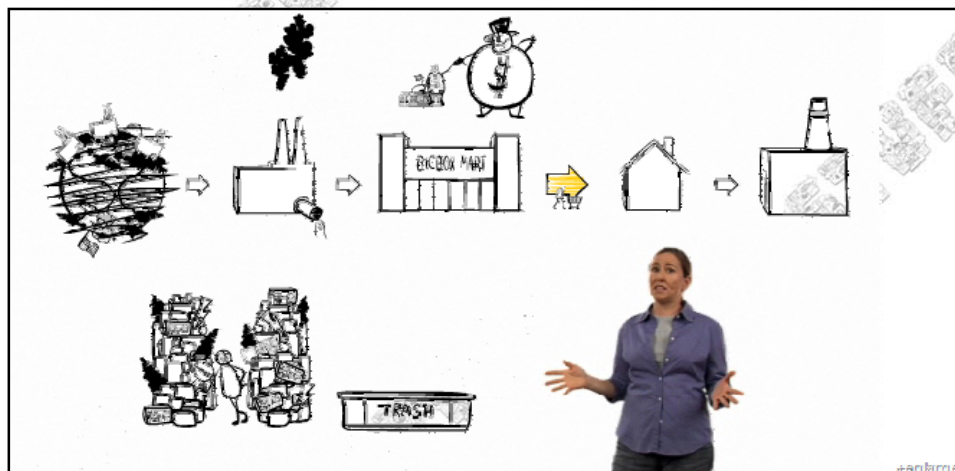


# THE STORY OF



WITH ANNIE LEONARD



ESL ACTIVITY SHEETS

## FACTS FROM THE STORY OF STUFF



- #1. In the past three decades,  
(a) one-half            (b) one-third            (c) one-quarter  
of the planet's natural resources base has been consumed.
- #2. In the United States, there is less than  
(a) 12%            (b) 8%            (c) 4% of the original forests left.
- #3. (a) 40 %            (b) 20%            (c) 10%  
of waterways in the US have become undrinkable.
- #4. The U.S. has 5% of the world's population but consumes  
(a) 60%            (b) 30%            (c) 10%  
of the world's resources and creates  
(d) 10%            (e) 30%            (f) 60% of the world's waste.
- #5. If everybody consumed at U.S. rates, we would need  
(a) 15 planets            (b) 10 planets            (c) 3 to 5 planets.
- #6. There are over (a) 100,000            (b) 10, 000            (c) 1000  
synthetic chemicals in commerce today.
- #7. Only a handful of synthetic chemicals have even been tested for  
human health impacts and (a) most            (b) only some            (c) none  
have been tested for synergistic health impacts.
- #8. In the U.S., industry admits to releasing over  
(a) 8 billion            (b) 4 billion            (c) 2 billion pounds of toxic chemicals a year.
- #9. The average U.S. person now consumes  
(a) twice            (b) three times            (c) four times  
as much as they did 50 years ago.
- #10. We each see more advertisements in  
(a) one week            (b) one month            (c) one year  
than people 50 years ago saw in a lifetime.
- #11. Each person in the United States makes  
(a) 4 ½            (b) 3            (c) 1 ½ pounds of garbage a day.  
That is twice what they each made thirty years ago.
- #12. For every one garbage can of waste you put out on the curb,  
(a) 100            (b) 70            (c) 40  
garbage cans of waste were used to make the junk in that one garbage can.

# Script for 'The Story of Stuff'



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## Introduction

Do you have one of these? I got a little obsessed with mine. In fact I got a little obsessed with all my stuff. Have you ever wondered where all the stuff we buy comes from and where it goes when we throw it out? I couldn't stop wondering about that. So I looked it up. And what the text books said is that our stuff simply moves along these stages: extraction to production to distribution to consumption to disposal. All together, it's called the materials economy.

Well, I looked into it a little bit more. *In fact*, I spent 10 years traveling the world tracking where our stuff comes from and where it goes. And you know what I found out? That is not the whole story. There's a lot missing from this explanation.

For one thing, this system looks like it's fine. No problem. But the truth is it's a system in crisis. And the reason it is in crisis is that it is a linear system and we live on a finite planet and you cannot run a linear system on a finite planet indefinitely. Every step along the way, this system is interacting with the real world. In real life it's not happening on a blank white page. It's interacting with societies, cultures, economies, and the environment. And all along the way, it's bumping up against limits. Limits we don't see here because the diagram is incomplete. So let's go back through, let's fill in some of the blanks and see what's missing.

Well, one of the most important things that is missing is people. Yes, people. People live and work all along this system. And some people in this system matter a little more than others; some have a little more say. Who are they?

Well, let's start with the government. Now my friends tell me I should use a tank to symbolize the government and that's true in many countries and increasingly in our own, after all more than 50% of our federal tax money is now going to the military, but I'm using a person to symbolize the government because I hold true to the vision and values that governments should be of the people, by the people, for the people. It's the government's job is to watch out for us, to take care of us. That's their job.

Then along came the corporation. Now, the reason the corporation looks bigger than the government is that the corporation is bigger than the government. Of the 100 largest economies on earth now, 51 are corporations. As the corporations have grown in size and power, we've seen a little change in the government where they're a little more concerned in making sure everything is working out for those guys than for us. OK, so let's see what else is missing from this picture

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## Extraction

We'll start with extraction which is a fancy word for natural resource exploitation which is a fancy word for trashing the planet. What this looks like is we chop down trees, we blow up mountains to get the metals inside, we use up all the water and we wipe out the animals.

So here we are running up against our first limit. We're running out of resources. We are using too much stuff. Now I know this can be hard to hear, but it's the truth and we've gotta deal with it. In the past three decades alone, one-third of the planet's natural resources base have been consumed. Gone.

We are cutting and mining and hauling and trashing the place so fast that we're undermining the planet's very ability for people to live here.

Where I live, in the United States, we have less than 4% of our original forests left. Forty percent of waterways have become undrinkable. And our problem is not just that we're using too much stuff, but we're using more than our share.

We [The U.S.] have 5% of the world's population but we're consuming 30% of the world's resources and creating 30% of the world's waste. If everybody consumed at U.S. rates, we would need 3 to 5 planets. And you know what? We've only got one.

So, my country's response to this limitation is simply to go take someone else's! This is the Third World, which—some would say—is another word for our stuff that somehow got on someone else's land. So what does that look like? The same thing: trashing the place.

- 75% of global fisheries now are fished at or beyond capacity.
- 80% of the planet's original forests are gone.
- In the Amazon alone, we're losing 2000 trees a minute. That is seven football fields a minute.

And what about the people who live here? Well. According to these guys, they don't own these resources even if they've been living there for generations, they don't own the means of production and they're not buying a lot of stuff. And in this system, if you don't own or buy a lot of stuff, you don't have value.

## Production

So, next, the materials move to "production" and what happens there is we use energy to mix toxic chemicals in with the natural resources to make toxic contaminated products.

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There are over 100,000 synthetic chemicals in commerce today. Only a handful of these have even been tested for human health impacts and NONE of them have been tested for synergistic health impacts that means when they interact with all the other chemicals we're exposed to every day. So, we don't know the full impact of these toxics on our health and environment of all these toxic chemicals. But we do know one thing: Toxics in, Toxics Out. As long as we keep putting toxics into our production system, we are going to keep getting toxics in the stuff that we bring into our homes, our workplaces, and schools. And, duh, our bodies.

Like BFRs, brominated flame retardants. They are a chemical that make things more fireproof but they are super toxic. They're a neurotoxin—that means toxic to the brain. What are we even doing using a chemical like this?

Yet we put them in our computers, our appliances, couches, mattresses, even some pillows. In fact, we take our pillows, we douse them in a neurotoxin and then we bring them home and put our heads on them for 8 hours a night to sleep. Now, I don't know, but it seems to me that in this country with so much potential, we could think of a better way to stop our heads from catching on fire at night.

These toxins build up in the food chain and concentrate in our bodies. Do you know what is the food at the top of the food chain with the highest levels of many toxic contaminants? Human breast milk. That means that we have reached a point where the smallest members of our societies—our babies—are getting their highest lifetime dose of toxic chemicals from breastfeeding from their mothers. Is that not an incredible violation? Breastfeeding must be the most fundamental human act of nurturing; it should be sacred and safe. Now breastfeeding is still best and mothers should definitely keep breastfeeding, but we should protect it. They [government] should protect it. I thought they were looking out for us.

And of course, the people who bear the biggest brunt of these toxic chemicals are the factory workers, many of whom are women of reproductive age. They're working with reproductive toxics, carcinogens and more. Now, I ask you, what kind of woman of reproductive age would work in a job exposed to reproductive toxins, except one who had no other option? And that is one of the "beauties" of this system. The erosion of local environments and economies here ensures a constant supply of people with no other option. Globally 200,000 people a day are moving from environments that have sustained them for generations, into cities, many to live in slums, looking for work, no matter how toxic that work may be. So, you see, it is not just resources that are wasted along this system, but people too. Whole communities get wasted.

Yup, toxics in, toxics out. A lot of the toxics leave the factory as products, but even more leave as byproducts, or pollution. And it's a lot of pollution. In the

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U.S., industry admits to releasing over 4 billion pounds of toxic chemicals a year and it's probably way more since that is only what they admit. So that's another limit, because, yuck, who wants to look at and smell 4 billion pounds of toxic chemicals a year? So, what do they do? Move the dirty factories overseas. Pollute someone else's land!

But surprise, a lot of that air pollution is coming right back at us, carried by wind currents.

### **Distribution**

So, what happens after all these resources are turned into products? Well, it moves here, for distribution. Now distribution means "selling all this toxic contaminated junk as quickly as possible." The goal here is to keep the prices down, keep the people buying and keep the inventory moving. How do they keep the prices down? Well, they don't pay the store workers very much and skimp on health insurance every time they can. It's all about externalizing the costs. What that means is the real costs of making stuff aren't captured in the price. In other words, we aren't really paying for the stuff we buy.

I was thinking about this the other day. I was walking to work and I wanted to listen to the news so I popped into this Radio Shack to buy a radio. I found this cute little green radio for 4 dollars and 99 cents. I was standing there in line to buy this radio and I wondering how \$4.99 could possibly capture the costs of making this radio and getting it to my hands. The metal was probably mined in South Africa, the petroleum was probably drilled in Iraq, the plastics were probably produced in China, and maybe the whole thing was assembled by some 15 year old in a maquiladora in Mexico. \$4.99 wouldn't even pay the rent for the shelf space it occupied until I came along, let alone part of the staff guy's salary that helped me pick it out, or the multiple ocean cruises and truck rides pieces of this radio went on. That's how I realized, I didn't pay for the radio.

So, who did pay? Well, these people paid with the loss of their natural resource base. These people paid with the loss of their clean air, with increasing asthma and cancer rates. Kids in the Congo paid with their future—30% of the kids in parts of the Congo now have had to drop out of school to mine coltan, a metal we need for our disposable electronics. These people even paid, by having to cover their own health insurance. All along this system, people pitched in so I could get this radio for \$4.99. And none of these contributions are recorded in any accounts book. That is what I mean by the company owners externalize the true costs of production.

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## Consumption

And that brings us to the golden arrow of consumption. This is the heart of the system, the engine that drives it. It is so important [to propping up this whole flawed system] that protecting this arrow is a top priority for both these guys. That is why, after 9/11, when our country was in shock, President Bush could have suggested any number of appropriate things: to grieve, to pray, to hope. NO. He said to shop. TO SHOP?!

We have become a nation of consumers. Our primary identity has become that of consumer, not mothers, teachers, farmers, but consumers. The primary way that our value is measured and demonstrated is by how much we contribute to this arrow, how much we consume. And do we! We shop and shop and shop. Keep the materials flowing. And flow they do!

Guess what percentage of *total* material flow through this system is still in product or use 6 months after their sale in North America. Fifty percent? Twenty? NO. One percent. One! In other words, 99 percent of the stuff we harvest, mine, process, transport—99 percent of the stuff we run through this system is trashed within 6 months. Now how can we run a planet with that rate of materials throughput?

It wasn't always like this. The average U.S. person now consumes twice as much as they did 50 years ago. Ask your grandma. In her day, stewardship and resourcefulness and thrift were valued. So, how did this happen? Well, it didn't just happen. It was designed.

Shortly after the World War 2, these guys were figuring out how to ramp up the [U.S.] economy. Retailing analyst Victor Lebow articulated the solution that has become the norm for the whole system. He said: "Our enormously productive economy . . . demands that we make consumption our way of life that we convert the buying and use of goods into rituals, that we seek our spiritual satisfaction, our ego satisfaction, in consumption . . . we need things consumed, burned up, replaced and discarded at an ever-accelerating rate."

And President Eisenhower's Council of Economic Advisors Chairman said that "The American economy's ultimate purpose is to produce more consumer goods." MORE CONSUMER GOODS??? Our [economy's] ultimate purpose? Not provide health care, or education, or safe transportation, or sustainability or justice? Consumer goods?

How did they get us to jump on board this program so enthusiastically? Well, two of their most effective strategies are planned obsolescence and perceived obsolescence. Planned obsolescence is another word for "designed for the dump." It means they actually make stuff that is designed to be useless as

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quickly as possible so we will chuck it and go buy a new one. It's obvious with stuff like plastic bags and coffee cups, but now it's even big stuff: mops, DVDs, cameras, barbecues even, everything!

Even computers. Have you noticed that when you buy a computer now, the technology is changing so fast that within a couple years, it's [your new computer] actually an impediment to communication. I was curious about this so I opened up a big desk top computer to see what was inside. And I found out that the piece that changes each year is just a tiny little piece in the corner. But you can't just change that one piece, because each new version is a different shape, so you gotta chuck the whole thing and buy a new one.

So, I was reading quotes from industrial design journals from the 1950s when planned obsolescence was really catching on. These designers are so open about it. They actually discuss how fast they can make stuff break and still leaves the consumer with enough faith in the product to go buy another one. It was so intentional.

But stuff can not break fast enough to keep this arrow afloat, so there's also "perceived obsolescence." Now perceived obsolescence convinces us to throw away stuff that is still perfectly useful. How do they do that? Well, they change the way the stuff looks so if you bought your stuff a couple years ago, everyone can tell that you haven't contributed to this arrow recently and since the way we demonstrate our value is by contributing to this arrow, it can be embarrassing. [I know.] I've have had the same fat white computer monitor on my desk for 5 years. My co-worker just got a new computer. She has a flat shiny sleek flat screen monitor. It matches her computer, it matches her phone, even her pen stand. [It looks cool.] She looks like she is driving in space ship central and I, I look like I have a washing machine on my desk.

Fashion is another prime example of this. Have you ever wondered why women's shoe heels go from fat one year to skinny the next to fat to skinny? It is not because there is some debate about which heel structure is the most healthy for women's feet. It's because wearing fat heels in a skinny heel year shows everyone that you haven't contributed to that arrow recently so you're not as valuable as that skinny heeled person next to you or, more likely, in some ad. It's to keep buying new shoes.

Advertisements, and media in general, plays a big role in this. Each of us in the U.S. is targeted with more than 3,000 advertisements a day. We each see more advertisements in one year than a people 50 years ago saw in a lifetime. And if you think about it, what is the point of an ad except to make us unhappy with what we have. So, 3,000 times a day, we're told that our hair is wrong, our skin is wrong, clothes are wrong, our furniture is wrong, our cars are wrong, we are

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wrong but that it can all be made right if we just go shopping. Media also helps by hiding all of this and all of this, so the only part of the materials economy we see is the shopping. The extraction, production and disposal all happens outside our field of vision.

So, in the U.S. we have more stuff than ever before, but polls show that our national happiness is actually declining. Our national happiness peaked sometime in the 1950s, the same time as this consumption mania exploded. Hmm. Interesting coincidence. I think I know why. We have more stuff but we have less time for the things that really make us happy: family, friends, leisure time. We're working harder than ever. Some analysts say that we have less leisure time now than in Feudal Society. And do you know what the two main activities are that we do with the scant leisure time we have? Watch TV and shop. In the U.S., we spend 3—4 times as many hours shopping as our counterparts in Europe do.

So we are in this ridiculous situation where we go to work, maybe two jobs even, and we come home and we're exhausted so we plop down on our new couch and watch TV and the commercials tell us "YOU SUCK" so gotta go to the mall to buy something to feel better, then we gotta go to work more to pay for the stuff we just bought so we come home and we're more tired so you sit down and watch more T.V. and it tells you to go to the mall again and we're on this crazy work-watch-spend treadmill and we could just stop.

## **Disposal**

So in the end, what happens to all the stuff we buy anyway? At this rate of consumption, it can't fit into our houses even though the average U.S. house size has doubled in this country since the 1970s.

It all goes out in the garbage. And that brings us to disposal. This is the part of the materials economy we all know the most because we have to haul the junk out to the curb ourselves. Each of us in the United States makes 4 1/2 pounds of garbage a day. That is twice what we each made thirty years ago.

All of this garbage [stuff we bought] either gets dumped in a landfill, which is just a big hole in the ground, or if you're really unlucky, first it's burned in an incinerator and then dumped in a landfill. Either way, both pollute the air, land, water and, don't forget, change the climate. Incineration is really bad. Remember those toxics back in the production stage? Burning the garbage releases the toxics up into the air. Even worse, it actually makes new super toxics. Like dioxin.

Dioxin is the most toxic man made substance known to science. And incinerators are the number one source of dioxin. That means that we could stop the number one source of the most toxic man-made substance known just by stopping

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burning the trash. We could stop it today. Now some companies don't want to deal with building landfills and incinerators here, so they just export the disposal too.

What about recycling? Does recycling help? Yes, recycling helps. Recycling reduces the garbage at this end and it reduces the pressure to mine and harvest new stuff at this end. Yes, Yes, Yes, we should all recycle. But recycling is not enough. Recycling will never be enough. For a couple reasons. First, the waste coming out of our houses is just the tip of the iceberg. For every one garbage can of waste you put out on the curb, 70 garbage cans of waste were made upstream just to make the junk in that one garbage can you put out on the curb. So even if we could recycle 100 percent of the waste coming out of our households, it doesn't get to the core of the problem. Also much of the garbage can't be recycled, either because it contains too many toxics or it is actually designed NOT to be recyclable in the first place. Like those juice packs with layers of metal and paper and plastic all smooshed together. You can never separate those for true recycling.

So you see, it is a system in crisis. All along the way, we are bumping up against a lot of limits. From changing climate to declining happiness, it's just not working. But the good thing about such an all pervasive problem is that there are so many points of intervention.

There are people working here on saving forests and here on clean production. People working on labor rights and fair trade and conscious consuming and blocking landfills and incinerators and, very importantly, on taking back our government so it is really is by the people for the people. All this work is critically important but things are really gonna start moving when we see the connections, when we see the big picture. When people along this system get united, we can reclaim and transform this linear system into something new, a system that doesn't waste resources or people.

## **Another Way**

Because what we really need to chuck is this old-school throw-away mindset. There's a new school of thinking on this stuff and it's based on sustainability and equity: Green Chemistry, Zero Waste, Closed Loop Production, Renewable Energy, Local living Economies. It's already happening. Some people say it's unrealistic, idealistic, that it can't happen. But I say the ones who are unrealistic are those that want to continue on the old path. That's dreaming. Remember that old way didn't just happen by itself. It's not like gravity that we just gotta live with. People created it. And we're people too. So let's create something new.



## Comprehension Activity Sheets

Listen to each part of **The Story of Stuff** and answer the Comprehension Questions:

### Part I: Introduction

**Q1.** What do the textbooks call the stages of extraction, production, consumption & disposal?

**A:** The \_\_\_\_\_ Economy.

**Q2.** What did Annie Leonard do for 10 years?

**A:** \_\_\_\_\_ the world \_\_\_\_\_ where our stuff \_\_\_\_\_ and where it \_\_\_\_\_.

**Q3.** Why is the system in crisis?

**A:** It is a \_\_\_\_\_ system and we live on a \_\_\_\_\_ planet.

**Q4.** What is the system interacting with?

**A:** It's interacting with \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, economies, and the \_\_\_\_\_.

**Q5.** What is one of the most important things that is missing in our system?

**A:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Q6.** What percentage of the US federal tax money goes to the military?

**A:** More than \_\_\_\_\_%.

**Q7.** Why does Annie use a person instead of a tank to represent the government?

**A:** Because she believes governments should be of the people, by the people, for the people. It's the government's job is to \_\_\_\_\_ for us, to \_\_\_\_\_ of us. That's their job.

**Q8.** Of the 100 largest economies on earth now, how many are corporations?

**A:** Of the 100 largest economies on earth now, \_\_\_\_\_ are corporations.

**Q9.** Who is the government more concerned about - the corporations or the people?

**A:** \_\_\_\_\_

## **Part II: Extraction**

**Q1.** What is “extraction” a fancy word for?

**A:** For natural resource \_\_\_\_\_ which is a fancy word for \_\_\_\_\_ the planet. What this looks like is we chop down trees, we blow up mountains to get the metals inside, we use up all the water and we wipe out the animals.

**Q2.** What are we running out of?

**A:** We’re running out of \_\_\_\_\_. We are using too much stuff.

**Q3.** In the past three decades alone, how much of the planet’s natural resources base have been consumed?

**A:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Q4.** In the U.S., what percentage of the original forests are left?

**A:** Less than \_\_\_\_\_ of the original forests left.

**Q5.** What percentage of waterways are undrinkable?

**A:** \_\_\_\_\_ of waterways have become undrinkable.

**Q6.** What percentage of the world’s resources does the US use and what percentage of the world’s waste does it create?

**A:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Q7.** If everyone consumed at US rates, how many planets would we need?

**A:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Q8.** What is the US response to limited resources?

**A:** They take resources from the \_\_\_\_\_.

**Q9.** How many trees are we losing per minute in the Amazon?

**A:** \_\_\_\_\_ trees a minute.

### **Part III: Production**

**Q1.** How many synthetic chemicals are there?

**A:** Over \_\_\_\_\_.

**Q2.** How many of these have been tested for *synergistic* health impacts (*their interaction with other chemicals*).

**A:** \_\_\_\_\_. So, we don't know the full impact of these toxics on our health and environment of all these toxic chemicals.

**Q3.** What does "Toxics in, Toxics Out" mean?

**A:** As long as we keep putting toxics into our production system, we are going to keep getting toxics in the stuff that we bring into our \_\_\_\_\_, our \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and our \_\_\_\_\_.

**Q4.** What is the problem with flame retardants?

**A:** They are a chemical that make things more fireproof but they are a neurotoxin—that means toxic to the \_\_\_\_\_.

**Q5.** What is the food with the highest level of toxic contaminants?

**A:** Human \_\_\_\_\_.

**Q6.** What kind of workers are most exposed to reproductive toxins?

**A:** \_\_\_\_\_ workers, many of whom are \_\_\_\_\_ of reproductive age.

**Q7.** How many pounds of toxic chemicals does industry in the US admit to releasing a year?

**A:** \_\_\_\_\_ pounds per year, and it's probably way more since that is only what they admit.

## **Part IV: Distribution**

**Q1.** What happens after all these resources are turned into products?

**A:** It moves here, for \_\_\_\_\_.

**Q2.** What does 'distribution' mean?

**A:** It means " \_\_\_\_\_ all this toxic contaminated \_\_\_\_\_ as quickly as possible."

**Q3.** What is the goal?

**A:** The goal here is to keep the prices \_\_\_\_\_, keep the people \_\_\_\_\_ and keep the inventory \_\_\_\_\_.

**Q4.** How do they keep the prices down?

**A:** They don't pay the store \_\_\_\_\_ very much and \_\_\_\_\_ on health insurance every time they can. The real costs of making stuff aren't \_\_\_\_\_ in the price. In other words, we aren't really paying for the stuff we buy.

**Q5.** What is the story behind the \$4.99 radio Annie wanted to buy?

**A:** The \_\_\_\_\_ was probably \_\_\_\_\_ in South Africa, the \_\_\_\_\_ was probably \_\_\_\_\_ in Iraq, the \_\_\_\_\_ were probably \_\_\_\_\_ in China, and maybe the whole thing was \_\_\_\_\_ by some 15 year old in a maquiladora in Mexico.

**Q6.** Who paid for this radio?

**A:** These people paid with the \_\_\_\_\_ of their natural \_\_\_\_\_ base. These people paid with the loss of their \_\_\_\_\_, with increasing \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ rates.

**Q7.** What do kids on the Congo drop out of school to do?

**A:** 30% of the kids in parts of the Congo now drop out of school to mine \_\_\_\_\_, a metal we need for our \_\_\_\_\_ electronics.

**Q8.** What does it mean that the companies externalize the true costs of production?

**A:** None of these contributions (loss of natural resources, sickness of workers etc.) are \_\_\_\_\_ in any \_\_\_\_\_ book.

## **Part V: Consumption**

**Q1.** What is the heart, or golden arrow, of this system?

**A:** \_\_\_\_\_ is the heart of the system, the engine that drives it. It is so important [to propping up this whole flawed system] that protecting this arrow is a top priority for both these guys (government & corporations).

**Q2.** What did President Bush suggest that people do after 9/11?

**A:** He said to \_\_\_\_\_.

**Q3.** What is the primary way that our value as people is measured and demonstrated now?

**A:** It is by how much we \_\_\_\_\_ to this arrow, how much we \_\_\_\_\_.

**Q4.** What percentage of total material is still in use after sale in North America?

**A:** \_\_\_\_\_ percent. In other words, \_\_\_\_\_ percent of the stuff we harvest, mine, process, transport—99 percent of the stuff we run through this system is \_\_\_\_\_ within \_\_\_\_\_ months.

**Q5.** How much does the average US person now consume compared to 50 years ago?

**A:** The average U.S. person now consumes \_\_\_\_\_ as much as they did 50 years ago.

**Q6.** What 3 things were valued in the past?

**A:** Ask your grandma. In her day, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ were valued.

**Q7.** What did retailing analyst Victor Lebow suggest as the solution to ramp up (improve) the U.S. economy after the Second World War?

**A:** He said: “Our enormously productive economy . . . demands that we make \_\_\_\_\_ our way of life, that we convert the buying and use of goods into rituals, that we seek our \_\_\_\_\_ satisfaction, our ego satisfaction, in consumption . . . we need things consumed, burned up, replaced and discarded at an ever- \_\_\_\_\_ rate.”

**Q8.** What did President Eisenhower’s Council of Economic Advisors Chairman say was the ultimate purpose of the US economy?

**A:** He said that “The American economy’s ultimate purpose is to produce \_\_\_\_\_ consumer goods.” (Not provide health care, or education, or safe transportation, or sustainability or justice).

**Q9.** How did the government get us to jump on board this program so enthusiastically?

**A:** Well, two of their most effective strategies are \_\_\_\_\_ obsolescence and \_\_\_\_\_ obsolescence.

**Q10.** What does “planned obsolescence” mean?

**A:** Planned obsolescence is another word for “designed for the \_\_\_\_\_.” It means they actually make stuff that is designed to be \_\_\_\_\_ as quickly as possible so we will \_\_\_\_\_ it and go buy a new one.

**Q11.** What does “perceived obsolescence” mean?

**A:** Stuff cannot break fast enough to keep this arrow afloat, so there’s also “perceived obsolescence.” Now perceived obsolescence convinces us to \_\_\_\_\_ stuff that is still perfectly \_\_\_\_\_. How do they do that? Well, they \_\_\_\_\_ the way the stuff looks so if you bought your stuff a couple years ago, everyone can tell that you haven’t \_\_\_\_\_ to this arrow recently and since the way we demonstrate our \_\_\_\_\_ is by contributing to this arrow, it can be \_\_\_\_\_. [I know.] I’ve have had the same fat white computer monitor on my desk for 5 years. My co-worker just got a new computer. She has a flat shiny sleek flat screen monitor. It matches her computer, it matches her phone, even her pen stand. [It looks cool.] She looks like she is driving in space ship central and I, I look like I have a washing machine on my desk.

**Q12.** What is another good example of perceived obsolescence?

**A:** \_\_\_\_\_ is another prime example of this. Have you ever wondered why women’s shoe heels go from fat one year to skinny the next to fat to skinny? It is not because there is some debate about which heel structure is the healthiest for women’s feet. It’s because wearing fat heels in a skinny heel year shows everyone that you haven’t contributed to that arrow recently so you’re not as valuable as that skinny heeled person next to you or, more likely, in some ad. It’s to keep buying new shoes.

**Q. 13.** How many times a day do people in the US see an advertisement?

**A:** \_\_\_\_\_.

**Q. 14.** What is the point of an ad?

**A:** The point of an ad is to make us \_\_\_\_\_ with what we have.

**Q15.** When did the national happiness in the US peak?

**A:** Our national happiness peaked sometime in the \_\_\_\_\_, the same time as this consumption mania \_\_\_\_\_. Hmmm. Interesting coincidence.

**Q16.** Why are people less happy now even though they have more stuff?

**A:** We have more stuff but we have \_\_\_\_\_ time for the things that really make us happy: \_\_\_\_\_, friends, \_\_\_\_\_ time. We're working harder than ever. Some analysts say that we have less leisure time now than in \_\_\_\_\_ Society.

**Q17.** What are the two main activities are that we do with the scant leisure time we have?

**A:** Watch \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_. In the U.S., we spend 3—4 times as many hours shopping as our counterparts in Europe do.

**Q18.** What is the 'crazy treadmill' Annie talks about?

**A:** So we are in this ridiculous situation where we go to work, maybe two jobs even, and we come home and we're \_\_\_\_\_ so we plop down on our new couch and watch TV and the commercials tell us "YOU \_\_\_\_\_" so gotta go to the mall to buy something to feel \_\_\_\_\_, then we gotta go to work more to \_\_\_\_\_ for the stuff we just bought so we come home and we're more tired so you sit down and watch more T.V. and it tells you to go to the mall again and we're on this crazy \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ treadmill and we could just stop.

## **Part VI: Disposal**

**Q1.** What has happened to the average US house size since the 1970s?

A: The average U.S. house size has \_\_\_\_\_ since the 1970s.

**Q2.** How many pounds of garbage does each person in the US make a day?

A: \_\_\_\_\_ pounds of garbage a day. That is twice what we each made thirty years ago.

**Q3.** What happens to all the garbage we dispose?

A: All of this garbage [stuff we bought] either gets \_\_\_\_\_ in a \_\_\_\_\_, which is just a big hole in the ground, or if you're really unlucky, first it's \_\_\_\_\_ in an \_\_\_\_\_ and then dumped in a landfill. Either way, both pollute the air, land, water and, don't forget, \_\_\_\_\_.

**Q4.** Why is incineration really bad?

A: Remember those \_\_\_\_\_ back in the production stage? Burning the garbage \_\_\_\_\_ the toxics up into the air. Even worse, it actually makes new \_\_\_\_\_ toxics, like dioxin.

**Q5.** What is the number one source of dioxin?

A: Dioxin is the most toxic man made substance known to science. And \_\_\_\_\_ are the number one source of dioxin. That means that we could stop the number one source of the most toxic man-made substance known just by stopping \_\_\_\_\_ the trash. We could stop it today.

**Q6.** What about recycling? Does recycling help?

A: Yes, recycling helps. Recycling \_\_\_\_\_ the garbage at this end and it reduces the \_\_\_\_\_ to mine and harvest new stuff at this end. Yes, Yes, Yes, we should all recycle. But recycling is not enough. Recycling will never be enough.

**Q7.** Why is recycling not enough?

A: For a couple reasons. First, the waste coming out of our houses is just the \_\_\_\_\_ of the \_\_\_\_\_. For every one garbage can of waste you put out on the curb, \_\_\_\_\_ garbage cans of waste were made upstream just to make the junk in that one garbage can you put out on the curb. So even if we could recycle 100 percent of the waste coming out of our households, it doesn't get to the \_\_\_\_\_ of the problem. Also much of the garbage can't be

recycled, either because it contains too many toxics or it is actually \_\_\_\_\_ NOT to be recyclable in the first place. Like those juice packs with layers of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ all smooshed together. You can never \_\_\_\_\_ those for true recycling.

**Q8.** What are some ways people are trying to help this system in crisis?

A: There are people working here on \_\_\_\_\_ forests and here on \_\_\_\_\_ production. People working on labor \_\_\_\_\_ and fair \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ consuming and \_\_\_\_\_ landfills and incinerators and, very importantly, on \_\_\_\_\_ our government so it is really is \_\_\_ the people \_\_\_\_\_ the people. When people along this system get \_\_\_\_\_, we can reclaim and transform this linear system into something new, a system that doesn't \_\_\_\_\_ resources or people.

### **Part VII: Another Way**

**Q1.** What is the new school of thinking based on?

A: There's a new school of thinking on this stuff and it's based on \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

**Q2.** What are examples of this new school of thinking?

A: \_\_\_\_\_ Chemistry, \_\_\_\_\_ Waste, Closed \_\_\_\_\_ Production, \_\_\_\_\_ Energy, \_\_\_\_\_ living Economies.

**Q3.** What do some people say about the new school of thinking?

A: Some people say it's \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, that it can't happen.

**Q4.** Who are the people who say a new way is unrealistic?

A: They are people that want to \_\_\_\_\_ on the old path.

**Q5.** What does Annie think we need to do?

A: \_\_\_\_\_ something new.

## TERMS ACTIVITY SHEET



### A. Put these processes in order:

production	disposal	extraction	consumption	distribution
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1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

### B. Fill in the blanks:

1. \_\_\_\_\_ in crisis
2. finite \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_ system
4. materials \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_ capacity
6. toxic \_\_\_\_\_
7. human \_\_\_\_\_ impacts
8. flame \_\_\_\_\_
9. \_\_\_\_\_ products
10. food \_\_\_\_\_
11. \_\_\_\_\_ violation
12. work-watch-spend \_\_\_\_\_
13. externalizing the \_\_\_\_\_
14. reproductive \_\_\_\_\_

beyond  
chain  
chemicals  
costs  
economy  
health  
incredible  
linear  
planet  
retardants  
synthetic  
system  
toxics  
treadmill



### C. Missing prepositions:

out	with	by	from	up	in	for	of
-----	------	----	------	----	----	-----	----

1. tracking where our stuff comes \_\_\_\_\_
2. bumping \_\_\_\_\_ against limits
3. governments should be \_\_\_\_\_ the people, \_\_\_\_\_ the people, \_\_\_\_\_ the people
4. undermining the planet's ability \_\_\_\_\_ people to live here
5. interact \_\_\_\_\_ other chemicals
6. Toxics \_\_\_\_\_, Toxics \_\_\_\_\_
7. propping \_\_\_\_\_ this whole flawed system
8. a nation \_\_\_\_\_ consumers
9. ramp \_\_\_\_\_ the [U.S.] economy
10. points \_\_\_\_\_ intervention
11. new school \_\_\_\_\_ thinking

### D. Match the term with the definition:

- |                              |                        |
|------------------------------|------------------------|
| _____ Green Chemistry        | _____ Zero Waste       |
| _____ Closed Loop Production | _____ Renewable Energy |
| _____ Local living Economies |                        |

- a. Seeks to design waste out of the entire industrial production system, rather than just figure out how to re-use it after the fact.
- b. A sustainable system in which a product is created using renewable energy, with no pollutant output and no waste.
- c. Natural resources such as sunlight, wind, tides and geothermal heat
- d. Economic systems that prioritize human and community needs and interests
- e. The use of chemical products and processes that reduce or eliminate substances hazardous to human health or the environment

**E. Put the words below in the best category:**

Health Problems	Garbage	Resources/Products
Air/Water Pollution	Negative Actions	Positive Actions

asthma  
 byproducts  
 cancer  
 carcinogens  
 contaminated  
 disposable  
 equity  
 erosion

exploitation  
 incinerator  
 landfill  
 maquiladora  
 metal  
 neurotoxin  
 obsolescence  
 petroleum

plastics  
 recyclable  
 resourcefulness  
 stewardship  
 sustainability  
 thrift  
 trashing

**F. Give example of the following with respect to our environment:**

i) old-school throw-away mindset

ii) new school of thinking



## **Pre-Viewing Activity FACTS FROM THE STORY OF STUFF - ANSWERS**

- #1. In the past three decades,  
(a) one-half (b) one-third (c) one-quarter  
of the planet's natural resources base has been consumed.
- #2. In the United States, there is less than  
(a) 12% (b) 8% (c) 4% of the original forests left.
- #3. (a) 40 % (b) 20% (c) 10%  
of waterways in the US have become undrinkable.
- #4. The U.S. has 5% of the world's population but consumes  
(a) 60% (b) 30% (c) 10%  
of the world's resources and creates  
(d) 10% (e) 30% (f) 60% of the world's waste.
- #5. If everybody consumed at U.S. rates, we would need  
(a) 15 planets (b) 10 planets (c) 3 to 5 planets.
- #6. There are over (a) 100,000 (b) 10, 000 (c) 1000  
synthetic chemicals in commerce today.
- #7. Only a handful of synthetic chemicals have even been tested for  
human health impacts and (a) most (b) only some (c) none  
have been tested for synergistic health impacts.
- #8. In the U.S., industry admits to releasing over  
(a) 8 billion (b) 4 billion (c) 2 billion pounds of toxic chemicals a year.
- #9. The average U.S. person now consumes  
(a) twice (b) three times (c) four times  
as much as they did 50 years ago.
- #10. We each see more advertisements in  
(a) one week (b) one month (c) one year  
than people 50 years ago saw in a lifetime.
- #11. Each person in the United States makes  
(a) 4 ½ (b) 3 (c) 1 ½ pounds of garbage a day.  
That is twice what they each made thirty years ago.
- #12. For every one garbage can of waste you put out on the curb,  
(a) 100 (b) 70 (c) 40  
garbage cans of waste were used to make the junk in that one garbage can.