



Purchasing Power and Global Learning

Introduction

Many of the products we buy and rely upon have travelled around the globe and passed through many processes before they reach our homes. In an age of globalisation, food products from every continent end up on our plates, many of our clothes have travelled through two or three continents before finding our wardrobes and according to the Economist, one country, China, is responsible for manufacturing a staggering proportion of all consumer goods (see bit.ly/manufinchina).

Every step of the process of moving goods from raw materials to consumers has impacts and costs to both people and planet. Consumers have a huge role to play in how those impacts play out and who bears the cost of our consumption. Learning to become a responsible and critical consumer is a crucial part of becoming a global citizen, as is understanding the meaning of the baffling range of indicators and marks that help the consumer to navigate a complex market.

With this activity kit teachers and learners can:

- Explore the concept of a supply chain and the impacts of each stage
- Analyse the people and resources behind a product
- Investigate how the decisions consumer makes affect the way companies behave.



In the curriculum (KS3)

Activity 1 brings a global dimension to **Geography** by developing the key processes in human geography relating to international development, economic activity and the use of natural resources.

Activity 2 brings a global dimension to **English** by providing an opportunity to write accurately, fluently, effectively and at length for information through writing for a wide range of purposes and audiences, considering

how their writing reflects the audiences and purposes for which it was intended.

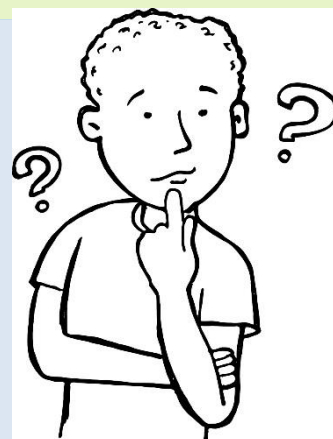
Getting started: Our responsibilities as consumers

Begin by asking pupils if they have ever wondered where the things they buy come from and where they go to when we throw them out?

Ask pupils what they understand to be the meaning of 'consumer' 'supply chain' 'resources' 'ethical'...

- A **consumer** is a person who buys products or services. We are all consumers of some things.
- A **supply chain** is a system of all the processes that affect a product, from being raw materials up to ending up with the consumer.
- **Ethical** means sticking to certain ethics, sometimes simply described as 'doing the right thing'.

There are many ways a product might interact with the environment. Being a responsible or ethical consumer means understanding the impact a product can have on people and planet, and trying to minimise negative impacts.



Getting critical

Activity 1: Exploring supply chains

Take a look at this illustration of a supply chain.

Every step requires people and resources to make the processes happen. This illustration shows a simplified supply chain for a cotton T-shirt, from the growing of the raw material (cotton) to the end of its useful life. This is a long supply chain as many things must happen to the raw material, the fluffy cotton flower, to make it into a useful item. Cotton requires warm and wet conditions to grow, and a large amount of cotton is grown in China, India and parts of the United States. According to WWF it can take 20,000 litres of water to produce the cotton required to make 1kg of cotton – that's the equivalent of one pair of jeans and one T-shirt (see bit.ly/wwfcotton).



Begin by showing pupils this supply chain, and discuss what is happening at each stage. Cotton is harvested, taken to a factory where the fibres are extracted and spun into thread. The threads are woven into fabric, which is dyed and washed, and sewn into garments. These processes may take place across several different countries.

Ask pupils to think about the resources used at each step of the supply chain, and the people involved in the process. They could do this in small groups.

These questions may help to shape the discussions:

- Who carried out this part of the process?
- Where might this have been?
- What resources were required?
- How did it get here?
- What might the environmental concerns be at each different stage?
- What will happen to it when it is no longer useful?

Feed back to class.

There are many different impacts that your product may have. Here are a few examples.

Environmental: Water use, pesticides and chemicals used that affect the land and the people who work it. And how is it disposed of when finished with?

Social: Farmers being paid fairly for their crop, garment workers being paid fairly to sew the garments. What about working hours, child labour, human rights?

This cotton T-shirt is just one example. Can you think of issues relating to other products?

(Check out the resources section on the last page for links to help pupils investigate chocolate and other supply chains.)

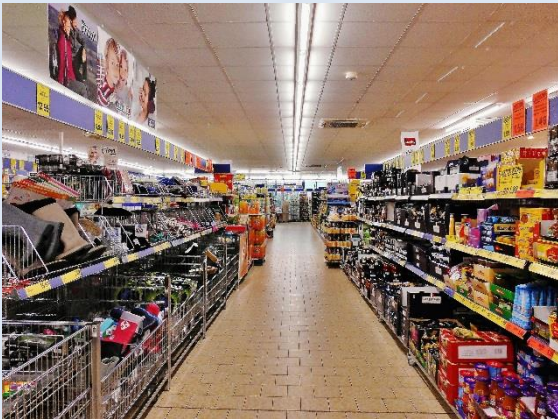


Activity 2: Shared responsibility

Ask pupils to discuss whose responsibility it is to ensure that companies are not causing excessive harm to people and planet along the supply chain. Is there any way to ensure they do no harm? What sort of actions could be taken along the supply chain to make these changes?

Introduce the concept of **agency** – that as a consumer you have the capacity and ability to hold companies to account for way their supply chain interacts with the world.

Explain to pupils that one of the most powerful tools you have for creating change is the pound in your pocket. Choosing to buy or not buy products sends powerful messages to a company about how the public feels about their way of doing business. And with this power comes the responsibility to engage with the life cycle of the products you buy, from the raw materials used to create them to what happens when they are no longer useful.



When you buy a product, you see it on a shelf in a shop, or on a website. How can you make choices to ensure your products are doing as little harm as possible to people and planet? What role do governments have to play? (Think about things like minimum wage, regulations governing the amount of time spent working, sick pay, etc.)

Take a look at some of the marks and logos you might find on a product:



®

BCI Better Cotton Initiative

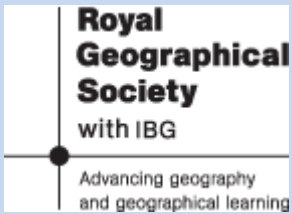


What do these marks mean? And guarantee? What other things can you do to ensure that your product is not having negative impacts?

Give pupils the choice of either writing to a company that produces the products they enjoy to find out about how they ensure their supply chain is ethical, or to prepare a presentation about what they have learnt about the social and environmental impacts of the supply chain.



Resources



The geography of my stuff from the RGS is a unit of work about the interrelations between consumers and the different places where they goods they purchase are made. This introduces the some of the moral, ethical and environmental issues that are associated with the global trade in consumer goods. bit.ly/rgsstuff

The Story of Stuff is an animated documentary about the lifecycle of material goods, and explores the problems of social and environmental issues

associated with consumption. There is also a set of teaching resources available.

storyofstuff.org/movies/story-of-stuff/

Labour behind the label is a campaign that works to improve conditions and empower workers in the global garment industry; it also has teaching resources about sweatshops.

labourbehindthelabel.org/resources/education/



Trading Visions has a range of resources for teaching about cocoa: bit.ly/tvcocoa

The Marginalized explores issues of slavery in cocoa production:

bit.ly/margcocoa

Make Chocolate Fair has interesting and easily digestible resources about cocoa. bit.ly/chocfair



Goal 12 of the UN Sustainable Development Goals is about **responsible consumption and production**. You can

find teaching resources on this theme at bit.ly/gdwsdg12



Fairtrade Foundation has a range of KS3 resources exploring Fairtrade.

schools.fairtrade.org.uk/resources/

Fashion Revolution campaigns for greater transparency in the global fashion industry.



Take a look at fashionrevolution.org/education

to find a wealth of resources, including an excellent 'fanzine' packed with articles, illustrations, games and quizzes – great for classroom use.

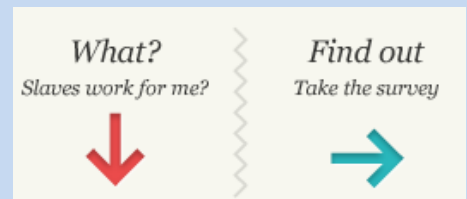
Slavery Footprint

Find out how many slaves work for you by taking an online survey slaveryfootprint.org/

Products of Slavery

Map showing where products are made using child labour or forced labour: productsofslavery.org/

Anti-Slavery: Slavery in supply chains useful article: bit.ly/assupply



Encourage students to visit Think Global's **DoNation** page and make a pledge to choose ethical products, eg: 'steer clear of palm oil', 'buy fairly traded goods' or 'dress sustainably'.

wearedonation.com/campaigns/make-a-supplychange/



The global dimension in my classroom activity kit is brought to you by Think Global www.think-global.org.uk. We aim to support all teachers to bring a global dimension to their classroom.

Author credit: Thanks to Joanna Milis, who did the initial research and writing for this Activity Kit.



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