights of citizens, the environment, and resource and income distribution in different nations.

D2.Geo.4.9-12. Analyze relationships and interactions within and between human and physical systems to explain reciprocal influences that occur among them.

D2.Geo.5.9-12. Evaluate how political and economic decisions throughout time have influenced cultural and environmental characteristics of various places and regions.

D2.Geo.6.9-12. Evaluate the impact of human settlement activities on the environmental and cultural characteristics of specific places and regions.

D2.Geo.11.9-12. Evaluate how economic globalization and the expanding use of scarce resources contribute to conflict and cooperation within and among countries.

D2.His.4.9-12. Analyze complex and interacting factors that influenced the perspectives of people during different historical eras.

D2.His.12.9-12. Use questions generated about multiple historical sources to pursue further inquiry and investigate additional sources.

D4.6.9-12. Use disciplinary and interdisciplinary lenses to understand the characteristics and causes of local, regional, and global problems; instances of such problems in multiple contexts; and challenges and opportunities faced by those trying to address these problems over time and place.