

CONSCIOUS CONSUMPTION

INTRODUCTION

It is easy to forget that humans are part of environmental systems. Every one of our actions has an impact on the environment around us. This may have been sustainable for our ancestors, living in small groups off the land, but nowadays the human population can be considered a megaconsumer. Everything humans require for survival comes from our planet, the air we breathe, the food we eat and even cleaning the waste we produce

More and more humans now live in large cities without any direct connection to the earth.



These cities are continuing to grow and consume more resources and produce more waste. It is estimated that there will be an additional 2.5 billion people living in cities by 2050, according to a report by the UN. This equates to a staggering two out of three people living in an urban area.



<https://www.un.org/development/desa/en/news/population/2018-world-urbanization-prospects.html#:~:text=News-,Around%202.5%20billion%20more%20people%20will%20be%20living%20in,2050%2C%20projects%20new%20UN%20report&text=By%202050%2C%20two%20out%20of,urban%20planning%20and%20public%20services.>



EDUCATOR HINT:

**Have a look at the world urbanization maps, for some sobering statistics-
<https://population.un.org/wup/Maps/>**

With the start of the industrial revolution in the eighteenth century, new technological and industrial advancements lowered the costs of production as well as increasing the rate of production. Consequently, these goods and services became affordable to the masses, and a society focused on consumption was born.

The demand for goods caused a demand in natural resources and mass ecosystem damage began. Along with this was the production of waste and an increase in pollution.

The more goods people gained, the more they wanted, and the more industry wanted to encourage us to buy new things.

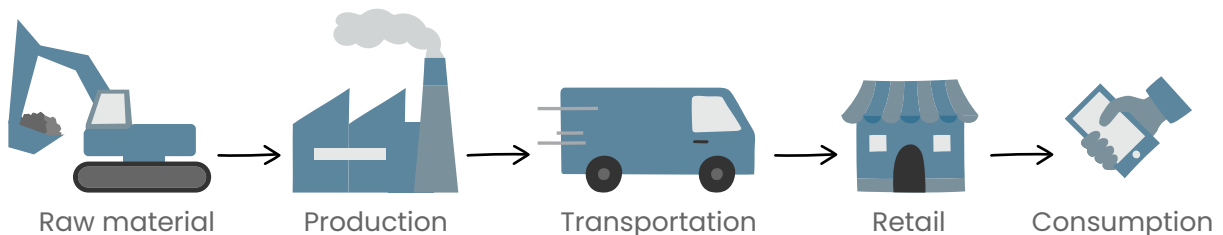
Today we live in a society of buy, buy, buy. New phones, new TVs, new clothes, people today seem to want something new all the time. In the “old days” (just ask your parents and grandparents) goods were designed to last a long time, but not any longer. Companies reach higher profits by using “planned obsolescence”

a fancy way of saying things are designed to fail after a certain period so you must buy a new one.

Advertising also targets us, teaching us that to be happy we need to buy more stuff! This consumer mindset causes people and economies to get stuck in a vicious cycle of buying and more buying.

The problem is all these goods need resources to produce and these come from our increasingly depleted planet. We have become so disconnected from the actual journey from raw resource to final product, that we have forgotten that the process requires resources and energy to produce.

How often have you stopped to think of where something comes from... your cell phone for instance?



Additionally, each step produces waste that will need to be disposed of.

A great video clip to show your class to give them a good sense of the cost of production is “The Story of Stuff” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9GorqroigqM>

The take-home message is that our consumer choices affect the planet whether we are aware of it or not. We need to start making informed choices to reduce environmental damage- we need to become **conscious consumers.**

We can become conscious consumers by:

- Consuming less- don't buy if you don't need it, avoid excess packaging, look for quality not quantity
- Making informed decisions- look for products that were ethically produced (fair trade, sustainable farming)
- Consuming responsibly – be creative in ways to save resources like water and energy, use efficient transport, reduce/reuse/recycle
- Disposing of waste responsibly- if you need to dispose of an item, ensure that it is done in a responsible manner, recycle or upcycle wherever possible

A CONSCIOUS CONSUMER IS AN ACTIVE MEMBER OF THE ECONOMY WHO CONSIDERS THE ENVIRONMENTAL, SOCIAL, AND ECOLOGICAL IMPACT OF THEIR PURCHASING CHOICES.

We will never be able to make a completely positive or even neutral decision in the consumption process, but we do need to become creative to balance the negative impacts.



EDUCATOR HINT:

Please note that this “buying power” does require a level of privilege not always existing at all levels of South African society, and this will need to be sensitively dealt with in the classroom.

It is important to remember that consumers have **buying power**, goods will not be produced if not in demand, so this can be used to promote ethical production like sustainable farming and eco-friendly products as well as pay equality and humane working conditions.

Individual choices can be combined to exert great influence over markets.

You can do this by choosing businesses that:

- Use eco-friendly packaging
- Recycle
- Create items designed to last
- Use green energy
- Promote sustainable processes
- Are cruelty free
- Offer repairs
- Are fair trade

So how can we teach this in the classroom?

We must remember that there is not a single approach to creating a conscious consumer. This is an area that is readily explored through class discussion.

For all ages, the subject can be broached by engaging with what products the learners appreciate and value and work from this point. For example, if the children say that they cannot live without cell phones, investigate how phones are made, how rare metals are mined etc.

TURN YOUR CLASSROOM INTO AN ENVIRONMENTALLY ETHICAL SPACE

Some ideas for the classroom could include:

- Only allowing reusable water and food containers in the classroom.
- Learning how to reduce waste the class produces.
- Starting a recycling program to sort classroom waste. For more information of what we can and can't recycle in South Africa:
<https://www.wasteplan.co.za/residential-collection/>
<http://treevolution.co.za/guide-to-recycling-in-sa/>
<https://www.greencycle.co.za/whatcanberecycled.html>
- Inspiring a love for the outdoors, by taking your class outside any chance you get. If this isn't possible, bring nature indoors- grow plants, show off interesting finds from nature, put up nature posters.
- Saving energy where possible. Switch off the lights, open the curtains, open/close the windows etc. depending on the natural light, warmth and wind levels outside.
- Looking for answers together. As Educators, we don't always know all the solutions to the current environmental issues, so ask your class questions to inspire their creativity and insight and research answers you don't know, together. Some questions to ask your class include:
 1. Where does our rubbish go after we throw it away?
 2. Do the farmers treat their animals kindly?
 3. How far away did your food come from?
 4. How does electricity cause air pollution?
- Model the eco-conscious citizen. Children learn by watching the behaviour of adults so maybe it is time to examine your consumption habits.

LESSON PLANNING

STEP 1: Introduce the concept

Why not start the lesson chatting about your favourite items that you own? Talk about how long you have had them and why they are special.

Ask learners what they would buy if they had a million rand, try, and get them to explain why. Use this to springboard into where goods come from and how they might be produced. Talk about what happens to things when you throw them away.

Some excellent videos for starting the conversation:

- *Consumerism explained to younger learners:* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TPG6E4nxtSw>
- *The Story of Stuff for older learners:* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9GorqroigqM>

LESSON IDEAS

REDUCE, REUSE, RECYCLE

GRADE	R-3
SUBJECTS	Natural Science & Technology, Art, Life Skills
	A selection of practical games and craft activities using everyday items to inspire a habit of recycling and re-using.
DURATION	30- 45 minutes per activity
RESOURCES	See the Activity Plan for the materials required for each activity

SORT THE RECYCLING

GRADE	R-3
SUBJECTS	Natural Science & Technology, Life Skills
	A cut and paste matching worksheet designed to initiate discussion around what we can and cannot recycle. This requires some educator discussion prior to the lesson talking about recycling and why it is important.
DURATION	30- 45 minutes
RESOURCES	Worksheets, scissors and glue

RECYCLING SCAVENGER HUNT

GRADE	R-3
SUBJECTS	Life Skills, Mathematics
	Learners race to collect litter and recyclable items around the school grounds, tallying the number of different items they find for a comparison and class discussion.
DURATION	30- 45 minutes
RESOURCES	Learner Worksheets, rubbish to be picked up/recyclables to be hidden, containers or plastic bags, hand sanitiser

WASTE TIMELINES

GRADE	3-6
SUBJECTS	Social Sciences, History
	This is a fun interactive activity to help learners understand how long items take to decompose/break down. Learners create a waste timeline in the class room, placing different items on a timeline depending on how long the items take to break down.
DURATION	1 hour
RESOURCES	Long piece of string (3m+), Date cards (examples supplied in Lesson Plan), Pictures of various waste items (examples supplied in Lesson Plan), Pegs

WASTE WINNERS GAMES

GRADE	4-7
SUBJECTS	Life Skills, Natural Science & Technology
	This is a fun activity to help learners understand where their waste goes and to spark conversation around recycling. Learners design a board or card game to explore different waste disposal options and their consequences.
DURATION	1 hour
RESOURCES	Spare paper/cardboard, craft materials for learners to use to decorate their games

DECOMPOSITION EXPERIMENT

GRADE	4-7
SUBJECTS	Natural Science & Technology
	The learners will conduct experiments to look at how fast items decompose. They will need a safe space protected from rain but exposed to air to leave their projects.
DURATION	Initial setup: 1 hour, Observation: every five days over one month, Write-up: 30 minutes
RESOURCES	Glass marbles/jar, tin cans, paper, plastic bag, organic food scraps, biodegradable plastic wrap

THE LIFE OF AN OBJECT

GRADE	4-7
SUBJECTS	Natural Science & Technology, Social Science
	The learners will choose an everyday object and trace the raw materials required to make the object. This is a research project so learners will require access to a library or internet. The process is designed to make the learners think about the environmental cost of making everyday items.
NOTES	This can be a group or individual project. If there is no internet access or library- the educator can provide information of a few everyday objects that their learners can choose from.
DURATION	Research 1 hour, project work 1 hour
RESOURCES	Library or internet access, Learner Worksheets

POPULATION PRESSURE MUSICAL CHAIRS

GRADE	4-7
SUBJECTS	Natural Science & Technology, Life Skills, Social Science
	A quick, fun game to demonstrate how growing populations compete for finite resources.
DURATION	30- 45 minutes
RESOURCES	5 chairs, music

MAKE YOUR OWN PAPER

GRADE	4-7
SUBJECTS	Natural Science & Technology
	The learners will make their own paper from used paper scraps collected in the classroom. The educator will need to make a deckle/s before the lesson. This works well as a group activity.
DURATION	Initial setup: 30 minutes, Paper making: 1- 2 hours and the paper will need to dry overnight
RESOURCES	Scrap paper, large bowl, deckle and screen (20cm X 25 cm works well), plastic container larger than the frame, water, sponge, blender, newspaper, coloured thread/dried flowers/leaves (optional)

RECYCLING INTERVIEWS

GRADE	8-10
SUBJECTS	English, Life Orientation, Mathematics, Social Sciences
	The learners will interview family and community members about recycling habits, comparing the older generation and younger generation's understanding of recycling. They will then need to come up with creative ideas to promote recycling within both generations and present this in an essay.
DURATION	Initial setup: 1 hour, Interviews: 15 minutes each, Comparison discussion: 1-hour, Essay: 1 hour. All in all around 6 hours including homework time.
RESOURCES	Learner Worksheet

THE DARK SIDE OF CHOCOLATE

GRADE	8-11
SUBJECTS	Natural Science & Technology, English
	The learners watch a short video clip on child slavery association with the chocolate trade. The learners will then need to examine the allegations of child slavery in the chocolate trade and in doing so confront the dilemma of how to become an ethical consumer. They will present their conclusions in either a newspaper article/formal letter/ PowerPoint or consumer guide.
DURATION	2 X 1-hour lessons
RESOURCES	Internet access
EXTENSION	Examine which South Africa chocolate brands available are ethically produced

CROSS- CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES:

FIELDTRIPS

Organise a visit to your local landfill, to show learners where and how their waste is disposed.

ART

Use waste (please ensure it is clean) to create beautiful artworks

<https://www.notimeforflashcards.com/2014/04/recycled-art-project-for-kids-2.html>

<https://babbedabledo.com/100-of-the-best-recycled-crafts-for-kids/>

<https://homesthetics.net/30-insanely-creative-diy-cork-recycling-projects-you-should-try/>

HISTORY/TECHNOLOGY

Do a research project on how an item has change over the years.

See this example of how shoes have evolved:

<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/culture/article/100609-worlds-oldest-leather-shoe-armenia-science>

LIFE SKILLS

Explore how trade has changed our diets.



REFERENCES

<https://startups.co.uk/sustainability/what-is-conscious-consumerism/#:~:text=Essentially%2C%20conscious%20consumerism%20focuses%20on,clothing%20or%20using%20natural%20toiletries.>

<https://publications.iadb.org/publications/english/document/Intelligent-Consumption.pdf>