Life of a Product Questions for Students

It feels good to get new things. Yet, consuming those goods packs an environmental wallop. We all need to work together to find solutions to this paradox. Below are some questions you might ask your students to help them explore solutions to this dilemma. We encourage you to adapt the questions to your grade level, but the initial ones are designed for younger audiences and the latter ones for high school and college students.

Questions

We all like to get new things. And it’s important to our happiness to get some new things. But getting too much causes unnecessary negative impact on the earth.

What are your favorite toys/clothes/games? What can you do to take care of them? Why is it important that you take care of them?

What are two of your least-favorite toys/clothes/games? If you don’t use them, what could you do with them?

What types of gifts could you ask for at (name the holiday) that would be experiences and not “stuff?” (Give examples such as a trip to the movie theatre or a trip to a museum.)

What types of gifts could you give at (name the holiday) that would be experiences and not “stuff?” (Give examples such as “Promising to baby sit my younger brother next Saturday night” to “Doing a chore Mom constantly asks me to do and I never do it” to “Movie tickets” or organizing “My Very Own Talent Show.” Students might even make granola. This is an opportunity to explain the difference between giving an object and a consumable, such as homemade granola, which we need for nourishment.)

What else could you do (when at the store, here at school, etc.)?

These are questions you might ask your students off and on throughout the entire school year. There are few easy answers. We at the CEEE want to know their answers—and yours—upon thinking about this over a period of time. The answers might lead to a fabulous service project. (Share your answers with susan.salterberg@uni.edu.)

How do we resolve the quandary of wanting “stuff,” with the facts that consumption causes great environmental harm?

What things could we do more of? If you need a quick discussion, here are a few possible answers: mending, repairing, socializing with friends, initiating fun experiences with friends, talk to our friends and family about these issues and come up with some ideas that we can do together.

What things could we do less of? (shopping, reading advertisements, watching TV...)

What could you do today about this issue? (stop all advertisements that come to my email, if I need something I can buy it used, ask a friend to take a walk with me rather than go to stores to hang out, save money rather than spend it, dismiss the “sales” signs at your favorite clothing store...)

What could we do as a class?
Assuming you establish that most of the students value relationships more than “stuff,” here are a few questions to ask:

Given we value people more than objects, what keeps us from living those values? (Advertising, temptation, wanting to stay up with fashion, wanting to have the newest stuff, lack of skill to repair my “stuff” when it breaks, it feels good to buy, it distracts me when I feel lonely or depressed....)

What ideas do you have for living your highest values, especially when your values contradict each other?

What can you do today to live your values?

What can you do this week to live your values?

What can you do this month to live your values?

How can we monitor how this is going for us as a class?

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