



# Lesson: Buyer's Choice

**Grade:** 4-5

**Subject:** Social Science, Math

**Objectives:**

Students will:

- assess the factors that affect purchases
- recognize that a number of economic factors affect consumer choices and that some factors are environmental in nature.

**Teaching Time:** 45 minutes

**Materials:** worksheet, Buyer's Choice; Buyer's Choice Postcards; heavier stock paper (to make the postcards); glue; scissors

(Optional:) magazines; large construction paper; copy advertisements targeting children on video and discuss with the class (see Ads Add Up K-3)

## Background:

By making very simple changes in our purchases, we can prevent waste by not generating it in the first place. Such changes include making purchases of high quality, durable products, reusing what we can, and recycling as much as possible. Being a "cautious consumer" can help the environment more than most people ever realize. The majority of waste is generated during the manufacturing, processing, and distribution of a product. Moreover, air and water pollution also occurs during manufacturing and distribution of a product as well. Thus, by picking products that are durable, reusable, recyclable and not overpackaged and by buying locally made products whenever possible, we can make a direct impact towards protecting the environment. This helps reduce the amount of waste generated, reduces stress on the roads during transportation to markets and helps reduce the amount of air and water pollution released. (See lessons on recycling materials (All About Aluminum, etc.) for specific statistics on the benefits of recycling.)

## Procedures:

- **Today we are going to learn about products (the things that we buy) and consumer choices.** Define consumer for the class.
- **What are the most common reasons for buying a product?** List them on the board. Responses should include convenience, price, quality, advertising persuasion, etc. Students will probably not think of the environmental reasons that might influence their choices. Let them know that people commonly overlook other aspects of buying a product, such as: Is the product itself recyclable or reusable? Is the packaging? Does the product come in a lot of unnecessary or excessive packaging that will only have to be thrown away? How far did the product have to travel to get to the store? (Shipping and transportation also contribute to environmental pollution). **People may not always see the connection between what they are buying and the amount of waste they are generating.**
- **What is the definition of 'disposable'?** It usually means a one-time use item (i.e., paper napkin), or an item that can be used many times for a short period before throwing it away (i.e., toothbrush).
- **Who can tell me what durable means?** Name some of the things that your family owns that are durable. Generally, the more we pay for an item, the more likely it is to be a durable. For example, toothbrushes are very inexpensive and are not made to last over time, but metal razors are more expensive and we only replace the blades instead of the entire product. *\*Note: comparing cost to durability usually makes the durable item cost effective in the long run.*
- Have class brainstorm a list of disposable and durable items.  
Example:  
disposable diapers v. cloth                      paper cups v. glass  
disposable razor v. durable                      paper plates v. ceramic
- **Do you think people can help the environment by asking themselves some simple questions about what they are buying?**  
**Yes!**

**REDUCE**  
**REUSE**  
**RECYCLE**

- **How will the environment be helped?** (List the reasons on the board). Students should come up with answers like: Fewer natural resources will be used up, Less pollution will be generated and less waste will be created, etc.

### **Reflection/Response:**

- Ask students to develop a list of questions that informed consumers can ask themselves when making a decision about what to buy. (i.e., Will it last a long time?, Can I fix it if it breaks?, Do I really need this at all?, Is there a more environmentally friendly option?)
- Discuss the role of advertising in purchasing. (Note: ads give you information--sometimes correct, sometimes not, and they “appeal” to your emotions so that you will identify a certain feeling with that item--like drinking a soda=happiness, wearing brand name clothing=social acceptability, etc.)
- Have students complete the first part of “Buyer’s Choice Worksheet” and then handout or have students create the “Buyer’s Choice Postcards.” Tell students to complete the At Home Investigation for homework and choose one product that they found to be less environmentally friendly that they will use the Buyer’s Choice Postcard (or write a business letter) to communicate their opinion to the manufacturer.

### **Extensions:**

- Discuss the ways in which advertising influence consumer decisions. Cut out some magazine ads or video tape ads targeting children and analyze the messages and their impacts.
- Have students gather and compare costs and the life span of comparable disposable and nondisposable items. For example, a disposable v. a durable razor, a reusable sandwich tupperware container v. one ziploc baggie, 5 disposable juice boxes for one week v. 5 thermoses of bulk purchased juice. \*Remind students to find the costs of all the items involved and to state what assumptions they had to make in order to perform the analysis.

#### **Oregon Common Curriculum Goal:**

**Social Science:** Social Science Analysis, Economics

- Define and clarify an issue so that its dimensions are well understood.
- Understand that resources are limited (e.g., scarcity, opportunity, cost).

**Math:** Statistics and Probability

- Interpretation of Data: Read, construct and interpret displays of data.

#### **Grade 5 Benchmark:**

- Examine an event, issue, or problem through inquiry and research.
- Understand that all economic choices have costs and benefits, and compare options in terms of costs and benefits.
- Collect, organize, display, and analyze data.
- Identify how citizens can make their voices heard responsibly in the political process.



# Worksheet: Buyer's Choice

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Oregon Department of Environmental Quality's 1998 Waste Composition Results	
<b>Total Paper in the waste stream</b>	<b>24.35%</b>
<b>Paper Packaging</b>	<b>11.98%</b>
<b>Other Paper</b>	<b>12.37%</b>
<b>Total Plastics in the waste stream</b>	<b>10.45%</b>
<b>Plastic Packaging</b>	<b>5.33%</b>
<b>Other Plastic</b>	_____
<b>Total Metals in the waste stream</b>	<b>7.31%</b>
<b>Metal Packaging</b>	_____
<b>Other Metal</b>	<b>5.78%</b>
<b>Total Glass in the waste stream</b>	<b>2.77%</b>
<b>Packaging Glass</b>	_____
<b>Other Glass</b>	<b>1.14%</b>
<b>Total Packaging in the waste stream</b>	<b>21.86%</b>

1. Fill in the blanks in the table above. (Hint: use the total of each category to find the difference).
2. Who is the author of the information in the table above? Which year was the data compiled?

\_\_\_\_\_

3. Which material makes up the largest portion of the waste stream? \_\_\_\_\_
4. Which packaging material is least commonly found in the waste stream? \_\_\_\_\_

5. Round each number in the table to the nearest ones place. Use these rounded answers to make a graph illustrating how much these materials represent out of the entire waste stream. (For example, Total Paper would round to 25% and would be 25% out of 100% of the entire waste stream). Also include a place on your graph that will illustrate how much total packaging makes up the entire waste stream.





# Buyer's Choice Postcards

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I want you to know that I like your product \_\_\_\_\_,

but I wish it came in a package that:

Is made from recycled materials

Is recyclable

Has less packaging



**LEAVE LESS BEHIND  
FOR THE FUTURE**

Other Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Sincerely yours, \_\_\_\_\_.

(Name)

(Address)

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I want you to know that I like your product \_\_\_\_\_,

but I wish it came in a package that:

Is made from recycled materials

Is recyclable

Has less packaging



**LEAVE LESS BEHIND  
FOR THE FUTURE**

Other Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Sincerely yours, \_\_\_\_\_.

(Name)

(Address)

*Glue or photocopy postcards onto heavier stock paper and address the back to the manufacturer, be sure to include your return address and stamp.*



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