
Group Activities



Workshops and games are a great way to learn. We've dreamed up and borrowed a handful of activities that you can facilitate at a house party or classroom or community meeting or any gathering after watching *The Story of Stuff*.

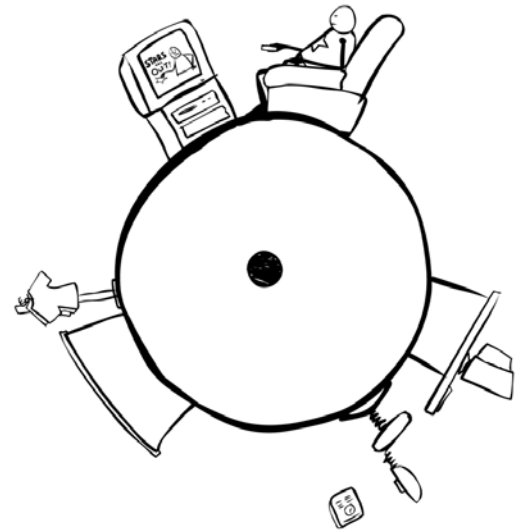
Different activities may be appropriate for different kinds of groups, with varying degrees of knowledge and awareness about the issues, so please feel free to adapt or change these suggestions to fit your audience. You may want to do these activities before a discussion, after a discussion, or in the middle of one.

1. iPod activity

You know how Annie starts the movie by throwing out her iPod? That's because the iPod is a great example of a tiny little product that's made from a great deal of extracted resources, with a great deal of questionable labor practices, filled with toxic components, and that sooner-rather-than-later ends up in the landfill. So:

Before watching the movie, talk about what factors you'd consider when buying an iPod or other personal entertainment electronic gadget. Sound, convenience, size, style, color, functions, cost? With some products—like iPods for example—the average consumer may not give it much thought at all; it's from a trusted company and everyone else has one. Encourage people to be as honest as possible.

After watching the movie, ask the same question. How has the discussion changed? What new factors would you consider when purchasing, or forgoing the purchase of, the next new gadget?



2. Trash Activity

Being sure to lay down a tarp or sheet, turn a household trash-bin upside down, and look at what's there. (**Note to the party host:** if you are very waste-conscious, you might want to stock your trash-bin with things you wouldn't normally throw out to inspire conversation. On the other hand, if you're embarrassed by your trash, watch what you let people sort through...)

Divide the trash by material: paper, cardboard, plastic, glass, metal, organic waste (food scraps and such). Further divide the materials into types of plastic (look for the little numbers stamped on them which indicate different resin types), types of metal, and different colors of glass. Once it's separated, talk about it. Note that source separation is key to recovering the materials for reuse. Mixed together, all this stuff is garbage but separated, much of it is a valuable resource.

Garbage Questions and Discussion:

Think backwards about some of the items in the trash. Where did they come from? Was their use necessary? How could you avoid using this product, and generating this waste, in the future? In other words, how can we design this waste out of the system? For example, a lot of the plastic waste we create is packaging—used once and thrown away...and often, totally unnecessary.

Which categories of materials can be recycled where you live? Which ones can't? Has anyone in the group lived in places where more categories of waste can be recycled? Has anyone in the group lived where there is no official recycling? What factors might be at play in any town which encourage or discourage recycling? What are the benefits of and limits of recycling for solving the 'waste' problem?

Where does the trash go after it is collected? Most of us don't know where our nearest dump or landfill is. Do you, or anyone in your group? And what about the recycling? Once collected, what happens to the materials in the recycling bin? Are they exported overseas? What are the environmental and labor conditions in their destination?

Might there be better ways to dispose of any of the waste in the trashcan? For example, a majority of what's in household waste is food scraps, which can be turned into compost for garden soil. Composting reduces waste disposal, avoids greenhouse gas production from landfills and creates a valuable soil amendment.

3. Scavenger Hunt

In most of the world (including parts of the U.S.), a good deal of 'waste management' is not done by big municipal waste disposal companies, but by poor people working in the informal recycling sector, people who scramble to earn a living from recovering materials in the waste stream. In fact, it can be said that many of the world's poor live in, on, and from the discards of others. Even though this informal recycling provides an essential service to the larger society, the recyclers are exposed to hazards and disrespect in doing their work. People who earn their living this way go by various names in different countries, with varying degrees of pride or shame attached: waste-handlers, rag-pickers, resource recoveries, or scavengers. Maybe you know of other names...

In honor of these people and the essential work they do, you can hold a scavenger hunt in your home, church or school. Have your party guests or workshop participants go through the building and find one item from each of these categories. Whoever collects the most items and gives the best explanation of each, wins. (Some items may belong to more than one category, may be counted more than once.)

Scavenger hunt categories:

- Probably contains heavy metals or toxic chemicals
- Probably manufactured in a foreign country
- Probably manufactured in a foreign country with component parts and materials from at least three other foreign countries
- Can be recycled or re-used, or has parts that can be recycled or re-used
- Can not be recycled or re-used
- Was made from recycled material
- Was clearly made to break ("designed for the dump")
- "They used to make these things to last longer"
- Is totally unnecessary and should probably never have been made in the first place
- This thing is dangerous!

4. Where You Are—Where the Points of Entry Are

“Points of intervention,” or “points of entry” are places in a system where action can be taken to change the way the system works. In other words, they’re where you can plug in, get involved, and make a difference.

On a large sheet of paper, draw the “materials flow diagram”—the five drawings from *The Story of Stuff* that represent extraction, production, distribution, consumption, and disposal in that order. First, where do you see yourself along this line? You may identify with communities at more than one place along the materials economy. Perhaps one where you work, one where you live, one where your grandparents live.

Once you find the places you occupy along the flow, find the points of entry available to you. Where can you get involved, organize, apply pressure, participate to make a difference? There are literally thousands of ways that each of us can get involved and we each need to find the ways that feel right to us. Fortunately, there are many organizations working all along the materials flow cycle which can help you plug in. And when we work together, linking across points on the materials flow, real change can happen.

Once you’ve talked about possible points of entry, pick an issue of particular interest to you or that has particular impact on your community. Is it dumping electronic waste in Asia or toxics in children’s toys or cutting down trees for junk mail? Whatever it is, write the issue you want to address, and your name, next to that point of entry on the drawing. If you have some ideas on how you can make a difference, share them with the group. If not, after the house party, contact groups that work on this issue and offer to get involved. Or start your own local group! Then, plan a reunion party in three months and hear what each other has learned and what everyone is doing to make change.

* Helpful Suggestion:

This one isn’t an activity, but a way to add an element of fun to your post-screening discussion. Using discarded materials, make a Game Spinner. Every time you ask a question, hit the spinner. Whoever it points to gives their answer.

To make a Game Spinner:

- Use the round top of a yoghurt container or other plastic container as the base.
- Cut an arrow from the side of the container, from a plastic milk carton, or from cardboard.
- Using a paper fastener, attach the spinner to the container top, and make sure it spins.

This spinner not only demonstrates creative re-use but encourages even shy people in the group to join the conversation.

More?

If you want more or the ideas above don't suit your fancy, we recommend two fabulous resources for group activities that dig deeper into environmental, economic and social issues.

Check out **The Ella Baker Center's Green Jobs Campaign Teaching Tools**: a five-part series designed for use in high school classrooms. Ranging from one to three class periods in length, these interactive activities explore key themes surrounding Green-Collar Jobs Campaign's work, including: the green economy, eco-equity and eco-privilege, model cities, and restorative justice. Available at:

www.ellabakercenter.org/page.php?pageid=27&contentid=23

For activities exploring economic equity issues, go to United for a Fair Economy's workshop guides start with people's own experiences to build a common-sense understanding of critical economy equity issues. Available at: www.faireconomy.org/econ/workshops.shtml