

Consumer society

Topic: Consumer items

Aims:

- To give practice in reading for information and argument
- To discuss their opinions about this topic

Level: Upper intermediate

Introduction

The aim of this lesson is to give students practice in reading for information and argument in an article about consumer society and give them an opportunity to discuss their opinions about the topic.

Procedure

Introduction task

- Give student pairs/groups the cut-up quotation below (Worksheet A) and ask them to order it to form the original quotation. Show the quotation on the whiteboard and ask them what it means.
- Ask them who they think might have said the quotation

Answer: Gandhi

Tip: You could ask them at this point what they know about Gandhi

Worksheet A

| | | | |
|-------|----------|-----------|--------|
| There | is | enough | on |
| earth | for | everybody | 's |
| need | , | but | not |
| for | everyone | 's | greed. |

- Write on the board the words '**Consumer Society**'. Ask students what they understand by this concept and what the advantages and disadvantages of a consumer society are.

TIP: consumer society noun [C] "a society in which people frequently buy new goods, especially goods which are not essential, and which places a high value on owning many things" (from [Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary](#))

Pre reading task

- Put students into pairs and give them the list of consumer goods below (Worksheet B).
- Ask them to discuss which items they think are most essential for their lives and which they would most like to have. Then get the students to report back to the class.

Worksheet B

Consumer goods

| | |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------|
| A coat | A pair of trainers |
| Levi's jeans | Water |
| A CD player | A pair of jeans |
| A dental check up | Paper |
| A restaurant meal | A telephone |
| Jewellery | Gold-coloured laces in your trainers |
| Food | An appointment at the hair salon |
| Paracetamol | Shampoo |
| An iPod | Beer |
| Toothpaste | A packet of M&Ms |
| Cushion covers | Table mats which match the curtains |

Reading task

- Show students the text about consumer society from the website and give them the reading comprehension questions (below) Worksheet C. Ask them to find the answers to the questions. If you have a computer room you may prefer them to read the article online at:

<http://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/en/magazine/consumer-society>

Tip: The online article has a special function that you might like to make students aware of. If they double-click on any word, a definition will appear in a separate box on the screen.

- In class, elicit the answers to the questions.

Worksheet C

Reading comprehension questions

1. What is 'downshifting'?
2. What is the definition of 'conservers'?
3. What is the definition of 'consumers'?
4. What criteria do we use when we make choices about buying things according to the article?
5. What are perfumes and creams usually made of?
6. What will happen to us if we have less money according to the article?

Text

Consumer society By Julie Bray

If we only bought things we needed, there would be enough for everybody. What do we need? What you need depends on how old you are and your way of life. If we don't need to buy so much, we don't need to work so much. We can take part-time jobs or reduce our working day from 8 hours to 6 hours. Some people are leaving very well paid jobs to live a healthier life in the countryside or a more exciting life abroad. This is called 'downshifting'. Parents can spend more time with their children and the unemployed are given more opportunities to work.

If we start to respect saving the earth more than spending money, we will become 'conservers'. When we are conservers, we try to choose environmentally-friendly products which are durable and last a long time. We may find growing our own vegetables or making our own clothes more rewarding than buying them.

What was the best thing you bought last week?

Could you choose from lots of different types? We like having a choice of what to buy. People who buy things are called consumers. Consumers have choices. We usually choose the colour, taste, smell or size of what we buy, but there are other choices we can make.

The following questions will help you to consider these choices.

Where was it made?

If you don't like the place it was made, you might decide not to buy that particular product. A lot of people don't buy products from certain countries when they don't like the way the country is run. Was it made in a factory or on a local farm? If the product was unbelievably cheap, the people who made it might not have been paid much.

Who made it?

Do you know? If a friend made it, you probably like it more and you will want to keep it for a long time. If it was made by somebody who enjoyed making it, the quality and the design are probably better. Or does it look like it might have been assembled in a large factory? There are children in Asia who make Santa Claus dolls for European children to play with. The children who make the toys don't celebrate Christmas because they are not Christian; they think of the dolls as work. Would it be better if the children in Europe made their own Christmas dolls?

What is it made from?

One of the places where we want to buy expensive luxuries is at the airport's duty-free shop. Next to the chocolate and cigarettes, there are beautifully-shaped bottles and compact boxes full of perfumes and creams which promise to make you look and feel more beautiful. If you look at the ingredients you will find that the perfumes are mainly alcohol and the creams are mainly made of petroleum!

Almost all products are sold in packaging. Some products have too much packaging, creating more rubbish and using up resources. Some use recycled packaging, which is better for the environment.

Next time you go shopping, think about what you really need to buy. Don't deprive yourself of things you like, but decide what you should buy before you go out, so that you won't be influenced by advertisements or promotions. If it is more expensive to buy goods which don't have much packaging and things which are more durable, buy less. If you can choose to work less, decide which things you would like to make, do or grow yourself. Even though you have less money, your life will become richer!

Discussion task

- In pairs ask students to discuss the following questions:

What parts of the article did you agree with and why?

Did you find any parts of the article stupid?

Would you describe yourself as a conserver or a consumer? Why?

Would you be prepared to 'downshift'? Why? / Why not?

Follow up

- If your students have internet access, they could do the online activities at the website.
- Ask the students to write their own text on this topic expressing their own opinions. You could send these to the LearnEnglish website and try to get them published on the site. Send your opinions to:
learnenglish.magazine@pt.britishcouncil.org