

Consumerism

“The things you own end up owning you.”

—Chuck Palaniuk, *Fight Club*

Pre-Reading

A. Warm-Up Questions

1. What was the last thing you bought?
Was it a necessity?
2. How could you cut down on your spending?
3. Do you feel good or bad after you buy something new?
4. How do holidays contribute to consumerism?



B. Vocabulary Preview

Match the words on the left with the correct meanings on the right.

- | | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| ___ 1. consumerism | a) to try to resemble others in one's neighbourhood or social circle |
| ___ 2. keep up with the Joneses | b) the desire to buy new things often |
| ___ 3. epidemic | c) a problem that is widespread |
| ___ 4. guilty pleasure | d) the lack of attachment to material possessions |
| ___ 5. high | e) something that a person loves even though they feel bad (guilty) that they love it |
| ___ 6. minimalism | f) a rule or policy in which you always get rid of something old when you get something new |
| ___ 7. one in, one out | g) a very good feeling that makes you happy for a short time |
| ___ 8. have-not | h) poor, low-income |
| ___ 9. shake one's head | i) to think that something is very wrong, to disapprove |
| ___ 10. shocked | j) very surprised |

Reading

CONSUMERISM

How much stuff do we need?

1. Do you work hard to **keep up with the Joneses**? Are you always hunting for the next best thing? If you answered yes, you are not alone. **Consumerism** is an **epidemic** in wealthy countries. Many people stop at the mall before going home after work. Others are addicted to shopping channels.
2. Not all consumers are shopaholics. Some people have one **guilty pleasure**. This may be golf clubs, brand-name purses, or even take-out coffee. Some people say that buying new things makes them happy. Does shopping provide a short-term **high**?
3. The opposite of consumerism is **minimalism**. Minimalists do not like unnecessary stuff. These people only shop if it is absolutely necessary. They typically have a **one in, one out** policy. If they buy something new, it is because the old one is too worn or broken to use. Many minimalists don't even have a car.
4. People in **have-not** countries would **shake their heads** if they knew our consumer habits. They would be **shocked** to learn that we throw out perfectly good electronics and clothes.

Comprehension

Discuss these questions in pairs, and write the answers in your notebook.

1. According to the reading, what is an epidemic in well-to-do countries?
2. Why does the reading mention take-out coffee?
3. What is the opposite of consumerism?
4. What do you call a person who doesn't like to own "stuff"?
5. Why would people in have-not countries shake their heads at shopaholics?

Vocabulary Review

Match the words on the left with their opposites on the right.

- | | | |
|-------|--------------------|-------------------|
| _____ | 1. minimalism | a) low |
| _____ | 2. high | b) wealthy |
| _____ | 3. have-not | c) necessity |
| _____ | 4. guilty pleasure | d) consumerism |
| _____ | 5. epidemic | e) isolated event |

Discussion

1. What will happen to the earth if consumerism continues to rise in wealthy countries?
2. What guilty pleasure could you not live without? Explain why you are addicted to buying this item.
3. "It is important to buy new things in order to keep the economy going." Do you agree or disagree with this statement?
4. Do you know anyone who is a minimalist? Describe this person. If you do not know any minimalists, what do you think their lives are like (the pros and cons)?
5. How do you feel about holiday shopping discount days, such as Black Friday and Boxing Day? Do you shop on these types of days? Why or why not?

Graffiti

Imagine that consumerism was the topic of a graffiti wall. What would your wall look like? Use colourful words and pictures to create your art.

- Describe your art to a partner and have him or her draw it.
- Make a group graffiti wall on the whiteboard.
- Create your graffiti online using a program such as Wordle or Glogster, or a drawing app such as Bord.

Listening

 <http://blog.esllibrary.com/2011/05/11/podcast-consumerism/>

Fill in the blanks as you listen to the recording.

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