Escape from Affluenza Teacher's Guide

- easy print edition

The program Escape from Affluenza illustrates practical solutions to the problem of Affluenza--an epidemic of debt, stress, waste and over consumption. The one-hour program explores the ecological costs of the American way of life, as well as showing how to reduce waste and conserve resources. The program also shows students practical life skills: money management, living better on less money and saving/staying out of debt. The program is appropriate for students in grades five through high school, and it will be a useful resource for teachers of math, science, economics, journalism/media, social studies and language arts. The following hands-on exercises were designed to be used in conjunction with Escape from Affluenza.

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(1) Be a Waste Reducer!

Objective:
Students will measure what they put into the solid waste stream, and then brainstorm ways to conserve resources and reduce waste.

Materials:
TV/VCR, one or two large shopping bags per student, twist-ties for sealing up the bags, scale, pencil and paper.

Background:
The average American consumes 120 pounds of resources each day. For every ton of garbage that ends up in a landfill, 20 tons of raw materials were originally consumed to produce it.

Video clip:
Start at the beginning of the video and stop video after hearing: "...The water came from the slopes of the Cascade Mountains. And the electricity came from a dam on the Columbia River. Then I enjoyed my cup of coffee."

Activity:
Ask students to carry a garbage bag around with them for 24 hours, to put every piece of trash (that they would normally toss into a garbage can) into the bag and record the item on paper. Include packaging from food prepared for the day's meals. After 24 hours, have students weigh their bags of garbage and calculate how many pounds of waste they would throw away in a year if they continued to consume at the same rate.

Discussion Options:

(a) Discuss the contents of the bags. What items could be eliminated by shopping more carefully for products with less packaging? How much is food waste? What about the bag itself? For an interesting look at the EPA "Pay As You Throw" programs, see http://www.epa.gov/payt/index.htm

(b) Discuss recycling. Is recycling the only way...or the best way to conserve resources? Visit the library or search the Web for more information.

(c) Discuss buying products made from recycled materials. Where can you find them ? How do you know that goods are made from recycled materials ? For information on recycled aluminum products, see http://www.alloynet.com/ For information on uses for recycled plastic, see http://www.renewplastics.com/

(d) Discuss the concept of each person's "ecological wake" as defined by Alan Durning in Escape from Affluenza. Ask students to map the ecological wake of a product they use every day.

(e) Discuss what happens to garbage in the landfill. Do items in a landfill decompose? If not, what happens to the materials in a landfill? To see a cross-section of a landfill, see http://www.ecowaste.com/swanabc/papers/sper01b.htm To see photos of the capping of landfill cells, see http://www.nationalseal.com/Products/jobphotos/TacomaLandfill.html

Field Trip:
Visit a landfill or solid waste transfer station.

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(2) Know Your Non-Renewables
(Activity courtesy of Washington State Department of Ecology Waste Reduction, Recycling and Litter Control Program)

Objective:
Students will learn about the world's supply of finite mineral resources and how these resources will be affected by rising population and consumption levels.

Materials:
TV/VCR, beads, pennies, paper clips, pencil and paper.

Video clip:
Start at the beginning of the video and stop video after hearing: "...The water came from the slopes of the Cascade Mountains. And the electricity came from a dam on the Columbia River. Then I enjoyed my cup of coffee." (same as for first activity)

Background:
The Earth contains a finite supply of mineral resources. To drive economic development, iron ore is needed to make steel, copper for electrical use, bauxite for aluminum, crude oil for gasoline and a plethora of other products, natural gas for heating homes and fueling industry.

Object
Number
Resource
Estimated
World Reserve Base*
Paper clips

Iron Ore
270,000 million metric tons
Red beads

Bauxite
(Aluminum)

28,000 million metric tons
Pennies

Copper 630 million metric tons
Blue beads

Crude Oil
1,007 billion barrels
Green beads

Natural Gas
4,934 trillion cubic feet
***Source: The World Almanac and Book of Facts**

Activity:
Hide the paper clips, pennies and beads throughout the classroom, keeping some colors in large groups to represent concentrated ore deposits. Hide some beads very well. To represent the world's unequal distribution of population and resources, divide students into unequal groups of First, Second and Third World Groups. (For instance, a class of 25 students might have 4 students in the First World group, 7 students in the Second World group and 14 students in the Third World Group)

The rules for collecting the beads are:

*** Students representing the First World get 60 seconds to look for the beads.**
*** Students representing the Second World get 20 seconds to look for the beads.**
*** Students representing the Third World get 5 seconds to look for the beads.**

Discuss:

Although the differences between First World, Second World and Third World countries are changing-especially with the rise of large multinational mining corporations--the following definitions are still generally applicable.

First World countries are the nations that consume most of the world's resources -- the U.S., Germany, Japan and the United Kingdom, for instance. These countries have the money and political influence to mine the Earth for minerals. Representatives from these countries can afford to travel great distances to search for minerals.

Second World countries are less wealthy-Russia, Eastern European nations and China, for instance. Residents of these countries consume fewer goods, generally have a more moderate standard of living and have less cash/influence to buy/lease mining equipment.

Third World countries like Mexico, many Central American nations and African nations are extremely poor, and poverty and hunger are common. Citizens of these countries can't afford to travel far to explore for minerals, and often do not have the means to mine the resources they do have. Frequently, when mineral resources are found in Third World countries, they are mined and exported by First and Second World countries.

Discussion options:

(a) Discuss common uses for the resources used in the activity.

(b) How do students feel about the number of beads they found--

(i.e.) the resources they have access to ? How would students utilize the resources they have found? How would they gain access to resources they need but don't have access to?

(c) What might happen if a rich mineral resource is found by people who do not have the means--or the desire--to mine it? For a look at bauxite mining in various countries, see http://www.un.org/Depts/unsd/mbsview/16data.htm

(d) Consider the effects of population growth on our ability to use finite resources. Who will gain access to the resources? Why?

(e) Consider the effects of mining on the landscape. How are iron ore, bauxite and copper mined? How is crude oil and natural gas accessed? Try starting at the "HandiLinks(To Bauxite & Aluminum Ore Mining" site at http://ahandyguide.com/cat1/b/b112.htm

(f) Consider the possibilities of what to do about local and future shortages of resources.

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(3) It's About Time

Objective:
Students will explore concepts of time and the choices one makes about how to use time.

Materials:
TV/VCR

Video clip:
Start video after hearing: "Throughout the United States, I've found people like the Roys, who are trying to live more sustainably. But in one city, more than most, the frugal lifestyle is winning widespread respect." Stop video after hearing: "My being involved with the volunteer side of things has been very fulfilling. We've got to get out of this rat race and get a real life."

Background:
Currently, "work" to most people means trading their time--a piece of their life--for money. A generation ago, experts predicted that the high number of labor-saving devices would give Americans a 14-hour work week by the year 2000. Yet Americans work 15% more now than they did in 1973, and they have 37% less leisure time. Today's parents spend 40% percent fewer hours with their children than did those of a generation ago.

Discuss:

(a) Do you have time to do the things you most like to do? What gets in the way of doing the things you most want to do? Do you ever feel stressed because you don't have enough time?

(b) How many of you trade your time for money ? (After-school job, doing chores for allowance.)

(c) When is it more important to you to have time rather than money ? When is it more important to have money rather than time?

(d) What do you think of Ron Simons' decision to give up a high-paying job so he could spend more of his time doing what he liked? Would you consider doing that? Why or why not?

(e) How much is your time worth ? What makes one person's time (a doctor vs. a daycare worker or a teacher vs. a CEO) more valuable than another person's time?

(f) In 1992, Michael Jordan was paid more money to endorse Nike shoes than Nike paid its entire Indonesian work force for the year. Why?

(g) Name some work people do that is "unpaid" (staying at home to care for children, volunteer work). Is this work less valuable to our society because it is unpaid?

(h) List several "time-saving" devices (washing machine, fax machine, computer). How did people get work done without these devices 100 years ago?

(i) Who controls how you spend your time now?

(j) What would your life be like if you chose how you spend your time? For instance, if you chose not to attend school or go to work, what things might you do to survive?

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(4) Get the Good Life
(For an interesting look at one version of the good life, see Goodlife Magazine-which is targeted to people over 50 years old--http://www.goodlifemag.com/)

Objective:
Students will discuss one family's version of the "good life," and then compare and contrast it to their own.

Video clip:
Start video after hearing: "Though his home is only a few blocks from a Seattle neighborhood that calls itself the center of the universe, Ming Chen and his family live humbly. Stop video after hearing: '"We felt like, you know, it really is important that we respect her wishes, too."

Discuss:

(a) In what ways is your family similar to or different from the Schneider-Chen family?

(b) In the program, Ming Chen gets his toaster repaired instead of buying a new one. Have students make a list of everyday items that are easy to repair (bicycle tires, socks, clothing, low-tech toys, some shoes) and those that are difficult to repair (pantyhose, athletic shoes, electronic equipment). Who benefits from products that can be repaired, and why? Who benefits when a product is made so that it must be replaced after a short period of time?

(c) Sometimes the Schneider-Chen family pays more for an item because it was grown without pesticides or because the product was manufactured with fewer harmful effects on the environment. Why would a product like this cost more? When would you be willing to pay more?

(d) Emily's values differ from those of her parents. How are your values different from, or similar to those of your parents?

ctivity: Ask students to do research, work in groups, discuss and

then write about one of the following topics:

(a) Describe how your thoughts around clothing or food differ or are similar to those of your parents, and explain why you hold the values that you do.

(b) What do you think it means to live a good life? What manufactured goods would you need? What--in addition to manufactured goods--would you need?

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(5) Take a Closer Look

Objective:
Students will consider the history of the land and its commercial, aesthetic and spiritual value. In addition, they will practice research and observation in nature and keeping field notes.

Materials:
TV/VCR, paper, pencil, rulers for every student or student team, string.

Start video when you hear:
"Oh wow. Look at this. Here is one of the really rare plants of the wetland. Here is the small water parsnip..." Stop video after hearing: "They stopped unplanned growth at the edge of Wabesa Marsh and worked together to restore the already damaged wetland to its natural state."

Activity:
Go to a park or open area (playing field, empty lot, parking lot, sidewalk) and ask each student or team of students to mark off one square foot (or square meter) of ground. Ask students to spend 15 minutes examining their piece of ground. Look over their patch of ground from above (for an overview) then kneel or lie down and look very closely. Try to get "eye-to-eye" with the ground. Have students record (using words and sketches) as many textures, shapes and colors as they can. Ask students to share their observations with the class. If possible, do two observations-of a grassy area and a parking lot, or a puddle and a dry area, for instance.

Discuss:

(a) What did you see? Animal, vegetable, mineral?

(b) What might you see if you could dig down a foot...two feet...more?

(c) What was the weather like when you were looking at your patch of ground?

(d) What do you think your piece of ground would have looked like 50 years ago? A hundred years ago ? Where could you look to find this information ?

(e) What gives the land its value: the things that live on it, or can grow on it? Could anything be built on your patch of land? Do you think there could be mineral resources there ?

(f) How does this activity compare to an activity that costs money, like seeing a movie, renting a video or going to a sports event?

(g) In the video, Cal De Witt talks about how a marsh is a cyclical system. Everything gets re-cycled and re-used, and nothing is wasted in this system. How does the human land-to-landfill system differ? How would you draw the cycle of raw materials to manufactured materials to waste...or recycled materials?

(h) Perhaps you'd like to make a map of your patch of land. Look at http://loki.ur.utk.edu/ut2Kids/maps/map.html to learn about how maps are made, and to see some of the terminology mapmakers use.

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(6) Make a Solar Oven

Objectives:
Students will learn about the benefits and costs of renewable and non-renewable forms of energy and why some types of energy are more of a priority for companies to make than others. For instance, most homes are heated with natural gas, oil or electric power. Yet, every day the earth receives enough energy from the sun to heat every home in the world for one year.

Start video after you hear:
"But what would happen to our economy if many Americans began to consume less? Would a reduction in spending create an economic crisis? Stop video after hearing: "I do it because I want to make a small change. I hope other people will follow my example. In Holland, we have a saying, 'consum minder.' It means to consume less than you really need."

Materials:
A cardboard box for every student or student team measuring 1 to 1 1/2 feet square and about 6 inches deep, aluminum foil, black paper or paint, coat hangers, turkey or tofu hot dogs, one for each student. To see photos, drawings and construction details of other kinds of solar ovens, and some cooking tips, see http://www.humboldt.edu/~ccat/sub/solovn.htm To see a commercially available solar oven and solar cooking recipes, see http://www.sunoven.com/

Background:
In Escape from Affluenza, members of Dutch eco-teams look for ways to reduce their household energy and water use, solid waste and overall consumption of resources. It's a notable endeavor, considering that the Netherlands already has half the per capita energy consumption of the U.S.

The Dutch make special use of renewable forms of energy. For example, they encourage the use of food as energy (bicycles) by having an elaborate system of bike paths and separate traffic lights for bikes, and the Dutch have long harnessed the wind with windmills. In this exercise, students will explore the renewable energy source of sunshine.

Activity:
Ask students to cover the outside of the box with black paper or black paint. Line the inside of the box with aluminum foil. Pull the coat hanger apart and straighten it before poking the wire into opposite sides of the box. To cook your hot dogs on a hot, sunny day, pull one end of the hanger out of the box and skewer the dogs on the wire over the inside of the box. Have students place their

boxes in a sunny place and wait 5 to 10 minutes until the dogs are hot. Ask students to be careful, the inside of the box and the wire will get hot.

Discuss:
(a) If the sun can cook a hot dog, what are the possibilities for heating a house?

(b) Why isn't there a greater effort to harness the sun -- the sun is free...who might NOT want to promote the use of solar energy?

(c) Why do companies have a greater incentive to deal in oil?

(d) Is there a bike path where you live? Who uses it? Why don't more Americans ride their bikes? What kind of energy savings are to be had from riding a bike?

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(7) Be a Toxic Detective

Overview:
Students will do an inventory of cleaning and maintenance products used in their school and home and discuss the safety of those cleaners. Together, students will look for alternatives that are more environmentally friendly.

Video clip:
Start video after you hear: "But what would happen to our economy if many Americans began to consume less? Would a reduction in spending create an economic crisis? Stop video after hearing: "I do it because I want to make a small change. I hope other people will follow my example. In Holland we have a saying, 'consum minder.' It means to consume less than you really need." (same as previous activity)

Background:
Before cleaning products were available in stores, people cleaned using ingredients like soap flakes, baking soda, vinegar, borax and lemon juice. Using these cleaners can save money, help protect the planet and reduce health risks.

Activity:
Ask students to make a list of the products in their homes that might be toxic, or take students to the school's supply room and do an inventory of the products there. Ask students to read the labels and make a list of ingredients. (Ask students not to open the containers, and to wash their hands well after handling the products.)

Visit the library or use the Internet to research these ingredients and their effects on the environment. Go to http://www.scorecard.org/chemical-profiles/ to find detailed information on more than 5,000 chemicals.

Discuss:

(a) How did your grandparents get their clothes, bodies and homes clean?

(b) What are some reasons you might want to buy cleaners in the store?

(c) When do you need to clean with an anti-bacterial soap or a

disinfectant? (Note: using these cleaners unnecessarily could increase a bacteria's resistance to the product.)

(d) If our grandparents were able to clean their homes with homemade recipes, why did companies decide to make other kinds of cleaners ?

(e) Compare the differences in the costs of cleaners. For instance, compare the cost of baking soda and vinegar to other store-bought cleaners.

(f) Some of the ready-made non-toxic cleaners are more expensive- why?

(g) Who are and where are the toxic polluters in your community? See http://www.scorecard.org/

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(8) Making a Budget for the Real World

Objective:
Students will learn about how to make a budget and how to stay out of debt.

Materials:
TV/VCR, copies of classified ads for apartments, grocery and clothing advertisements.

Video clip:
Start video after hearing: "How much do you guys figure we spend on our clothes? This is a very fine Italian tie here. How much are you going to spend on this tie?" Stop video after hearing: "I don't want them to grow up and end up with a lot of debt like I'm trying to get out of right now."

Background:
The average teen in the U.S. spends $3,200 per year. Eleven percent of teenagers own their own credit cards and 40 percent use their parents' cards. A recent survey found 80% of Americans don't understand basic financial principles. Arguments about money play a major role in 90% of all divorce cases.

Activity:
Ask students:

1. Where does your money come from now?

2. What do you spend your money on, and how will it be different when you're living on your own?

3. When do you disagree with your parents about money?

Split the class into two groups--half the students have budgets of $2,000 a month to live on, and the other half must live on $1,000 a month. Use the classified ads and newspaper advertisements as resources to determine the current costs of renting an apartment, buying groceries, etc. Ask students to work with a partner who makes the same amount of money to make a monthly budget using the following categories:

*** Transportation (Bus or car? If a car, then account for the cost of the vehicle, gas, insurance and maintenance.)**

*** Food**
*** Clothing**
*** Miscellaneous (haircuts, cosmetics, soap)**
*** Electricity**
*** Rent**
*** Entertainment**

Ask students to share their budgets with the class. Ask studetns with $1000/month budgets to present their budgets first.

Discuss:

(a) What is "reasonable" and what is not reasonable to pay for rent, transportation, clothing, entertainment, etc.

(b) What items did you budget too much for? What things did you under budget for?

(c) Did you feel like you had enough money to work with?

(d) What are some ways to save money?

(e) Do you want a credit card ? What are the benefits of credit ? What are the problems? For a budgeting activity centered around using credit cards, see
http://www.pbs.org/kcts/affluenza/treat/tguide/tguide6.html

(f) What do you think is the single largest source of debt for teens?