

LESSON 6

PART A:

Objective:

Identify opportunities to improve all stages in the life cycle of an everyday object.

Materials:

- The completed product Life Cycle Worksheet from activity 5B
- A new copy of the product Life Cycle Worksheet (on page 18)
- The object examined in Lesson 5B

Activities:

1. Ask students to join the students they worked with in Lesson 5B. Explain that they are to use the pluses and minuses that they identified in Lesson 5B to look for opportunities for positive change to the life cycle of the object they examined. For example: Design Stage: the object could be fastened together with materials that make it easy to take apart the object for repair and for easy recycling of its components; Sourcing Stage: the object could be made from recycled materials; Distribution Stage: the object could be shipped using trucks that have hybrid engines. The group should use a new copy of the product Life Cycle Worksheet on page 18 to help them to brainstorm opportunities for changes at **each stage** of the product life cycle that would have positive consequences for humans and other living things, near and far, now and in the future.
2. After students have completed step 1, ask them to look for potential trade-offs given the changes they have made to the various stages of the product's life cycle (e.g. regarding cost, longevity, product integrity, etc.). For example, using bioplastic instead of conventional plastic may have benefits at the Sourcing, and End-of-Use stages, but it is more expensive and sometimes it is heavier which may have drawbacks at the Distribution stage.
3. Finally, ask the students to use different coloured highlighters to indicate:
 - Which changes they are confident that they would like to see made.
 - Which changes they would need more information about before they could decide whether or not to make them.
 - The students should leave uncoloured any changes that they would not support.

PART B:

Objectives:

- Students will learn how to communicate to companies about aspects of a company's business practices that the student appreciates and/or would like changed.
- Students will gain experience and confidence in communicating to companies.

Materials:

- Research skills tip sheet to help students to identify the name and email address of the appropriate person in a company to contact regarding the students' thoughts on the life cycle of the company's product. Found at www.resources4rethinking.ca/en/toolbox.
- Internet access for all students

Activities:

1. Help each group to brainstorm what type of company makes the object they examined in Lesson 5B (e.g. food packaging; stationery supplies, etc.) and the specific names of companies that make the object.
2. Some non-profit organizations and business organizations rate the performance of companies with respect to the companies' social/environmental practices. Ask students to use a search engine to find three such rating reports. Suggest search terms for your students to use, for example, "ethical companies", "most admired companies", "ethical shopping", "corporate social responsibility rating", "best corporate citizens", etc. (We suggest trying to conduct the search yourself before the lesson and try out some of the sites that you find.)
3. Ask your students to use the sites to:
 - Identify two companies that make the type of object the student examined in Lesson 5B. One company should have a positive rating on at least one of the sites and one of the companies should have a poor rating on at least one of the sites.

Note: Neither HP nor LSF can vouch for the credibility of these sites.

ALTERNATIVE APPROACH: If finding the rating sites seems like too much for your students to sort out, you may wish to take your students to a local store or simply have them look in their homes to see if they can identify companies that produce the products the students analyzed in Lesson 5B and 6A.



4. Ask students to take some time to revisit their own “So what?” charts. Invite them to emphasize things on their “So what?” chart that feel especially important to them using markers/highlighters and to add new points to the chart. If they visited rating sites, ask them if they care about any of the accomplishments and/or drawbacks in the life cycles of the products highlighted by the rating sites they visited? Why or why not?
5. To each company, the students will send a letter identifying:
 - i. The individual student’s thoughts about the company’s performance. (Highlight that it’s important for students to congratulate/thank companies for good performance. It is very easy to complain, but rare that we acknowledge when something is done well. It is important for companies to know that people care about the measures they adopt that foster greater social and environmental justice.)
 - ii. Specific suggestions about how the company can improve the social and environmental consequences of producing the product (from the students’ own analysis of the products in Lesson 5B and Lesson 6A).
6. Provide a brief lesson/demonstration on:
 - a. How to locate the name and email address of a person at a company that manufactures a particular item – see tips at www.resources4rethinking.ca/en/toolbox.
 - b. Review email writing tips used in Lesson 5B found at: www.resources4rethinking.ca/en/toolbox.
7. Have a peer edit each student’s email before sending them out.

For general tips on ethical shopping, visit www.newint.org/features/2006/11/01/action/



Why Provide Students with an Opportunity to Work Toward Positive Change?

“Service learning bestows responsibility on adolescents weaving them into society rather than alienating them from it.”

(David Orr Ecological Literacy 1996, 33)

Teaching students about issues of concern without providing them with an opportunity to do something constructive about the issue, may cultivate apathy. Furthermore, providing opportunities for authentic action:

- Engages and motivates students by making learning relevant and addressing diverse learning styles;
- Enhances learning through authentic experiences which is related to improved test scores on standardized tests (www.seer.org/pages/GAP.html);
- Boosts the credibility of educators as students see that we “walk the talk”.

If we want students to become active citizens, we must create safe spaces for them to practice their citizenship skills so that they may build confidence to use them outside of the school context. So...take action!