

# LESSON 5: Why Do I Buy It?

## LESSON'S CONCEPTS

- Practicing waste prevention is an effective way to cut down on solid waste.
- An individual's informed and careful buying decisions, which include considering waste disposal and recycling, can significantly reduce the volume of household waste.
- Solid waste contains increasingly more disposable (one-time use) objects and synthetic materials.
- If people reduce the number and types of goods they purchase, fewer goods will need to be manufactured and fewer natural resources will be used.

## PURPOSE

Students will learn that informed buying is the first step in reducing the amount of solid waste and will find out the reasons why they and their classmates buy certain products.

## OVERVIEW

In this lesson students will:

- Listen to or read *The Lorax*, by Dr. Seuss.
- Develop advertisements for products that are not really needed and for products that have many uses.
- Identify some of these products as they pertain to their lives.
- Complete a questionnaire on why they and their classmates buy things.
- Work in groups to analyze disposable and durable items.
- Develop a criteria for selecting and purchasing products which use less energy and fewer resources.
- Keep a log of what they buy and analyze their purchases.

## CORRELATIONS TO CALIFORNIA'S CONTENT STANDARDS AND FRAMEWORKS AND TO BENCHMARKS FOR SCIENCE LITERACY

- Students read *The Lorax* by Dr. Seuss and identify how overharvesting a natural resource in order to produce a product can deplete the natural resource.

- Students "identify the main events of the plot, their causes, and the influence of each event on future actions." (*English–Language Arts Content Standards for California Public Schools, Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve*, page 22)
- Students "identify the main problem or conflict of the plot and explain how it is resolved." (*English–Language Arts Content Standards for California Public Schools, Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve*, page 29)
- Students create advertisements for a *thneed*.
  - Students "choose the form of writing (e.g., personal letter, letter to the editor, review, poem, report, narrative) that best suits the intended purpose." (*English–Language Arts Content Standards for California Public Schools, Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve*, page 37)
- Students compare disposable to durable products and develop a criteria for selecting and purchasing products which waste less energy and use fewer resources. They write a narrative on the advantages and disadvantages of disposable products.
  - "In making decisions, it helps to take time to consider the benefits and drawbacks of alternatives." (*Benchmarks for Science Literacy*, page 165)

- Students “select a focus, an organizational structure, and a point of view based upon purpose, audience, length, and format requirements.” (*English–Language Arts Content Standards for California Public Schools, Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve*, page 23)
- Students complete a chart on why people buy things and write in their journals how they can reduce the garbage they generate.
  - “Students organize, represent, and interpret numerical and categorical data and clearly communicate their findings.” (*Mathematics Content Standards for*

*California Public Schools, Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve*, page 18)

### SCIENTIFIC THINKING PROCESSES

observing, communicating, comparing, classifying, relating

### TIME

20 minutes to prepare for the lesson; 90 minutes to implement each of the three parts of the lesson

### VOCABULARY

disposable, durable, sustainable, consumers

## PREPARATION

- \_\_\_ 1. Read the “Background Information for the Teacher” at the end of this lesson.
- \_\_\_ 2. Make a copy of the “Questionnaire for Why Do We Buy It?” (page 366).
- \_\_\_ 3. Ask students to bring to class examples of one durable and one disposable item.

**Note:** Warn students not to bring potentially dangerous items to school, such as disposable razors. Check all items that are brought to class to make certain that they are appropriate for a classroom setting.

## MATERIALS

*For “Part I, Reading The Lorax by Dr. Seuss and Identifying Thneeds”*

\_\_\_ The book, *The Lorax*, by Dr. Seuss

*For “Part II, Completing a Questionnaire on Why People Buy Things”*

\_\_\_ A pencil and clipboard (or piece of cardboard) for each student

\_\_\_ The “Questionnaire for Why Do We Buy It?” for each student

*For “Part III, Analyzing Disposable and Durable Items”*

\_\_\_ Magazines and newspapers in which advertisements on disposable and durable products can be found

\_\_\_ Glue

\_\_\_ Five pieces of butcher paper or cardboard from boxes on which to glue collages

\_\_\_ Scissors

\_\_\_ Felt-tipped pens

## PRE-ACTIVITY QUESTIONS

In this lesson students will be focusing on non-food items that they purchase.

- A. Ask students what they believe are the main reasons why people buy products. List their ideas on the chalkboard. *To survive (e.g., food), for entertainment (e.g., videos), for protection (e.g., coat)*
- B. Ask students to think about and write down on a piece of paper a nonfood product that they recently discarded. Discuss with students:
  - Could this product have been reused or recycled? Why or why not?
  - Was it necessary to buy this product? Was it really needed? Explain.
  - What could have been done instead of buying the product and then throwing it in a trash can?

**Note:** Gather the pieces of paper on which students wrote the name of a product they recently discarded, and keep these to use in Lesson 6.

## PROCEDURE

### Part I, Reading *The Lorax* by Dr. Seuss and Identifying Thneeds

- A. Brainstorm with students what they think they need to live every day but are not necessary for survival. List these items on the chalkboard and save for the “Discussion/Question” section of this lesson.
- B. Tell students that they will hear or read a story called *The Lorax* by Dr. Seuss. They

Picture intentionally deleted.

Students from Nona Reimer's fifth-grade class at John Malcom Elementary School read *The Lorax* by Dr. Seuss.

should pay particular attention to what a *thneed* is.

1. Read or have students read *The Lorax* by Dr. Seuss.
2. Have students describe the plot of the story.
3. Ask students what was a *thneed*. A *thneed* is a thing that everyone thinks they need. (In *The Lorax*, the Once-ler explains, "A Thneed's a Fine-Something-That-All-People-Need.") Discuss with students that a *thneed* appears to be something that no one needs. On the other hand, however, a *thneed* appears to have many uses and, therefore, can be reused. (In *The Lorax* a *thneed* was described in the following way: "It's a shirt. It's a glove. It's a hat. But it has other uses . . .")
4. Divide the class into several groups.
  - Half of the groups will focus on the *thneed* as something that everyone thinks he or she needs but does not really need. Have these students create an advertisement to keep people from buying a *thneed*.
  - The other groups should focus on the *thneed* as being a great product that has many uses. Have them create an advertisement to encourage people to buy a *thneed*.
5. Ask groups to present their advertisements to the class.

A Thneed You  
NEED

You need a car to get around. It would be better to use a bike, but what would you do if you had to go to Sacramento? It would take double or more hours on a bike. So buy a car!

A Thneed  
You Don't  
Really Need

A lot of people think you need a computer, but actually you don't. It costs a lot, it'll keep you inside, and you can do a lot without a computer. So don't buy a computer unless you really need it.

Submitted by Connie Biehle, junior high school teacher, Ione Junior High School, Amador County Unified School District.

6. Ask students to describe in their journals at least two *thneeds* that they have at home. Have them describe one that is not really needed and one that is useful for many reasons.
7. Discuss what the Once-ler could have done to make his factory sustainable. You might need to explain to students that sustainable means to continue on and on and, in this case, to continue operating the factory without damaging the environment, including the natural resources that are being used.

## Part II, Completing a Questionnaire on Why People Buy Things

- A. Provide a copy of "Questionnaire for Why Do We Buy It?" to each student.
  - Ask students to complete columns "A" and "B" for two nonfood products they purchased in the past month.
  - Then ask students to complete columns "C" and "D" for two products that one of their classmates purchased in the past month.
  - Have students answer #1 for themselves and to ask a classmate to answer #2.
- B. After students have completed their questionnaires, discuss:
  - Which were the most common reasons for buying a product?
  - How frequently was packaging considered when purchasing an item? Why is that so?
  - Do most people appear to be concerned about waste disposal when deciding

Picture intentionally deleted.

A student from Janet Cohen's sixth-grade class at Gold Trail Elementary School asks another student why he buys certain products.

what to buy? *Usually not.* Explain your answer. *They do not know much about the problems of waste disposal.*

**Homework Assignment:** Assign students to interview their own families to find out why certain products were purchased for home use.

### Part III, Analyzing Disposable and Durable Items

A. Discuss with students the definition of *disposable* and *durable* items. Note that *disposable* usually means one-time use, such as the use of a paper napkin, paper or polystyrene cup, or plastic container. However, there are some items that are considered disposable that may be used many times; e.g., a plastic container or a toothbrush.

**Note:** Since it is not always easy to determine whether an item is disposable, students will need to make their own judgments.

- B. Have students share the disposable and durable items that they brought to class.
- C. Brainstorm with the class a list of disposable products and record these on the chalkboard. Have students identify which disposables are used more often by adults than young people and which disposables young people use more often than adults. Discuss with students why disposable items are used and what types of disposable items are necessary. Ask them to give their reasons.

**Note:** In order to reduce solid waste, it is recommended that nondisposable items be used if substitutes for disposable items are available.

For example, students could carry their own reusable beverage containers. They might want to avoid aerosol cans, because these cannot be recycled, whereas a refillable pump spray could be reused. However, there are times when disposable items are essential, especially for personal health and safety reasons.

#### Disposable (One-time use)

- Contact lenses
- Paper plates
- Disposable cameras
- Disposable diapers
- Paper napkins
- Light bulbs
- Garbage bags
- Paper/plastic cups
- Disposable shavers
- Cotton balls
- Toilet paper
- Charcoal
- Books
- TV dinner trays

#### Durable (Can be used more than once)

- Shovels
- Regular cameras
- Jars
- Plastic bottles
- Rechargeable batteries
- Shoes
- Clothes
- Sunglasses
- Paper bags
- Plastic bags
- Backpacks
- Water bottles
- Books
- Cloth towels

Submitted by Tina Porter's science class, Curtner Elementary School, Milpitas Unified School District.

- D. Have each student select one of the products listed on the chalkboard.
- Ask students to write narratives in their journals that describe the advantages and disadvantages of buying this disposable product. Then they should decide whether they would buy this product and explain their reasons.
  - Explain to students that they should organize their writing to make their point of view clear to their audience (groups of students in their class). They should write at least three paragraphs.
  - When students have completed their narratives, ask them to share these in small groups.
- E. Discuss with students:
- On what occasions do we tend to use the most number of disposable products? *On a picnic we use paper plates, paper napkins, and plastic forks; when we have a cold, we might use more facial tissue paper;*

for birthday parties we tend to use wrapping paper for gifts.

- What disposable items could be replaced with durable ones? *Paper plates, paper cups, paper napkins, paper lunch bags, tissue paper, plastic wrap.*
  - Why should using nondisposable items be encouraged? *Less waste will be sent to the landfill and fewer natural resources will be needed, because nondisposable items are being reused.*
  - When are disposable items essential? *If the health and safety of a person is a concern.*
- F. Divide the class into five groups. Provide several magazines and newspapers to each group. Assign one of the following tasks to each group:
- Task 1.** Look for advertisements that contain the word *disposable* and locate pictures of items that are disposable (e.g., make-up). Cut out the advertisements and pictures.
- Task 2.** Look for advertisements that mean *durable* (e.g., well-built and long-lasting) and locate pictures of items that are durable (e.g., wooden bench, jeans). Cut out the advertisements and pictures.
- Task 3.** Locate pictures of containers that could be reusable and cut out the advertisements. How could these be reused?
- Task 4.** Locate pictures of things that people think they need but can probably live without.
- Task 5.** Locate pictures of items or products that people must have to survive.
- G. Have groups make collages of what they gathered from magazines. They should label their collages and present these to the class.

**Note:** Another way to do this is to select only one or two tasks for all groups to complete.

**Homework Assignment:** Allow students to choose one of the following:

- Select a part of your day (e.g., getting ready in the morning) and describe it in writing. List items you used at that time of the day. Of those items you listed, select which would be considered disposable and which durable. What disposable items could be replaced with durable ones?

- Look at home for items that are disposable. List these. Look for items that are durable. List these. Select a disposable item and list ways this item can be reused. How can fewer numbers of this item be purchased in the future?

H. Ask students to share their homework assignments.

## DISCUSSION/QUESTIONS

A. Discuss with students:

- What were the needs that we had at the beginning of this lesson? Are there any needs that were not necessary? What changes would you make to the list we developed at the beginning of this lesson?
- Why might we want to try to cut back on buying things we do not really need? *By cutting back, we can save natural resources.*
- How does what we purchase affect the number of natural resources and the amount of energy used? *The more we buy, the more natural resources and energy are needed to replace what we bought.*
- Is it better for the environment to buy high quality products (probably expensive) that will last a long time or low quality (probably less expensive) products that need to be replaced often? *High quality products, if you take care of them.*
- Besides cutting back on your buying, people can also practice garbage reduction by not wasting things. How can we cut back on wasting things? *Use one facial tissue instead of two or three facial tissues or use a handkerchief; use a refillable thermos bottle for drinks instead of cans or disposable cups; give a magazine you have finished reading to someone else instead of throwing it away or recycling it.*
- What can we consider when buying things to make sure that we are conserving natural resources, such as trees and fossil fuels? *If safe, buy unwrapped products or products with less packaging; buy fewer products; don't buy what you don't really need; buy things that will last; take care of what we have.*

B. Refer to the list developed in the "Pre-Activity Questions." Discuss how the packaging

of a product can make you want to buy it. What questions can we ask ourselves to make sure that we are buying wisely? Record students' responses on the chalkboard. For example:

- Why did I buy it?
- Do I really need this?
- Is this a disposable product?
- Will what I buy create waste? How much garbage will I have to throw away?
- Does it have too much packaging? Is there unnecessary packaging used to advertise the product?
- Is the product and the packaging made from recycled material?
- Will it go out of fashion soon?
- Will I use it for a short while and then get bored with it?
- Will it break easily?
- Is this a quality product and will it last a long time?
- How much energy and how many natural resources were used to manufacture this product?
- Can I buy this product at a second-hand store?
- Could I borrow this product instead of buying it?

## APPLICATION

- A. Ask students to describe what informed consumers do concerning the purchases they make. *Informed consumers care about reducing the amount of garbage they create and use good judgment when buying products. They buy durable products, don't buy what they don't really need, and limit what will become trash after one use.*
- B. Ask students to work in groups and develop a list of criteria that informed consumers can follow when making a decision about what to buy. For example, whenever possible, buy products that (refer to the list developed in "Discussion/Questions" section "B"):
- Will last a long time
  - Are packaged in recyclable, returnable, or refillable containers

- Are not overpackaged
- Are not one-time-use disposables (unless health or safety is compromised)
- Can be repaired easily

- C. Ask students to describe in their journals the following:
- What products are you planning to buy in the future?
  - How could you reduce the number of products you purchase?
  - In order to reduce waste, what could you consider before buying something?

**Homework Assignment:** Ask students to keep a log for the next month of what they buy. They should answer the following questions for each product they buy.

1. Why did I buy it?
  2. Do I really need it?
  3. Will buying it create waste?
  4. Is it disposable?
  5. Will it break easily?
  6. How long am I planning to use it?
- D. Over the next month ask students to report what they have found out about their buying habits.

## EXTENSIONS

- A. Have students develop a questionnaire about why people buy things and have them conduct some interviews at school and at home. Have them develop a graph showing the most popular reasons why people buy things.
- B. Have students gather and compare costs and the life span of comparable disposable and nondisposable items.

## RESOURCES

### Videos

*Going Green: How to Reduce Your Garbage.* Oley, Pa.: Bullfrog Films, 1994 (22 minutes).

Provides a step-by-step guide to reducing garbage. A family shows practical ways to reduce waste. Describes easy methods of sorting recyclables, alternatives to common household hazardous chemicals, and the benefits of composting and of buying in bulk. Grades five through adult.

*Reduce*. Protecting Our Environment series. Chatsworth, Calif.: Pied Piper/Aims Media, 1992 (14 minutes).

Provides suggestions on how to reduce the amount of waste that is thrown away. Explains how overpackaged and disposable items create excess trash and waste energy and natural resources. Also available in Spanish. For grades four through six.

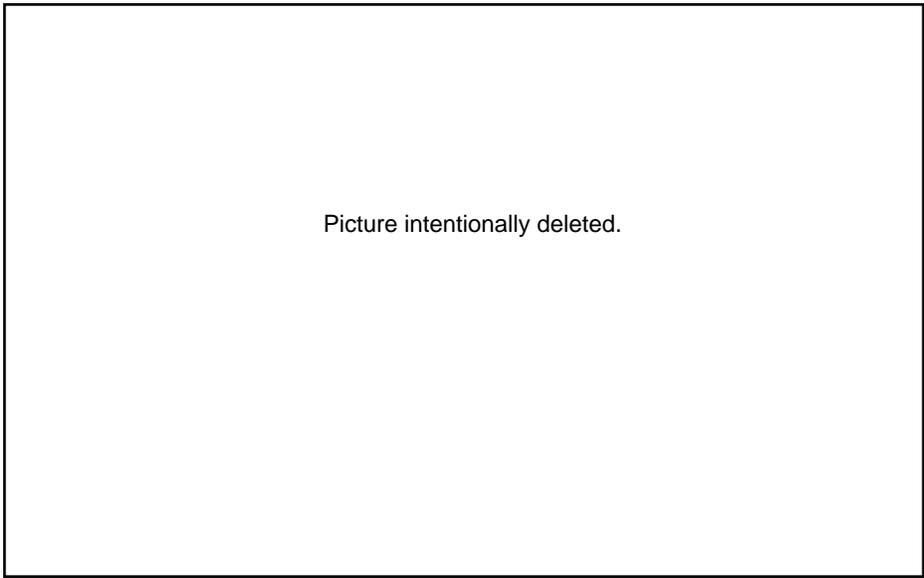
### Books

Kalman, Bobbie. *Reducing, Reusing, and Recycling*. The Crabtree Environment series. New York: Crabtree Publishing Company, 1991.

Explains to students the importance of and offers recommendations for ways students can reduce, reuse, and recycle.

Seuss, Dr. *The Lorax*. New York: Random House, Inc., 1971.

Tells in verse the story of overharvesting a natural resource to create a product of questionable need to society. Offers hope to children in reestablishing the natural resource (trees) in the area.



One child interviews another about why she buys things. Photo taken at the Solar Community Housing Association, Homestead CO-OP.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## QUESTIONNAIRE FOR WHY DO WE BUY IT?

Complete columns A and B for the two products you purchased in the past month. Complete columns C and D for two products a classmate purchased in the past month. Place a check mark in any box that describes a reason why the product was bought.

Reason product was bought	A Name of product: _____	B Name of product: _____	C Name of product: _____	D Name of product: _____
1. The cost				
2. Saw it advertised				
3. Because packaging is reusable/recyclable				
4. Trying something new				
5. Catchy packaging; visually attractive				
6. Recommended by a friend				
7. Was on sale				
8. Uses less packaging than other brands				
9. Familiar with the brand				
10. Bought this product before				

### Answer #1 for yourself

1. When you buy a product, do you think about whether its package can be reused or recycled? Yes No Sometimes

Explain your answer: \_\_\_\_\_

### Ask your classmate to answer #2 and record the answer.

2. When you buy a product, do you think about whether its package can be reused or recycled? Yes No Sometimes

Explain your answer: \_\_\_\_\_

# BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR THE TEACHER

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, each American throws away about four to seven pounds of waste per day. As landfill capacity diminishes and environmental concerns and public perceptions restrict or delay the construction of new facilities, new strategies are being developed to address solid waste. Most people, when asked what they can do to reduce their waste, answer, “I can recycle!” Recycling has become popular among local governments, businesses, and citizens as a method to divert valuable materials from landfills. However, recycling does not reduce the amount of waste actually generated. Preventing waste from being created in the first place—waste prevention (reducing and reusing)—is the preferred method. After all, waste that does not get produced does not have to be managed. Furthermore, waste prevention eliminates the need for handling and transporting materials, eliminates the energy-intensive remanufacturing step which is required in recycling, conserves natural resources and energy, reduces waste management costs, reduces pollution, and encourages innovation. For these reasons, waste prevention is the highest priority in the California Integrated Waste Management Board’s (CIWMB) hierarchy for the management of solid waste.

To encourage waste prevention actions by consumers and industry, the California Legislature mandated the CIWMB to develop strategies to promote waste prevention within the public and private sectors. The CIWMB evaluated strategies

which include (1) legislative actions to promote waste prevention; (2) actions to improve packaging and product design; (3) actions to develop and implement product durability standards; and (4) actions to reduce toxicity of packaging and products.

Currently, Americans live in a disposable society—one in which many manufactured products are designed for a single use and are then disposed. Waste prevention encourages the production processes and consumer choices that are efficient and conserve natural resources.

Consumers are people who buy things. In California there are over six million children who are current and future consumers and waste generators. Through education these children can learn responsibility for their consumptive behavior, as well as ways to influence adults to be more aware of purchasing choices. By providing insight into purchasing choices and the consequences resulting from these choices, children can become wise consumers, who help to reduce solid waste and conserve natural resources.

Whether at home, school, work, or elsewhere, waste prevention is something everyone can practice. People who practice waste prevention eliminate waste wherever possible in the products or packaging that they buy and use. They also reuse whatever they can. And, when possible, they purchase items made from recycled materials.