

The Geography of my Stuff

This unit of work focuses upon the interconnections and inter-relationships that link teenage consumers living in the UK with societies and environments overseas (where the goods they purchase are made). As well as explaining how these connections work - and why they have come into being - the unit introduces students for the first time to some of the moral, ethical and environmental issues that are associated with the global trade in consumer goods (including child labour and food miles). Plenty of hands-on examples and case studies are provided that will help teachers deliver these themes in an accessible and interactive way. Additionally, there is important groundwork here to pave the way to GCSE: students will gain a first impression of some key ideas relating to retail land use (from convenience stores to retail parks).

The first lesson introduces students to the idea of global supply chains or networks (although these term are not explicitly used). Referencing a variety of 'stuff' (from laptop computers to Hip-Hop music), the global ingredients of consumer products are recorded and mapped. Following on from this, an investigation is undertaken into why consumerism – especially amongst teenagers – has grown so much in recent decades and why such complex supply chains now exist to help feed demand in countries like the UK. The first two lessons also provide space for two issues to be explored, namely (i) the concept of food miles (ii) the extent to which we make free choices as consumers or are manipulated by advertisers and the media.

The middle part of the unit looks at the places and spaces where stuff is bought and consumed. Firstly, an analysis is undertaken of the different kinds of retail environment found in the UK and the advantages and disadvantages that these bring to local societies and environments. Following on from this, online retailing (virtual spaces of consumption) is put under the spotlight. Music downloads, online ordering of consumer goods and virtual chat rooms are all looked at, both in terms of the new risks that they bring to consumers and the impact that they are having on 'real' geography and space.

The last two lessons of the unit deal with big issues. Firstly, the existence of child labour in poor countries is shown to be part of the 'bigger picture' of manufacturing of toys and goods for western markets. Reasons for the use of overseas labour - including children – are explored, as well as prospects for change. Secondly, the environmental and social impacts of global trade – all of the stuff that is being moved around from place to place, especially at times of year like Christmas and Easter– are investigated and strategies for action (recycle, re-use, refuse & replace) assessed.

Focus on key concepts:

Cultural understanding and diversity

Space

Interdependence

Environmental interaction

Place

Human processes