Live Net Zero Classroom Challenge
Our Stuff

True Cost

Overview

Investigate the full life cycle of a product and explore its environmental and social impacts. Consider alternatives and share a more sustainable way to meet the same need.

Learning outcomes

- Investigate the environmental and social impacts of everyday products over their full life cycle (from resource extraction to disposal).
- Evaluate alternatives to buying new (e.g., buying second-hand, leasing, sharing) and identify lower-carbon options.
- Develop skills in research, analysis, and communication.

Curriculum Connections

- Science: Materials, resource use, energy, environmental impacts
- Geography: Resource extraction, global supply chains, waste management
- Social Studies: Consumer choices, labour, equity, sustainability
- Mathematics: Comparing data, quantities, environmental impacts

Proof to submit

Sample product analyses or "life stories" (poster, infographic, video* or written piece).

Materials

- Access to the internet or reference materials
- Worksheet for product life cycle analysis
- Optional: visual tools for presenting findings

Activity

Grades K to 6

Students choose a familiar item (e.g., toy, school supply, plastic bottle) and create a poster or written piece showing its "life story" — where it comes from, how it's used, and what happens when it's thrown away. As a class, talk about more sustainable options, such as trading with a friend, buying second-hand, or choosing an item that uses fewer materials or lasts longer.

** Important: Please ensure that any videos submitted as proof do not include student names or clearly identifiable faces.*

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Grades 7 to 12

Students research the full life cycle of a single product (e.g., item of clothing, headphones, school supply) including materials, energy use, and disposal. They evaluate its impact, presenting their findings in a poster, infographic, video*, or short report. If relevant, they identify a company offering a more sustainable version of that product, or propose a lower-carbon way to meet the same need (e.g., thrift the t-shirt rather than buy it; rent the tool rather than own it).

Accessibility: If students cannot find enough information about a particular product, they can choose a more commonly documented item or work with a product selected by the teacher. Students can also complete their item's "life story" using drawings, diagrams, audio, or other visual formats rather than a written report.

Optional Extension: Where Does It Go?

High School: Investigate what happens to the product after it is thrown away, donated, or recycled in your community. Where does it actually go? Research your municipality's waste, recycling, composting, or other disposal systems and identify the next step in the product's journey. Students can map or describe the product's local disposal pathway and reflect on how its end-of-life options might influence their decision to buy, reuse, repair, donate, or recycle it.

Resources for teachers

Visit the Live Net Zero Classroom Challenge website for additional resources and information.