



The Geography of My Stuff

Lesson 2: Why can people buy more stuff than they used to?

TEACHER NOTES

STARTER

Global patterns of pocket-money

How do personal allowances vary between different countries and groups of people? Students match ten figures with the places shown. Why do they differ? This activity puts the UK into context as a *high-spending economy* (NB: Taiwan's suggested figure may surprise them.)

MAIN

Why are people in Britain buying more stuff than in the past? Or instead ask: Why do teenagers today have more stuff?

Pupils may well assert that more 'must-have' items have been invented as each decade has passed. But they also need to be taught how:

1. *Average incomes have risen* Rising wealth has played a critical role in driving consumer demand for new products. To show how life has changed, re-visit a well-known Nineteenth/early Twentieth Century story with the class and critically observe the level of relative poverty compared with today (e.g. a film extract from *Oliver Twist*). Key questions for students include: What work did people do? How were they paid? How do things differ today? What impact does this have on shopping and the spending of money?
2. *Prices have fallen for many items* This is related to the emergence of cheap producer nations overseas. A time-line of falling prices for some key products, such as TVs and CDs, should be shown to students, emphasising that changes in the geography of production (the shift to overseas manufacturing e.g. the Tiger economies) that have helped this to happen (as well as cheaper production as technology has improved).

To help students appreciate just how much more teenagers consume than in the past, a timeline can be downloaded. It shows how teenagers have accumulated more and more stuff over time, starting with bicycles and ending with i-pods and mobiles.

The big debate – freedom or force? One key issue for students to address is whether they, as consumers, make free choices or are under pressure from advertisers and a global media. Why is it so important to own 'the next big thing'? This can be delivered through group-work or as a classroom debate.

PLENARY

The lesson ends with a summary of the key factors that explain changing patterns of consumption: changing wealth (incomes), cheaper goods (overseas



workers), better technology (new inventions), advertising. Which is most important? Wealth is the key factor.