

# Consumer Power

## Topic

Consumer power, where products come from.

## Aims

- To practise speaking about consumerism
- To practise reading and retelling a short text
- To practise giving opinions and advice
- To analyse information relating to products.

## Age group

12 - adult

## Level

B1 +

## Time

60 - 90 minutes

## Materials

1. Consumer Power Student worksheet
2. Internet links: <http://www.ethicalconsumer.org/> - website dedicated to ethical consumers  
<http://www.oxfam.org.uk/coolplanet/teachers/> - this site has some good downloadable materials from Oxfam's Cool Planet site  
<http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/> - website giving more information about the Fairtrade Foundation  
<http://www.timebanking.org/> - official website of timebanking UK  
<http://www.cleanclothes.org/campaign/shoe.htm> - website of the Clean Clothes Campaign

## Introduction

If there is one thing that people from all countries have in common, it is shopping. Like it or hate it, we are all to some extent consumers, so this is a subject that students of all ages and nationalities should be able to identify to.

Task 1 is to get students involved in the topic and asks them to check out the labels on their clothes and school materials to see where they're from. Task 2 asks students to think about the most important factors when shopping for different items. Task 3 is a reading task which looks at the trend of fair trade products in the UK. The next task gives students some moral shopping dilemmas to discuss. Task 4 looks at the idea of time banks and Task 5 looks at how the cost of a typical pair of trainers is divided amongst all the people involved in producing and selling them.

## Procedure

<b>1. Task 1 – Look at your labels</b>	<p>This is a warmer to get students thinking about where their clothes and school materials actually come from. Ask them to have a look at the labels on their things and to fill in the table. Give them a few examples of your own clothes or things before you start. If you have a class of excitable teenagers make clear that it's not acceptable to start stripping off their clothes! In fact, it's probably best to keep this activity to small groups that you can trust to be sensible.</p>
<b>2. Task 2 – Consumer criteria</b>	<p>Before you start, complete the fourth column of the chart with an item that is popular with most of your students, or ask them to decide. Then get them to think about the four items and decide which are the most important factors for them.</p>
<b>3. Task 3– Consumer power – reading task</b>	<p>This is a text written by the British Council's Trend UK team. It was written by Connie in July 2005 and the source was The Independent (<a href="http://www.independent.co.uk">www.independent.co.uk</a>). It looks at how fair trade products are making an impact in Britain.</p> <p>You will need to copy enough texts for a third of the class, as each student only needs one part.</p> <p>Firstly give students the title and brainstorm ideas of what you think the article is going to be about and what words may appear. Then divide the class into 3 groups – A, B and C. Give all the students in group A a copy of the text for Student A, group B a copy of the student B text and so on. Give the students time to read their texts and help each other out with unknown vocabulary. When they all have a good understanding of the text, re-group the students by giving all the students in each group a number (1 to however many in the group) Then ask all number 1s to sit together, all number 2s etc. There will be one student A, one student B and one C in each newly formed group. If your class doesn't divide by 3 put the extras into groups so some will have 4 students.</p> <p>Ask students to tell their new group members about their part of the text. Round up the activity with some follow up questions such as 'are fair trade products popular here in</p>

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	your country?' etc.
<b>4. Consumer quandary cards</b>	<p>Write the word 'quandary' on the board. Explain to your students that a quandary is like a dilemma, a problem. Put students into groups of three or four. Cut up the cards and give one set to each group. Ask them to read the quandaries and discuss their responses. When they have discussed them ask the groups for their opinions and then ask each group to think of another quandary for the blank card. Ask them to write their quandary and then ask the other groups for their views.</p>
<b>5. Task 4 – The time bank</b>	<p>Time banks are a very pure example of fair trade. If you don't know much about time banks, check out this site to give you a bit of background information: <a href="http://www.timebanking.org/">http://www.timebanking.org/</a></p> <p>Basically a time bank is an organisation that arranges for people to swap their time so that all parties benefit. For example, I could offer English classes and get a 'credit' for each hour I teach. I could then exchange the credits I earn to get another service from another 'time banker', such as a massage, computer tuition, a home-made cake etc. etc.</p> <p>This task introduces students to the idea of time banks. There may well be similar schemes where you're working so ask if anyone's familiar with the idea. Go through the initial questions as a group. When you get to the last one make sure you give a clear and simple explanation of the concept of time banking. Then, ask the students to think about what they could offer to a time bank. Ask them to complete the first column. Then ask them to speak to each other and see if they could exchange their time so that both students benefit. Give some examples of what students could offer such as helping each other with their maths homework, making bracelets, helping mend computers, football training, making sandwiches etc.</p>
<b>6. Task 5 – Clean clothes campaign</b>	<p>The language in this activity is for higher levels but it could be easily simplified for lower levels. The information for this activity has come from an organisation called Clean Clothes Campaign. <a href="http://www.cleanclothes.org/">http://www.cleanclothes.org/</a> The organisation aims to improve the conditions of the billions of workers in the clothing and shoe industry. Check out their website for more information.</p> <p>Ask students how much a good pair of trainers cost these days? Then ask them to look at the breakdown of the cost of a pair of trainers and to guess how much is spent on each part of the process.</p> <p>Answers:</p> <p>Material – €8.50</p> <p>Production costs - €1.50</p> <p>Labour cost of the worker (paying the person who makes the shoe) – €0.50!</p> <p>Profit subcontractor – €3</p> <p>Transport and tax – €5</p>

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Labour cost of the retailer (paying the person who sells the shoe) – €18

Publicity for the retailer – €2.50

Rent of the retailer – €12

Profit for the brand name – €13

Research – €11

Publicity for the brand name – €8

VAT - €17

Follow on by discussing the students' reactions to this information.

**Contributed by**

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