

School Eco-Club Climate Repair Activity: Reducing unnecessary consumption

AIM: Reduce Unwanted 'Free' Gifts

BACKGROUND

The Global Footprint Network has shown that humans are currently using, on average, 1.7 times the earths renewable resources, which is unsustainable. They have also identified that if the whole world consumed like the UK it would require 2.8 times the Earths renewable resources each year.

Human activities lead to greenhouse gas emissions. Greenhouse gases, which include carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide,

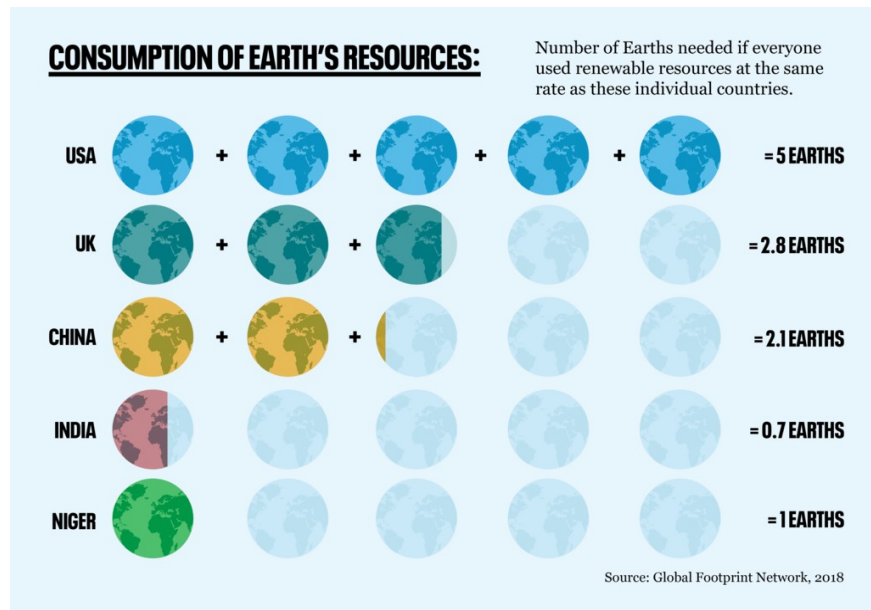
trap heat in the atmosphere and through that are leading to climate change. If humans would only use resources at a level at which they can be renewed then there would be a balance between greenhouse gases added to the atmosphere and those removed. However, if human consumption requires non-renewable resources (fossil fuels) global warming will continue. To live sustainably UK residents clearly need to consume much less than they currently do.

The BBC documentary "War on Plastic", raised awareness of a campaign to persuade MacDonalDs and Burger King to stop giving free toys, many of them plastic, with their children's meals. A Letchworth school joined in with this campaign and the children wrote to MacDonalDs. In a response MacDonalDs wrote "Our research shows the vast majority of families still very much value the toys and surprises in the Happy Meal but as you heard first-hand it's an area we are always working on." However, given the level of overconsumption in the UK do 'free' gifts give sufficient value to justify the carbon footprint associated with making them and disposing of them?

ACTIVITY

1) Start by giving students an opportunity to think about the pleasure they get from particular activities. Two ideas for how this could be achieved are:

- Ask students to bring in free toys they have received, like McDonalds happy meal toys. Share these toys out with the students to play with in pairs or small groups with the instruction that when they are bored with playing with the gift to put it in a box and start the next activity you have for them. This will hopefully give a practical demonstration of how long children stay interested in the type of free gifts that companies provide.
- Ask students to interview each other in pairs about their favourite activities. For example, get them to write down their partners favourite outdoor activity and why they like it and their favourite indoor activity and why they like it. Ask them to feed back their partner's answers and record these on a board. Follow this with some group discussion drawing out what the favourites had in common, looking for themes, for example, being with friends or



family, being able to relax, being energetic and opportunities to chat. Ask whether the activities involved plastic items or gifts and how important this was.

2) Ask each student to write about a 'Free Gift' they received with a purchase.

- What was the gift?
- What did the gift come with?
- What enjoyment did they get from the gift?
- Would they have still made the purchase without the free gift?
- Where is the gift now?

If they have not had such a gift, they may have heard of someone else doing so which they can write about. Share these pieces of work in class and see how many examples students can find of this practice and agree as a class on a particular 'free gift' you would like an organisation to stop giving.

3) For your class's chosen 'gift' consider what might be the most appropriate method for stopping this unvalued 'free' gift from being given, some ideas are given in the next paragraph. If its considered appropriate by the school undertake the activity you agree upon and see if you can make a change.

If introduction of a 'free' gift was considered to have increased a product or service sales, the companies will be concerned that its removal will reduce sales. Customers can help companies make a decision that will help the environment by letting them know that the 'free' gifts are not wanted. The 'War on Plastic' documentary showed how an online petition (hosted by the website Change.Org) was used to mobilise support for removing the 'free' gifts given with MacDonalds and Burger King childrens' meals. This is one way to try and get change. Some other methods for trying to get change are:

- When offered a gift, decline the gift with an explanation.
- Writing to local papers to raise awareness and persuading other people to support a change.
- Making posters explaining why you don't want free gifts and getting them prominently displayed in places where they might help influence other people to think about whether they should accept these gifts.
- Writing to the company providing the 'free' gifts, perhaps including copies of your posters, explaining why the gifts should be stopped.

POSSIBLE EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

Ask students to brainstorm their favourite activities. Then ask students to create a poster inviting other children to join them in a favourite activity that didn't involve buying anything.

Ask the students to describe one of their happiest moments. Then ask the students to reflect on this happiest moment, was it about relationships or was it about consumption? Watch The Story of Stuff video "How Advertising Rewires Kids' Brains" (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hGN1ZEABk_Y&t=35s). The video make the assertion that advertising teaches us that more stuff leads to more happiness, do you think this is true?