Earth Day Lesson Plan: The Life of Stuff!

Ideal for 10-15-year-old students.
Duration: 30-90 minutes, depending on how many activities a class completes.

Overview

Thinking before buying is the easiest way to be a planet protector. When we only buy what we use and/ or appreciate, we avoid disappointment and automatically reduce our carbon footprint and the number of items we place in landfills over our lifetime.

The activities below help students understand how thoughtful consumption is an upstream solution to climate change. Thinking before buying allows kids to slow down and consider a purchase's environmental impact before spending their money (or anyone else's!).

Individual efforts to reduce waste and emissions sometimes feel small, but if enough of us participate, they add up to meaningful progress toward lowering greenhouse gases!

Objective

Students explore the lifecycle of everyday products and identify how responsible consumption reduces climate harm.

They then calculate the DIMS—DOES IT MAKE SENSE?® SCORE for a purchase they're interested in making and reflect on their experiences using the calculator with a responsible consumption lens.

Materials Needed

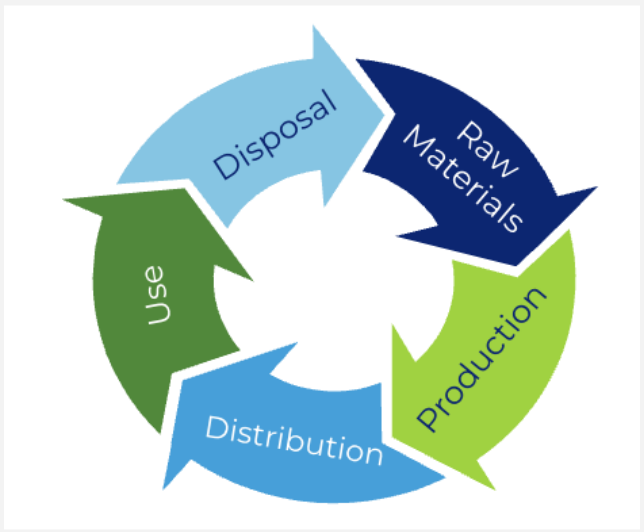
- Printed 'Product Lifecycle Cards' (In student activity downloadable PDFs.)
- Large poster paper or whiteboard (physical or digital)
- Markers
- Sticky notes or index cards
- Internet or tablets for quick research and calculating the DIMS SCORE® for a possible purchase.

First Activity: Warm-Up Discussion (15 minutes)

Ask students:

1. Where does your T-shirt come from? (Refer to T-shirt lifecycle card.)
2. What happens when we throw away a phone? (See explainer in student activity downloadable PDFs.)
3. How many of you have received a birthday or holiday gift that wasn't exactly what you hoped for? (Your honesty will be rewarded!) Do you know what happened to that underappreciated gift...did it end up in the garbage?
4. Let's define half-life and carbon footprint. (Definitions provided in student activity downloadable PDFs.)

Introduce the concept of a product life cycle:
Raw Materials → Production → Distribution → Use → Disposal



Draw this cycle on the board and explain that responsible consumption means working to reduce harm at every step.

Second Activity: Be a "Product Life Cycle Detective" (20 minutes)

1. Divide students into small groups and give each a 'Product Lifecycle Card.'
2. Each group draws their product's life cycle on the card they've been given, poster paper, or a whiteboard if they want to be environmentally friendly!
3. They mark 'hot spots' where smarter choices could reduce climate impact.
4. Encourage students to brainstorm creative upstream solutions.

Third Activity: Gallery Walk & Class Discussion (15-20 minutes)

Groups post their posters and walk around to view others' work.

Other group students can add sticky notes (or comments on a digital whiteboard) with extra ideas.

Fourth Activity: Practice Mindful Spending With an Earth Day Lens (35 Minutes)

Instructions: Students use the DIMS—DOES IT MAKE SENSE? Score Calculator at https://giftingsense.org/ to evaluate a purchase they're considering making.

Based on their experience using the calculator, they answer the following reflective questions (available in student downloads).

1. What possible purchase did you evaluate?
2. What was the DIMS SCORE®?
3. Did the item or experience generate a score of 8 or greater? Why or why not?
4. What surprised you about the questions in the DIMS SCORE® Calculator?
5. How do you think thoughtful shopping habits help the environment?
6. After using the calculator, do you still want to buy this item or experience? Why or why not?
7. Can you think of an alternative that might be better for the planet (because you'll appreciate it more, it has a longer life cycle, generates less packaging waste, etc....)?

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