



THE
JUBILEE CENTRE
FOR CHARACTER & VIRTUES



LESSON 30

ETHICAL CONSUMPTION

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SESSION 1

IS THERE A MORAL PROBLEM HERE?



Courage, Justice, Honesty, Compassion,
Self-discipline, Gratitude, Humility



EITHER:

Locate and watch the documentary: *The Dark Side of Chocolate*. It is supported by the following website:
www.the-darksideofchocolate.org

OR:

Locate and watch the documentary: *Black Gold*. It is supported by the following website:
<http://blackgoldmovie.com>

NAMING OUR EMOTIONS



Identify the issues in either of the documentaries.

Identify the emotions the documentaries provoke in you: be honest! They could range from apathy and indifference, to anger.

What do your emotions tell you about: a. the issue; b. ourselves?

Do we *really* care – or is it just a case of ‘too bad for them’?

Is there a moral problem here?

If so, how would you frame it?

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●

How do the issues you have seen in this relate to the virtue of justice?

●

Think about the issue of 'getting what we deserve'.

How might those in the documentaries feel towards the rich?

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SESSION 2

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Read Kothrai Gogan's, '*On Opening a Page in Time Magazine*'.

Discuss: how does the poet convey criticism of the girl; how are the refugees described? What does the poet ask the girl to do with the dead child?

Make a collage of pictures from magazines that show modern materialism and consumerism and the misery and pain of the poor in the world.



**Locate and
listen to the song
'Driven to Tears',
written by *Sting* and
performed by *The Police*.**

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SESSION 3

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A CONSUMPTION TASK



Make a list of all of the things you (or your family) buy over the next half term, or so.

Use the headings: food and drink/clothes, cosmetics and jewellery/transport and travel/electronic gadgets/entertainment/other.

| | FOOD AND DRINK | CLOTHES, ETC | TRANSPORT AND TRAVEL | ELECTRONIC GADGETS | ENTERTAINMENT | OTHER |
|---------------------|----------------|--------------|----------------------|--------------------|---------------|-------|
| WHAT | | | | | | |
| NAME OF PRODUCER | | | | | | |
| ORIGIN OF PRODUCT | | | | | | |
| MODE OF PRODUCTION | | | | | | |
| PRICE OF PRODUCT | | | | | | |
| OUTLET | | | | | | |
| ETHICAL RATING: 0-5 | | | | | | |

● **USE THE FOLLOWING WEBSITES TO RESEARCH THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE PRODUCERS OF SUCH PRODUCTS ARE CONSIDERED ETHICAL OR UNETHICAL:**



● www.business-humanrights.org

www.ethicalconsumer.org/research/ecis.htm

www.thegoodshoppingguide.co.uk

www.idealswork.com

www.responsibleshopper.com

● www.corporatewatch.org.uk

www.corpwatch.opg

www.prwatch.org

www.ergo-living.com

www.new-consumer.co.uk

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- **RESEARCH WHAT IT TOOK FOR EACH OF THESE PRODUCTS TO COME INTO YOUR POSSESSION:**



Where were they originally from;

What kind of labour was involved to produce them;

- How did they get transported from the source to the market;

What kind of processes and labour were used to sell them;

Do you really need it – what would happen to you if you did not have it?

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SESSION 4

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● WHAT KIND OF CONSUMER DO I WANT TO BE?



ONE THAT:

● Buys with good sense – how do I best balance out my need to budget and provide for my present and future needs, with the increased costs (and hassles) of more ethical products?

● Buys with a sense of justice, fairness and sensitivity to the impact of my purchasing decisions on others?

● Buys with self-control – do I really need this, now? Why do I really want this? Because I really need it, or to enhance my status; or, because it is fun and frivolous – for me?

● Can I see what is motivating my buying – remember, the role of the advertiser is to separate me from the money in my pocket as fast as possible, and to suggest that my life is incomplete without the product she is pushing!

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OR, DO I WANT TO BE A CONSUMER WHO:



Is greedy (avaricious), taking more than my fair share of the earth's resources, at a cost to the social lives of others?

Is unjust, prepared to make others suffer the consequences of my addiction to spending?

Is addicted to shopping, buying things I really don't need, but just for the buzz of spending – or because | *'I'm worth it'*?

Is blind and callous to the impact of my purchasing decisions on the social lives of others?

**IN GROUPS, DISCUSS THE
POSSIBILITIES, PROS AND CONS
OF THE FOLLOWING COURSES OF
ACTION IN YOUR AREA:**



Buying less

Buying local

Buying selectively

Buying Fairtrade, or other ethical alternatives:
investigate how fair FairTrade really is.

Boycotting

As a class, can you draw up an 'Ethical Consumption' set
of guidelines for your area.

USEFUL RESOURCE: *The Rough Guide to Ethical
Shopping*, Duncan Clark, Penguin 2004

● **IN GROUPS, RESEARCH AND DEBATE THE PROS AND CONS OF BUYING GOODS PRODUCED BY THE FOLLOWING PRODUCERS.**



SHOULD WE:

Buy from sweatshops (especially those that use child labour)? (Look in particular at issues surrounding Nike and Gap).

Buy from Big Brands and Big Businesses?

Buy from Oppressive Regimes?

Buy from businesses that donate money to political causes with which we disagree?

A DILEMMA:



How might 'good sense' help us through a dilemma, where a mother has to choose whether to buy expensive, ethically sourced products, or inexpensive unethically sourced ones . . . ?

A single mother needs to provide cheap food and clothing for her children; this cheap food and clothing may have been produced through unethical social and environmental practices. The trouble is, though, she simply does not have the time, resources, or energy to research the processes by which such products were produced and with what negative impact. And, her children need clothing and feeding on the meagre income she has – and from the local shops which are closest to her.

What's the virtuous thing to do in such circumstances?

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A RESPONSE? DISCUSS



This is a clear case where ‘good sense’ needs to come in. She needs to balance out her compassion and concern for children elsewhere, with her compassion and concern for her own children and what is economically sound. She should privilege her own children, by buying them food and clothes that may have been unethically sourced; but, with some of the money she saves from buying such goods, she may be able to contribute to an organisation that is keen to end child labour. She may also want to donate a little of her time, over a long period, to researching precisely where her products come from and what it takes to get them to her. She can use this as a basis to more ethically informed decision making about what to buy and from where.

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How might 'good sense' help us through a dilemma, where failing to buy unethically sourced products could lead to an even more detrimental impact on the lives of those who produce the goods?

Construct a scenario that can illuminate these moral features.

Organise a class enquiry: How fair is Fairtrade?



SESSION 5

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FOR EACH OF THE FOLLOWING, RESEARCH:



The motives, the methods and the impact

What virtues (and what vices) can you see in those involved in the movements?

- Fair Trade Movement, especially Garstang – a Fair Trade town near Lancaster

- Mahatma Gandhi: the swadeshi campaign to reject British goods in favour of home-grown products

- Mel Young: *The Big Issue in Scotland*; *New Consumer*

- Safia Minney: People Tree;
www.wftday.org; www.peopletree.co.uk

- Any local project concerned with the impact of consumption on the social lives of others.

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CASE STUDIES



Research and present the following Case Studies: what moral issues do they provoke and how might these issues be resolved.

- Silk: Sericulture Slavery?

- Are diamonds really (an African girl's) best friend?

- Should we allow organ-trafficking (e.g. the sale of kidneys)?

- Should we allow the outsourcing of pregnancy to India, for pay...? (Research Anand, India)

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1. Look back at the 'My Consumption Task' at the beginning of this sequence of lessons. How, if at all, have your spending habits changed, or become more ethical as you have progressed through this sequence of lessons?

2. Now, take your list: divide it up into things you feel you absolutely 'need', and those things you just 'want'.

3. Could you: **a)** make any cutbacks;
b) make more ethical choices in your spending – what are the ethical alternatives to your choices?

4. Make some resolutions about this...

5. Over a period of a month, journal your new spending habits, in line with the resolutions you set out in your journal – what evidence can you see of change?



SESSION 6

REFLECTION

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WHERE CAN I SEE SIGNS THAT I AM:



Buying with greater sense, balancing out my competing life priorities, needs, wants, and reflecting these in my spending?

Buying with a greater sense of justice, fairness and sensitivity to the impact of my purchasing decisions on others?

Buying with greater self-control. Do I have a better sense of what is motivating my buying – remember, the role of the advertiser is to separate me from the money in my pocket as fast as possible, and to suggest that my life is incomplete without the product she is pushing!

Evaluate and assess: Am I really growing in ethical sensitivity?

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