



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2025 Volume I: Objects, Material Culture, and Empire: Making Russia

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

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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 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.

(Developed for Environmental Studies, grades 11-12; recommended for Environmental Studies, Philosophy, and English, grades 11-12)

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