

Too much stuff in our lives – Consumerism and its impact on the world

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Die heutige Teenager-Generation hat zwar ihre Politikverdrossenheit bezüglich der Themen *Fridays for Future* und Klimaschutz abgelegt, verfügt aber gleichzeitig über das größte Konsumpotenzial aller Zeiten und nimmt eine nicht zu unterschätzende Größe in Wirtschaft und Werbung ein. Das eigene Konsumverhalten der *Fridays for Future*-Generation und seine Auswirkungen sind das Thema dieser Reihe. Übergeordnetes Lernziel ist, den Schülerinnen und Schülern auf Basis von ausgiebiger Recherchearbeit und ausgehend von dem eigenen Konsumverhalten einen Einblick in die komplexen Zusammenhänge globaler Produktionsprozesse zu geben und sie zur Reflexion und kritischen Betrachtung des eigenen Lebensstils zu führen.

Too much stuff in our lives – Consumerism and its impact on the world

by Linda Weiland

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Competences and skills:

The students train their **reading skills** as they work with texts and their **viewing skills** as they work with videos. They practice reproducing, analysing and evaluating/assessing facts mentioned in the texts. They frequently work with partners and, thus, train their **communicative** as well as their **social competences**. By completing various **research** tasks, they train their **media competences**.

Overview:

List of abbreviations:

A Analysis	C Comment	CT Creative Task
D Discussion/debate	EV Evaluation	I Interpretation
LVC Listening/Viewing comprehension	P Placemat	T Working with the text/video
R Research	RC Reading comprehension	
VI Visualisation	W Writing	

Topic	Material	Methods/Skills
1: Consumerism – Too much stuff in our lives	M1–M5	C, CT, D, EV, LVC, RC, T, W
2: The big picture – Where does „the Stuff“ come from? And where does it go?	M6–M10	A, EV, LVC, RC, T, VI, T
3: Your T-shirt – A case study	M11–M12	D, LVC, R, RC, T, W
4: What can we change? And how can we change it?	M13–M16	C, EV, P, R, RC

Topic 1: Consumerism – Too much stuff in our lives

M1 Worksheet: Consumerism – Too much stuff in our lives

Approaching the topic



1. In pairs, discuss the following questions.
 - a) How often do you go shopping? Why do you go shopping? What do you typically buy?
 - b) How often do you buy new clothes? Do you get rid of old clothes when you buy new ones?
 - c) How often do you buy/get a new mobile phone?
 - d) How many items do you think you own in total? How many items does your family own? Who owns the most stuff in your family? How often do your family members go shopping? What do they typically buy?
 - e) Is the lifestyle of your grandparents different from your family's lifestyle?

Working with the video



2. Watch the video *What is Consumerism?* by activist Annie Leonard: https://raabe.click/en_um_consumerism. Work in pairs on the following tasks. Share your results with the class.
 - a) What does it say about the questions in task 1? List aspects that describe the average shopper/household.
 - b) Explain the meaning and relevance of the following two statements.



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“Ask your grandma! In her days stewardship (good household management) and resourcefulness (ability and creativity to cope with difficulties) and thrift (careful management of one's money and/or resources) were valued.”

“We're on this crazy work-watch-spend treadmill.”

- c) What do you think the term “retail therapy” means in this context? Explain.

M5 Worksheet: Can money buy happiness?

Annotations

1 **evidence**: proof – 2 **to survey**: to examine – 3 **consecutive**: one after another without interruption – 4 **purchase**: something that you buy – 5 **to commute**: to go to work and back – 6 **host**: a large number of – 7 **perceptions**: beliefs or opinions – 8 **busyness**: working hard and being active – 9 **to forgo**: to give up or do without

Pre reading activity



1. Work with a partner. What do you think? Does retail therapy work? Can money buy happiness? Discuss and note down your thoughts.

Reading comprehension

2. Each of you reads one of the texts and sums up how the authors answer the question (M4).

Working with the text

3. Share your findings with your partner and compare the texts' answers with your ideas from 1.
4. Explain what you find surprising about the research results mentioned in the text?

Comment



5. Write a comment. Do you find comfort in "retail therapy"? If yes, how long does the effect last? What could give you a more lasting feeling of happiness?

Further activity and discussion



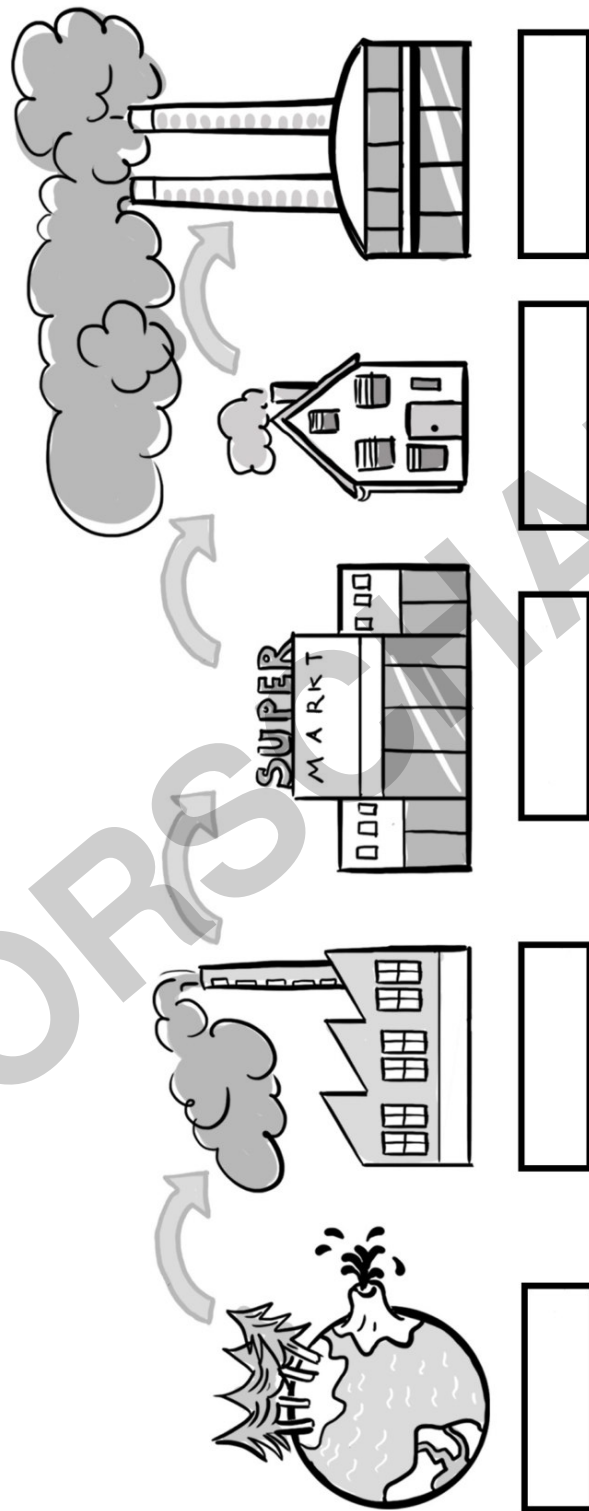
6. Work in small groups. Find out more about teenagers and consumerism under

https://raabe.click/en_um_teensconsumerism

- a) Why is consumerism especially dangerous for children and teenagers? Outline points the text mentions.
- b) What could be done to stop the increasing consumerism among children and teenagers? Discuss and take notes of your ideas.



M8 *The Story of Stuff* – Graph



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M10 Worksheet: Greta Thunberg's speech at the U.N. Climate Action Summit

Reading comprehension



1. Greta Thunberg is a very famous contemporary activist. Read the speech she gave to the world leaders at the U.N. Climate Action Summit in September 2019 (M9) and watch her deliver it under [https://raabe.click/en um Greta speech](https://raabe.click/en_um_Greta_speech).



Underline the facts about the world's future she mentions.

Working with the text



2. Relate these facts to your graph in M8: Where do they fit? What aspects of the materials economy is Greta Thunberg referring to?
3. Compare Greta Thunberg's speech with *The Story of Stuff*. Detect similarities and differences.
4. Greta Thunberg emphasises that she speaks on behalf of "the young people" and "future generations". Assess: with which parts of what she says, do you agree? With what do you disagree? Why?

Further activities

5. Calculate your family's carbon footprint under [https://raabe.click/en um footprint](https://raabe.click/en_um_footprint). If possible, go through the questions with your parents and have them help you find accurate answers to the questions.



- a) Analyse your results: What is shocking, interesting and/or surprising when you look at the results? Be ready to explain your results
- b) What could your family do to decrease their impact on the world? Come up with a list of recommendations.



6. What are three recommendations for improvement that you would like to work on over the next weeks. Report back on your experience in class.

M12 Worksheet: Your T-shirt – A case study

Approaching the topic



1. Work with a partner and talk about the following questions:
 - a) What is your favourite T-shirt? Sketch it to give your partner an impression of your favourite T-shirt.
 - b) Why is it your favourite T-shirt?
 - c) Where did you buy it?
 - d) How much was it?
 - e) When do you wear it?
 - f) How often do you wear it?

Working with the video



2. Watch the video *How your T-shirt can make a difference* by the National Geographic and WWF under https://raabe.click/en_um_Tshirt.

Outline what the video teaches you about the impact your T-shirt has on the world. What does it recommend you do? Use the following graph to take notes.



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Reading comprehension



3. Work with a partner. Each one of you reads one of the texts by Annie Leonard about *The story of your T-shirt* (M11).



- a) Underline further information about the impact your T-shirts have on the world. Also mark additional interesting aspects your partner should know about. Note down keywords in the corresponding fields of your graph.
- b) Share your results and take notes.
- c) Discuss: Which aspects do you find especially disconcerting?

Further activities



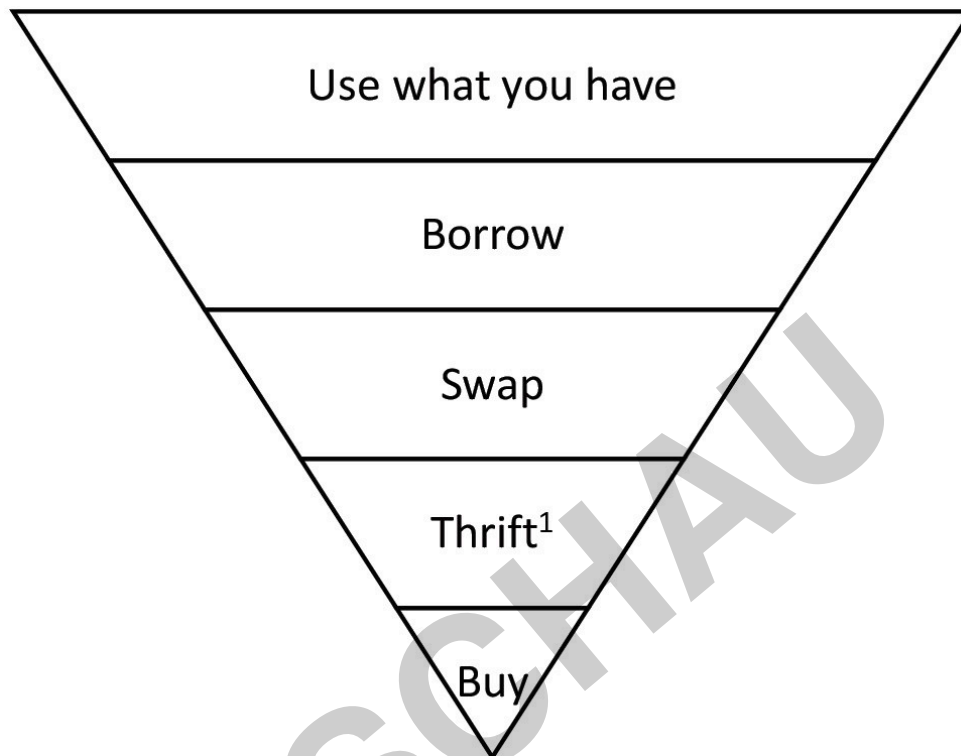
4. Get together in groups of three. Each one of you chooses one of the following research tasks. Present your findings to the other group members.



- a) Check where your favourite T-shirt was produced. Research the internet to find out more about the working conditions in that country.

M14 Instead of consuming

Partner A



Source: Sarah Lazarovic, *A bunch of pretty things I did not buy*, Penguin: 2014, p. 160.

Annotation

1 **thrift**: here: referring to thrift store that sells used articles as to benefit a charitable organisation

Partner B

1. Grow and make your own food	5. Sew your own clothes
2. Get around car-free	6. Find free fun
3. Make your own furniture	7. Plan before shopping
4. Fix things yourself	8. Be a conscious shopper

Source: Ernest Callenbach, *Living cheaply with style*, Ronin Publishing: 1993.