

"Consumerism"

OTHER TITLE OPTION:

"No Purchase Necessary"

GRADES: 7-College

TIME: 45-60 minutes

REQUIRED MATERIALS:

- Various material items for *True Price*
- Video - *Schools for Sale* and/or *Affluenza*
- Booklet - *All Consuming Passion*

Part One: Engaging Your Audience

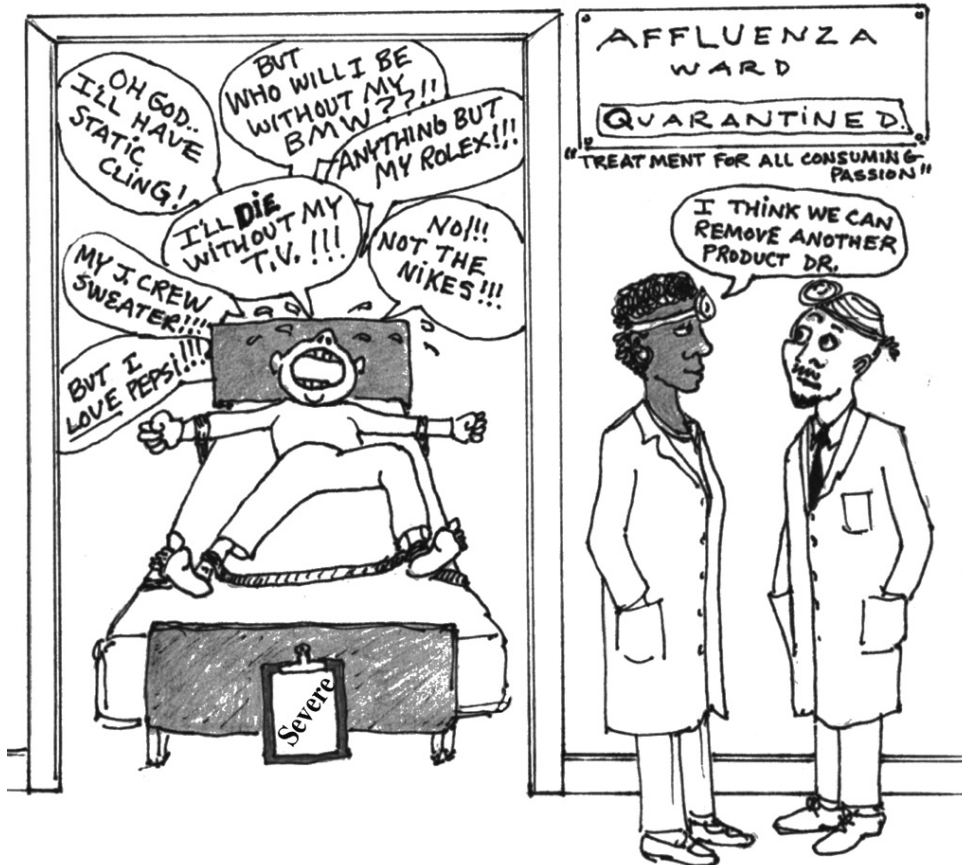
Ask students to remember the last time they visited a large mall, and to visualize in their minds the many stores and items available for purchase. Ask them "how many of you think that we humans need all those things in the mall?"

(Surprisingly, at the junior high level, many students will raise their hands in response to this question!)

Part Two: Guided Imagery

Ask students to close their eyes and to imagine what life was like fifty years ago (in the place where you live). Have them imagine what a grocery store might look like, or a clothing store, or a book store. Ask them to imagine the size of the store, and to notice the products on the shelves. Then ask the students to imagine a typical home. How big would it be? Would there be disposable products? Convenience items? Large or small closets? Ask the students to open their eyes and talk about the contrast between then and now. You may want to share some information from the booklet *All Consuming Passion* available from The Simple Living Network, P.O. Box 233, Trout Lake, WA 98650, (800) 318-5725. For example, the median size of a new house built in the U.S. in 1949 was 1,100 square feet, compared to 2,060 square feet in 1993. You might want to

share the following statistic: In 1987, the number of shopping centers in the U.S. surpassed the number of high schools. Or this: Americans can choose from: • over 25,000 supermarket items • 200 kinds of cereal • 11,092 magazines.



Part Three: The Effects of Consumerism

A. A few facts can help you guide the conversation and the following activities. For example: we blacktop 1.3 million acres each year in the U.S. (the size of Delaware).

Each year we generate enough garbage to fill a convoy of 10-ton garbage trucks 145,000 miles long. For packaging of products alone the U.S. uses approximately: • 50% of its paper • 75% of its glass • 40% of its aluminum • 30% of its plastic. In addition, compare the average time spent shopping per week to time spent playing with children: 6 hours versus 40 minutes. What effect does this have on our families?

B. Activity - Who's Affected:

This activity looks at the impact of the lifestyles of two different fictitious people whom you yourself role play: Joanne and Sarah. The job of the students is to analyze the impact of their daily choices in a number of categories, and to compare how Joanne and Sarah live.

1. Divide students into the following categories:
 - a. positive impact on the environment
 - b. negative impact on the environment
 - c. positive impact on nonhuman animals
 - d. negative impact on nonhuman animals
 - e. positive impact on the community
 - f. negative impact on the community
 - g. positive impact on Joanne or Sarah herself
 - h. negative impact on Joanne or Sarah herself
2. Tell students that their job is to tell Joanne or Sarah all the information they can think of regarding their particular category as she tells them about her day. Suggest that they try to play the part of their character and to really “get into” their role.
3. Joanne introduces herself to the group and begins to tell about her day:
“I’m Joanne, and I live in a suburb of a large city. It’s Saturday morning, and the kids and I head over to McDonalds for breakfast.” [Stop and ask participants to respond with their opinions based on the category they’re in. For example, students in category (a) might say: “I’ve heard that

McDonald’s has stopped using styrofoam, so it’s better to go there than to a fast food restaurant that still uses styrofoam.”

Students in category (b) might say:

“McDonald’s produces tons of waste and is serving foods that cause destruction of rain-forests, and which pollute water, soil and air. Plus driving somewhere for breakfast isn’t as good for the environment as just eating at home.” Students in each category think of whatever impacts they can in their category and share these with Joanne.]

Joanne continues: “After breakfast we head to the mall to buy some things. We get some books at a large bookseller chain; some gold jewelry; some clothes that we like (but don’t really need), and some wool blankets that we buy on impulse because we see them for sale.” [Stop and allow participants to respond.] Joanne continues: “We go home after the mall, and we all watch TV for the rest of the day.”

[Stop and allow participants to respond.]

4. After Joanne has discussed her day, have Sarah speak (you will play both roles). Sarah introduces herself and shares information about her day.

“I’m Sarah, and I’m Joanne’s next door neighbor. It’s Saturday morning, and the kids and I have decided to make pies with the apples we collected from nearby trees earlier in the week.” [Stop for responses.]

Sarah continues: “After making pies, we bicycle over to the library to hear a local storyteller, and to take out some books to read and CDs to listen to.” [Stop for responses.]

“We take the dog for a walk in the nearby woods, and collect acorns, twigs, bark and other found objects for whistles and art projects.” [Stop for responses.]

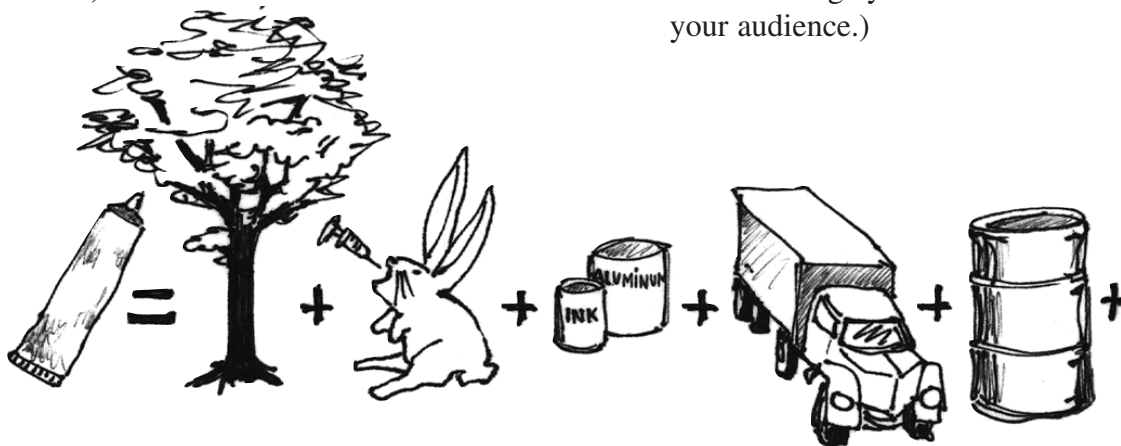
“At home the kids work on projects while I make dinner. I make a lentil and squash stew (the squash is from the garden and has been stored for two months), a large salad

from vegetables I purchased at our local food coop, and cornbread. We have apple pie for dessert.” [Stop for responses.]

5. After Joanne and Sarah have heard from participants, allow everyone to discuss their different lifestyles and the larger effects on the planet, other species, the individuals themselves, and other people from these two different ways of living. Ask students to consider whose life they identify with more, and which life they aspire to live in the future. Provide resources and information for people who may wish to learn how to live more like Sarah and less like Joanne.

C. Activity: True Price

This activity is similar to *Who’s Affected*, but provides each student with an object to examine while asking the same questions in the different categories outlined above. Hand out a common object to each student (book, newspaper, CD, popular toothpaste, shampoo, soap, pen, fast food container, soda can, videotape, clothing, knick knacks, etc.), and ask each to consider the *True Price* to: other species, the Earth, other people, and themselves. For example, a student could look at a book and see not only cost in dollars but also the cost to trees, to waterways polluted by paper-bleaching chemicals, to oceans and marine life that suffer when oil spills happen (oil is used in the ink, machinery and transportation involved in the book’s production).



If the student had a tube of popular toothpaste, she or he might notice that costs included the suffering of animals on whom the product was tested. Be careful to explain that this activity helps us to see the hidden costs involved in our products, and is not meant to make people feel guilty or deprived. Rather it opens the door for new choices (taking books out of the library or using homemade or cruelty-free products, for example). Once students are aware of the many costs involved in production of materials and foods, they can choose more sustainable and humane products and lifestyles. After the students have shared the products’ “true price” ask them the following questions: 1) Did this product exist 75 years ago? 2) If not, what did we do or use instead? 3) What could we use today instead?

D. Activity: Are You Sold?

1. To prepare for this activity, you’ll need to videotape commercials. You may wish to make several videos, taping the commercials on programs that are geared toward the specific age group that you addressing. For example, for younger children, you will want to videotape the commercials during Saturday morning cartoons. For teens, you’ll want to videotape the commercials during Melrose Park or Ally McBeal. For a group of junior high school boys, taping the commercials during Deep Space 9 or a sporting event would be appropriate. (We recognize gender stereotypes here, but still encourage you to consider the interests of your audience.)

