

The Story of Bottled Water



The following resource is designed as a way to take further the learning about plastic pollution by looking into the concept of manufactured design, and how so many of the single-use plastic containers that we consume by default today, come from a business and marketing decision.

Description of the activity:

Watch in class the short video [‘The Story of Bottled Water’](#), and discuss in class the concepts and facts described in the video with the help of guiding questions.

[‘The Story of Bottled Water’](#) is a video made by the US-based [‘The Story of Stuff’](#) project. The video explains how, through manufactured demand, consumers are made to believe the necessity and importance of consuming certain products. The video centres around bottled water, and how since its introduction to the global market in the 1970s, bottled water companies have been responsible but not accountable for one of the top 10 most found items littering and damaging the environment: plastic bottles.

Experiences & Outcomes supported by this activity:

SOC 1-08a, SOC 2-08a, SOC 3-06a, SOC 3-08a, SOC 4-05a, SOC 4-20a
HWB 2-37a, HWB 4-37a, LIT 3-18a, LIT 4-18a

Questions to introduce and sample of potential answers:

- 1. Why is bottled water so popular even though it’s more expensive and often doesn’t taste as good?**
 - It’s convenient
 - It’s a status symbol
 - Clever marketing
 - Water is something we all need every day
- 2. Can you think of another example of ‘manufactured demand’?**
 - Yearly phone upgrades
 - Fast fashion
 - Designer clothing
 - NFTs
 - Diet and health food products

3. Why is sending waste abroad to developing countries problematic?

- Added environmental cost of fuel involved in shipping
- The sheer volume of waste overwhelms recycling facilities
- Materials are often unrecyclable due to contamination, so are disposed of either in landfill or by incineration which damages air quality
- While all plastic is theoretically recyclable, doing so is not always cost effective particularly in the case of plastics designed to resist heat
- It is done to reduce costs, not increase environmental benefit
- Recycling is not actually the best solution as it uses a lot of energy

4. The right to clean water is ironically threatened by bottling companies. What can we all do to help?

- Use a reusable water bottle
- Avoid single use plastics whenever possible
- Campaign for investment in public water infrastructure for everyone
- Campaign for refill stations like [these from Scottish Water](#).

Extensions to the activity:

Extension 1

Design a marketing poster for tap water. Your design should be eye-catching and informative, giving convincing reasons why your fellow pupils should choose tap water over bottled water. If you like, display your posters around the school.

Extension 2

Locate your school on Google Maps or a paper OS map. Find all the sources of water within 1 mile, 5 miles and 10 miles of your school. You might find it helpful to use a compass to measure the distance. How many of these water sources are connected? Can you trace a path from your school to the sea?

Now use [this map from Scottish Water](#) to find the Top Up Tap closest to you. Can you think of any new places to add one?

Extension 3

You might also want to watch

[How Can Coca-Cola Solve Its Plastic Problem](#) – BBC News 25 Oct 2021

[Dirty Business: What Happens to Your Recycling](#) - Sky News 29 Jan 2018