

CURRICULUM IDEAS

Secondary Level Curriculum Idea

The Study of Stuff

By Glenda LaBruyere, Anchor Bay High School, Fair Haven, MI

As an Environmental Science teacher, I'm always looking for new ways to persuade students that, in addition to recycling, it is imperative that we reduce consumption. That is why I was so delighted to find *The Story of Stuff*, a 20 minute video by Annie Leonard (<http://www.storyofstuff.com/>).

The video quickly engages students as Ms. Leonard succinctly explains the problem the world has, and will continue to have, as we repeatedly produce and throw away consumer items. Obviously, from an Ecology/Biology/Environmental Science point-of-view, this video will fit right into your curriculum. Look a little deeper, however, and you can see where it could be utilized in Chemistry also. Have students take a look at why some materials will break down and others do not. Explore dioxins at a molecular level to discover why they are so toxic in the human body. Help them to appreciate the connection science has to real life.

Since critical thinking is an important skill for every student to acquire, the video could be used as the basis for a project in any classroom where students compare it with the standard commercial message and evaluate it for errors in thinking and logic. We live in a world filled with information. No matter the level of responsibility our students will have in the future, it is imperative that they learn how to analyze incoming information so they will be able to make sound decisions based upon facts and not simply opinion.

Share with others in your school and pass this idea to a variety of disciplines as a terrific opportunity for deeper thinking. An English teacher may use it as a writing prompt; in Psychology discussions may be had



on the reasons behind the need to own and accumulate “stuff”; delve into the Content Expectations in Economics that could be met using this video.

Annie Leonard has more recent videos available on the *Story of Bottled Water* and *The Story of Cap and Trade*. The website also has downloadable resources with suggestions for activities and discussions. It should be noted, however, that age and maturity may need to be taken into account before showing the *Story of Stuff* since, at one point, Ms. Leonard points out that commercials are telling us that “we suck” hence we need to buy more stuff. Hopefully, with a little teacher input, we can broaden the perspective of students and help them see that the things people really need are not always found with packaging!

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- Science Teacher of Promise - **Jeremy Warner**, Ubyly High School, Ubyly
- Elementary Science Teacher of the Year - **Chris Modrack**, Thornton Creek Elementary School, Northville
- Middle School Science Teacher of the Year - **Chuck Delpier**, Negaunee Middle School, Negaunee
- High School Science Teacher of the Year - **Hans Sowder**, Ypsilanti High School, Ypsilanti
- College Science Teacher of the Year - **Dr. Mary Stein**, Oakland University, Rochester
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- **Jeremy Warner** was chosen as the 2010 Science Teacher of Promise for inspiring his students, demonstrating innovative teaching strategies, demonstrating the potential for science leadership, and exhibiting a passion for science and for teaching.
- **Chris Modrack**, **Chuck Delpier**, **Hans Sowder**, and **Dr. Mary Stein** have been selected as the 2010 Elementary, Middle School, High School, and College Science Teachers of the Year for using and modeling best practices, inspiring their students, demonstrating innovative teaching strategies, being an excellent role model for students and other teachers, demonstrating leadership, and exhibiting a passion for science and for teaching.

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