

**[This document is intended for teachers. Feel free to download and edit for student use as desired.]**

*Target audience: EAP students, high intermediate to advanced. Can be done in one long class, or in several parts over different classes.*

## **Black Friday, Consumption, and Buy Nothing Day.**

**Warm Up:** What is Black Friday?

Talk with a partner. If neither of you knows, guess about what it might mean.

### **Reading:**

*Black Friday is the Friday following Thanksgiving Day in the United States. As the first day after the last major holiday before Christmas, it marks the unofficial beginning of the Christmas season. Additionally, many employers give their employees the day off as part of the Thanksgiving holiday weekend. Black Friday is not a federal holiday, but some states observe "The Day After Thanksgiving" as a holiday for state government employees. Most schools have both Thanksgiving and the day after off, followed by a weekend. In order to take advantage of this increase in the number of potential shoppers, virtually all retailers in the country, big and small, offer various sales. It has routinely been the busiest shopping day of the year.*

*In recent years, most major retailers have opened extremely early and offered promotional sales to kick off the holiday shopping season. For many years, it was common for retailers to open at 6:00 a.m., but in the late 2000's many had crept to 5:00 or even 4:00. This was taken to a new extreme in 2011, when several retailers opened at midnight for the first time. In 2012, Walmart and several other retailers announced that they would open most of their stores at 8:00 p.m. on Thanksgiving Day, prompting calls for a walkout protest among some workers.*

*Black Friday shopping is known for attracting aggressive crowds, with annual reports of assaults, shootings, and huge crowds of people trampling on other shoppers in an attempt to get the best deal on a product before supplies run out.*

*The day's name originated in Philadelphia, where it originally was used to describe the heavy and disruptive pedestrian and vehicle traffic which would occur on the day after Thanksgiving. Later an alternative explanation was made: that retailers traditionally operated at a financial loss from January through November, and "Black Friday" indicates the point at which retailers begin to turn a profit, or are "in the black." For large retail chains like Walmart, Black Friday can boost their year to date net profit from \$14 billion to \$19 billion.*

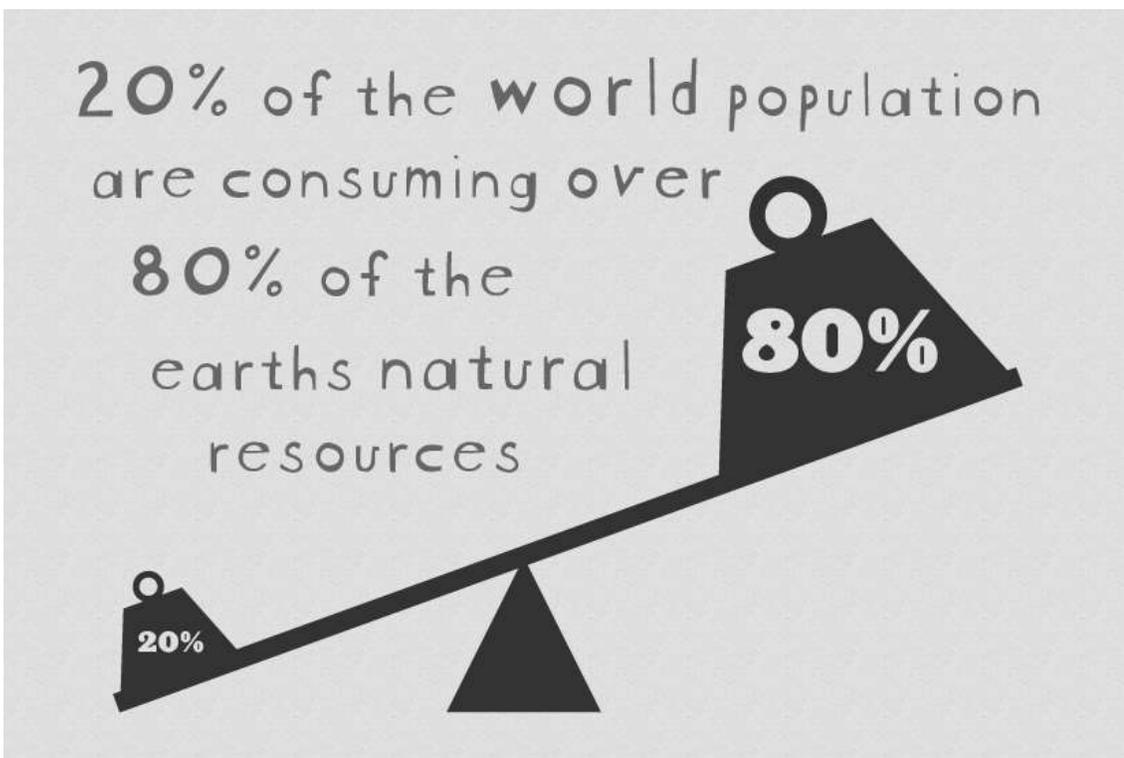
(Adapted from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black\\_Friday\\_%28shopping%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Friday_%28shopping%29))

### **Questions:**

1. Define Black Friday in your own words.
2. Why is it the biggest shopping day of the year?
3. Why is it called Black Friday?
4. The article mentions that some workers wanted to protest stores being open on Thanksgiving. Why do you think they were upset? What do you think about the store hours?

5. The article discusses some problems with Black Friday. What are they? Why do you think these happen?
- 6a. Watch this short news clip **“Storming the Malls”** <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RoiUshaICK8> (Published on Nov 23, 2012) and take notes on main points and interesting facts.
- 6b. After watching, explain what happened in this video by writing a short summary.
7. Google “Black Friday.” What kind of information do you find?
8. What do you think about this American tradition?

**Now consider this:**



<http://www.buynothingday.co.uk/>

8. How does Black Friday contribute to this phenomenon?

**Reading 2 - “Websites: Buy nothing for holidays”** By Katherine Dorsett, CNN, December 15, 2010  
<http://www.cnn.com/2010/LIVING/12/10/facebook.buy.nothing/>

**(CNN)** -- While millions may be running to the malls this holiday season, there are some people running away from the buying frenzy.

Several online movements have inspired thousands of people to attempt to spend little or no cash on holiday presents. Followers are avoiding shopping malls and opting to save their money, make their own presents or provide free services like baby-sitting or massages as gifts. "The holiday season is about sharing time with loved ones, not going into debt,"

said Cat Ellis, a Facebook "Buy Nothing Christmas" follower. "It is entirely unnecessary to spend money in order to show others that you care."

In addition to the Facebook page that Ellis and some 1,700 people follow, websites called *buynothingchristmas*, *buynothingday* and *revbilly* are encouraging people to stop spending a lot of cash on gifts and reduce holiday consumerism. Aiden Enns co-founded *buynothingchristmas.org* and said during the holidays, his site attracts up to 7,000 hits a day from people wanting to learn more about the movement. "Our website challenges people to de-commercialize Christmas and connect in simpler ways, such as spending time with friends and loved ones and giving to less-privileged people," said Enns.

Kyle Denholm of Petoskey, Michigan, is among those who asked his family to attend a holiday event together instead of exchanging gifts last year. "It felt wonderful to create some special memories with people we love and we plan to do it again this year," said Denholm.

It's not just anti-consumerism fueling the cause. "Christmas is an environmentalist's worst nightmare -- tons of extra landfill, megawatts of flashing lights and congested shopping mall parking lots," said Liz Wylie, an anti-consumer subscriber. While followers of the movement find various ways to support the cause, Scott Krugman, a spokesperson with the National Retail Federation, has a different take. Krugman said he respects a person's right to celebrate the holidays as he or she chooses and does not want to make it a "we" versus "them" issue. "However, the retail sector helps generate one in five U.S. jobs and it is important to remember how critical this industry is to our weakened economy and to help support it," Krugman said. "Some 95% of retailers are small, independent businesses."

"Some 500,000 retail positions will be created this holiday season in the U.S. and these jobs play a huge role in fueling our economy." But for some people, like Ellis, supporting the U.S. retail sector is not an easy option. Her family was forced to change spending habits a couple of years ago. "After my husband lost his job in January of 2008 he was unemployed for almost two years before he found part-time work," said Ellis. "I had my own business, which became our primary income. Unemployment benefits didn't cover much -- we didn't have a choice but to be hyper-responsible with money." The anti-consumerism philosophy has kept the Ellises afloat financially. Ellis said they don't have to worry about credit card bills and she does not argue with her husband about money. "I know some people are willing to run up the charge cards and spend tons of cash on the latest toys and games for children," Ellis said. "I can get 'new-to-my-kids' toys and give an even more important gift -- a family that is financially stable even in a failing economy."

Ellis said making gifts for the holidays and finding free or used items is easier than many might imagine. "Look at your talents and ask yourself -- can you cook or sew or do you have a special hobby to share? Is there something you can teach or could you clean someone's house?" As a former massage therapist, she has used her skills to give free gift certificates. She also knits and gives away food she has grown, canned and baked.

Ellis' husband, Eddie, is a beekeeper and gives away honey, beeswax candles or honey wine (also known as mead). "I've found people are far more impressed with the time and effort that went into a handmade gift than the perceived dollar amount spent on a retail gift."

### **Reading Questions**

1. What is "Buy Nothing Day" or "Buy nothing Christmas"?
2. Why did people start this idea? What kinds of people like it?
3. Who and/or what does this idea help?

4. What are some of the suggestions the article makes for alternatives to shopping?

## Video 2

Watch this video: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PPQY\\_Cb4III&hl=fr&gl=FR&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PPQY_Cb4III&hl=fr&gl=FR&feature=related)



## Questions

1. How do you think the news reporter feels about this idea?
2. What was Kelle Lasn's counterargument to each of her questions or concerns?
3. Which person had a stronger argument? Why?

## Application

What is your opinion on Buy Nothing Day and Black Friday?

***[Students can discuss or free write on this question and can expand on this prompt in a position paper or another writing assignment.]***

## Extension

Students can do "on the street" style interview on campus, asking people if they plan to shop on Black Friday and whether or not they have heard of Black Friday.

Another option would be to plan a buy nothing exchange or abundance swap on Black Friday at the school or in a nearby area. See these links for more information on the idea.

- <http://www.abundanceswap.org/> & <http://voices.yahoo.com/how-host-eco-friendly-abundance-swap-1009119.html>
- <http://occupymxmas.wordpress.com/2011/11/15/black-friday-white-elephant-exchange/>

- <https://www.facebook.com/events/157682707589525/> (from 2010)

## Additional Resources

### Shopping Checklist

- Do I need it?
- How much will I use it?
- Do I already have one (or more), or something similar?
- How long will it last?
- Does it require service/maintenance?
- Are the resources that went into it renewable/recycled?
- Is it recyclable?
- How easily can it be moved?

From an unknown original source, but here is a similar list: <http://www.examiner.com/article/buy-nothing-day-helps-consumers-to-simplify-and-keep-the-clutter-out>

### Blurbs/Quotes/Images

Today, humanity faces a stark choice: save the planet and ditch capitalism, or save capitalism and ditch the planet.” –Fawzi Ibrahim

Until we challenge the entrenched values of capitalism – that the economy must always keep growing, that consumer wants must always be satisfied, that immediate gratification is imperative – we’re not going able to fix the gigantic psycho-financial-eco crisis of our times. The journey towards a sane sustainable future begins with a single step. It could all start with a personal challenge, such as this: make a vow to yourself to participate in Buy Nothing Day this year.



From <https://www.adbusters.org/campaigns/bnd>

### More information on Buy Nothing Day

- <http://www.buynothingchristmas.org/>
- <https://www.adbusters.org/campaigns/bnd>
- <http://www.buynothingday.co.uk/>
- <http://www.christianpost.com/news/buy-nothing-day-not-black-friday-occupy-xmas-begins-63056/>
- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buy\\_Nothing\\_Day](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buy_Nothing_Day)
- <http://www.buynothingnew.com.au/how/>

### Other ESL / Language Arts / Literacy Lessons on Buy Nothing Day:

- [http://www.eslholidaylessons.com/11/buy\\_nothing\\_day.html](http://www.eslholidaylessons.com/11/buy_nothing_day.html)
- [http://www.developingteachers.com/tips/bnd\\_plan.htm](http://www.developingteachers.com/tips/bnd_plan.htm)
- <http://mediasmarts.ca/lessonplan/buy-nothing-day>
- <http://www.michellehenry.fr/buyno.htm>
- <http://www.esletc.com/2012/11/21/buy-nothing-day-2012/>