

CONSUMER POWER AND RENEWABLE RESOURCES

Introduction

One of humankind's greatest challenges is to ensure sustainable development. Knowledge is crucial to increase environmental awareness, and perhaps more important is the understanding that we all play a role in making a change towards a sustainable development. As consumers, we have the power to push development of products and services towards a sustainable development, but we need to know what our options are. Images and objects is a teaching method, which emphasizes active learning and critical thinking.

Purpose

The aim of using images and objects is to create reflection and discussions about the products and services we use, and to raise awareness of the options we face as consumers.



Preparations

Find relevant objects or images representing various themes (see examples on the next page). Each theme should have two objects or photos similar to each other, but where one is considered more environmentally friendly than the other. The teaching material is easy to adjust to different age groups. However, the recommended use is for pupils from the age ten to sixteen years.

Implementation

- Each pupil chooses an object or a picture, and the first task is to find the pupil who has a corresponding image. They must look at each other's photo and figure out which images belong together.
- Once all pupils have gathered in pairs, the next task is to figure out which photo's image is more environmentally friendly. They must discuss the images and come up with one or more reasons for their decision.
- Next step is to divide the pupils into two groups, one group having the environmentally friendly image and the other group the not so environmentally friendly image.
- One by one, each pupil from the environmentally friendly group stands up and shows his/her photo or object and describes why it belongs to this group. From the other group, the pupil with the corresponding image stands up and tells the reason for being in that group. The whole class decides whether they have come to the right conclusion.



Downhill skiing, slalom
vs.
Cross country skiing

Downhill skiing requires the use of a lift, and is therefore more energy consuming than cross country skiing.
However, making the tracks require snowmobiles.



Petroleum based heater
vs.
Wood based heater

Both heaters will emit the same amount of CO2. However, wood will not release more CO2 than it gathered as a live tree, and wood is also a renewable resource.



Concrete
vs.
Wood

Concrete bridge releases vast amounts of CO2 in the production process. Wooden bridge stores carbon, and is likely to be a better choice.



Paper
vs.
Plastic

Paper cup is made of wood, a renewable resource.
Plastic cup is made of petroleum, not a renewable resource.



This is one basic way to teach using images and objects. The main purpose of this activity is to understand that we always have a choice. Among the choices we make, one is likely to be more environmentally friendly than the other. Two choices may seem similar, and yet they're not. Please note that there aren't necessarily any "right or wrong" answers. This is an exercise to ask critical questions, and reflect upon the consequences of the choices we make

For the youngest pupils, you may want to leave it to a simple good or bad. For older pupils, you can make it more complex by asking "what if ...". By adding more information to the themes, the pupils need to dig deeper into the subject to get a broader understanding of today's challenges. In this way, they will experience that there isn't necessarily an easy yes or no solutions.

As an example, take the two photos of the boats. One is made from wood, and the other from plastic. The immediate response is that the boat made from wood is the better option. But what if this boat has a large fuel consuming engine and the plastic boat has a small engine using very little fuel. Which is then the most environmentally friendly? Another aspect is to investigate consumer power. If everyone started using shopping nets rather than plastic bags, can this stop production of plastic bags? There are numerous examples of how consumers can force changes by simply not buying it, and social media reinforce the power. Think about animal tested products in cosmetics. The production has had a shift in how the products are tested towards other options based on new technology and innovation. Palm oil is another example. Palm oil causes loss of rainforest which are cleared to give room to palm plantation. Equally important is the fact that it is unhealthy to eat. Several food production companies have replaced palm oil with better alternatives simply because consumers stop buying the products and demand options. Loss in sales speaks a language producers understand very well. But as in most cases there is still a long way to go until palm oil is completely effaced from our food.



We have the power to make it happen and by thinking critically about what our options are, we can force changes toward a sustainable consumption and development.