

The consumer society lesson – vocabulary and speaking

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The Consumer Society lesson

This lesson idea came to me in a flash while discussing international movements actually. Only because we ended discussing the ‘slow food’ movement as well as ‘slow travel’ and inevitably ended up on minimalism. That’s when it dawned on me that a ‘consumerism’ lesson would be great for English learners of most ages and intermediate or above levels.

We are all a part of the consumer society and so all of us plenty of personal experience with:

- our spending habits
- our shopping habits
- how much/little we consume individually or as a family
- how our preferences change
- spending vs saving

All of these are great topics that teachers can dive into in multiple lessons. That’s what is great about this lesson idea is that you can branch off into other themes/topics. So here are some ideas on how to frame a lesson and this should be a stellar start that you can then build on. Please note that I am aware that there is a treasure trove of information on the internet that teachers can access regarding the topic. This lesson idea is just to build a framework for how you can present it to your students. You can also watch my video lesson for additional supplementary content on this.

Start with writing the word ‘consume’ on the board and ask students to give you all its forms (*consumer, consumerism, consumption, consuming*) and then ask them to list what we as a society consume: *energy, food, retail products*. You can build a mind-map with examples of each of these. If you’d like ask them if they know what the recent movement is against this type of living: *Minimalism*

Have some images prepared that you think provide an accurate portrait of examples of consumerism. You can also add some quotes and one or two questions that accompany the images and quotes to get students talking

about this. Get feedback afterwards.

Proceed in two ways from here:

- Provide some content like a reading (advantages/disadvantages of consumerism, personal story of a shopaholic, article describing spending or shopping trends, multiple short extracts on people's bad/great shopping experiences etc).
- A listening on similar ideas stated for the reading but have questions prepared to check comprehension

Whichever you choose make sure you have follow up speaking questions related to the content you've chosen so students can discuss their own experiences or beliefs/opinions regarding the topic.

Vocabulary: keep vs get rid of

Here is some vocabulary that students might find useful:

dispose of, throw away, abandon, store, hoard, archive, maintain, discard, consume, save, stockpile, consume, dump, retain, conserve, eradicate

Ask them to put them into two categories: Keep vs Get rid of and then have some definitions they can match the words with, or just some sentences with the words missing to provide some context. You will have to explain some words with examples mostly. These are all very relevant and useful.

Speaking

So here are some ideas that you can incorporate into the lesson:

Make a spider-gram with the question: *What are the advantages of shopping in these places?* Make a circle around it and then bubbles surrounding it with different locations – shopping center, street markets, boutiques, supermarkets, online shops, department stores etc.

Alternatively, you can ask them to make a line in their notebooks with a smiley face on one end and a sad face on the other and then read out all the types shopping you can think of including: window shopping, Christmas

shopping/presents shopping, main shopping street (5th Ave, Oxford Street), shoe shopping. Then ask students to compare their lines and share information. (This can be done at the start of the lesson if you focus on shopping and spending)

More Speaking ideas

1. Is it better to buy organic food than the standard options?
2. Did people spend more time shopping ten years ago than now? compare and discuss
3. How do people do most of their shopping in your country?
4. Do you think you have to spend a lot of money to get nice clothes?
5. What brands are the most popular for your age group at the moment? How has this changed?
6. Are you a saver or spender?
7. Do you think people should save money?
8. What are the consequences of living on credit?

Ads, Facilities and features

Here are some questions on topics that branch off consumerism and shopping (vocabulary words in *italics*).

1. What are the advantages and disadvantages of shopping at the same places every time?
2. Do you mind that shops may be holding information about you? ex. *loyalty cards*, online shops etc.
3. Do you mind receiving sponsored ads related to your *purchases*, or sales offers?
4. How do you feel about the new trend in which shops are asking you to download their smartphone app in order to get better deals from them, while they collect information on your shopping habits?
5. What *features* and facilities do you appreciate most in a shop?

Customer service

1. Have you ever taken *faulty* goods back to a shop? What happened?

2. have you ever felt like you were *being ripped off* by a shop or a service provider?
3. In what sorts of situations should travel agents or airlines pay *compensation* to travelers?
4. What things frustrate you when shopping?
5. Do you think service in stores is getting better or worse these days?

If you'd like to talk about minimalist and other international movements you can connect it to a follow-up lesson I've made with some ideas on what to discuss and cover.

Additional ideas

To follow up all this you can very easily find a listening excerpt on consumer spending habits, disposable income, tips for finding the best deals, top smartphone shopping apps. If you good these topics you are much more likely to find something relevant and easy on YouTube. For this you don't have to prepare too many questions, just some comprehension stuff to make sure they get it and a couple of vocabulary words if they come up. get them to discuss using the language you've taught in the lesson and this should be a nice way to finish up. For more lesson ideas, check out my other topics on offer.

Some questions and ideas adapted from the *First Expert coursebook* and *IELTS vocabulary builder*.

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