

Consumerism

Pre-Reading

A. Warm-Up Questions

1. What was the last thing you bought?
Was it a necessity?
2. How could you cut down on your spending?
3. Do you feel good or bad
after you buy something new?
4. How do holidays contribute to consumerism?



B. Vocabulary Preview

Match up as many words and meanings as you can.
Check this exercise again after seeing the words in context on page 2.

- | | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| ___ 1. consumerism | a) to try to resemble others in one's neighborhood or social circle |
| ___ 2. keep up with the Joneses | b) the desire to buy new things often |
| ___ 3. epidemic | c) a problem that is widespread |
| ___ 4. guilty pleasure | d) the lack of attachment to material possessions |
| ___ 5. high | e) something that a person loves even though they feel bad (guilty) that they love it |
| ___ 6. minimalism | f) a rule or policy in which you always get rid of something old when you get something new |
| ___ 7. one in, one out | g) a very good feeling that makes you happy for a short time |
| ___ 8. have-not | h) poor, low-income |
| ___ 9. shake one's head | i) to think that something is very wrong, to disapprove |
| ___ 10. shocked | j) very surprised |

Reading

CONSUMERISM

How much stuff do we need?

1. Do you work hard to **keep up with the Joneses**? Are you always hunting for the next best thing? If you answered yes, you are not alone. **Consumerism** is an **epidemic** in wealthy countries. Many people stop at the mall before going home after work. Others are addicted to shopping channels.
2. Not all consumers are shopaholics. Some people have one **guilty pleasure**. This may be golf clubs, brand-name purses, or even take-out coffee. Some people say that buying new things makes them happy. Does shopping provide a short-term **high**?
3. The opposite of consumerism is **minimalism**. Minimalists do not like unnecessary stuff. These people only shop if it is absolutely necessary. They typically have a **one in, one out** policy. If they buy something new, it is because the old one is too worn or broken to use. Many minimalists don't even have a car.
4. People in **have-not** countries would **shake their heads** if they knew our consumer habits. They would be **shocked** to learn that we throw out perfectly good electronics and clothes.

*"The things you own
end up owning you."*

—Chuck Palaniuk, *Fight Club*

Comprehension

Discuss these questions in pairs, and write the answers in your notebook.

1. According to the reading, what is an epidemic in well-to-do countries?
2. Why does the reading mention take-out coffee?
3. What is the opposite of consumerism?
4. What do you call a person who doesn't like to own "stuff"?
5. Why would people in have-not countries shake their heads at shopaholics?

Vocabulary Review

Match the words on the left with their opposites on the right.

- | | | | | |
|-------|----|-----------------|----|----------------|
| _____ | 1. | minimalism | a) | low |
| _____ | 2. | high | b) | wealthy |
| _____ | 3. | have-not | c) | necessity |
| _____ | 4. | guilty pleasure | d) | consumerism |
| _____ | 5. | epidemic | e) | isolated event |

Discussion

1. What will happen to the earth if consumerism continues to rise in wealthy countries?
2. What guilty pleasure could you not live without? Explain why you are addicted to buying this item.
3. "It is important to buy new things in order to keep the economy going." Do you agree or disagree with this statement?
4. Do you know anyone who is a minimalist? Describe this person. If you do not know any minimalists, what do you think their lives are like (the pros and cons)?
5. How do you feel about holiday shopping discount days, such as Black Friday and Boxing Day? Do you shop on these types of days? Why or why not?

Graffiti

Imagine that consumerism was the topic of a graffiti wall. What would your wall look like? Use colorful words and pictures to create your art.

- Describe your art to a partner and have him or her draw it.
- Make a group graffiti wall on the whiteboard.
- Create your graffiti online using a program such as Wordle or Glogster, or a drawing app such as Bord.

Listening

Fill in the blanks as you listen to the recording.

CONSUMERISM

How much stuff do we need?

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2. Not all consumers are shopoholics. Some people have one guilty pleasure. This may be golf clubs, brand-name purses, or even take-out coffee. Some people say that buying new things makes them happy. Does shopping provide a _____ high?
3. The opposite of consumerism is minimalism. Minimalists do not like unnecessary stuff. These people only shop if it is absolutely necessary. They typically have a one in, one out policy. If they buy something new, it is because the old one is too worn or _____ to use. Many minimalists don't even have a car.
4. People in have-not countries would shake their heads if they knew our consumer habits. They would be shocked to learn that we _____ perfectly good electronics and clothes.

Answer Key

LESSON DESCRIPTION:

Students read about consumerism and minimalism. They discuss the idiom “keeping up with the Joneses.” This lesson includes a reading, vocabulary development tasks, comprehension questions, and discussion questions.

TEACHING TIPS:

See *Discussion Starters Teaching Guide* (<https://esllibrary.com/courses/72/lessons/>) for a variety of ways to use the reading.

LEVEL: Int

TIME: 1.5–2 hours

TAGS: discussion, consumerism, shopping, Black Friday, stuff, minimalism, idioms, economy

Pre-Reading

A. WARM-UP QUESTIONS

Have students work in small groups or as a class.

B. VOCABULARY PREVIEW

- | | | | | |
|------|------|------|------|-------|
| 1. b | 3. c | 5. g | 7. f | 9. i |
| 2. a | 4. e | 6. d | 8. h | 10. j |

Reading (and/or Listening)

Read individually, in small groups, or as a class. You can also play the listening as your students read along. Discuss the quote and how it relates to consumerism. Here is another saying you could put on the board: “Less is more.” A gap-fill version of the reading is available on page 4. Help your students with vocabulary and expressions that they are unfamiliar with.

Comprehension

1. According to the reading, consumerism is an epidemic in well-to-do countries.
2. The reading mentions take-out coffee as an example of a guilty pleasure.
3. The opposite of consumerism is minimalism.
4. A person who doesn't like to own “stuff” is a minimalist.
5. People in have-not countries would shake their heads at shopaholics because of all of the wasted goods.

Vocabulary Review

1. d 2. a 3. b 4. c 5. e

Discussion

Answers will vary.

Graffiti

If your students create graffiti art on the topic of consumerism, share it with us at ESL Library. We'd love to post your graffiti on our blog. Email us at hello@esllibrary.com to share.

Listening

1. next best thing
2. short-term
3. broken
4. throw out

SPELLING NOTE:

This lesson shows the American spelling of the words *Neighborhood* and *Colorful*. Other English-speaking countries spell them this way: *Neighbourhood* and *Colourful*. Make it a challenge for your students to find these words in the lesson and see if they know the alternate spellings.