

LET THERE BE...STUFF? A SPIRIT-FILLED RESPONSE TO A CONSUMER-CRAZED WORLD

A Baha'i - inspired Program for Youth created by

www.storyofstuff.org

www.greenfaith.org

Story of Stuff Baha'i Team

version 1.0

SESSION 3: WHERE DOES OUR STUFF COME FROM?

These materials contain three main sections:

- * TO THE FACILITATORS: Explanations about how to facilitate Session 3.
- * SESSION 3 – LESSON PLAN: A step by step guide through the session. Each activity is explained here.
- * SESSION 3 - HANDOUTS: These are all the readings and materials that need to be copied for each participant. They will be used throughout the session as indicated in the Session 3 - Lesson Plan.

TO THE FACILITATORS

Preparing for Session Three

Overview

The True Cost exercise is the heart of this session. It helps youth to see what is the true cost of extracting and producing our most cherished, and sometimes unneeded possessions that are just bought because they were cheap or because someone needed to buy a present. These might be clothing, jewelry, electronics, cosmetics, or other things. It is the first step in their journey to understand and appreciate the secret life of their stuff and the personal steps it takes to change their own habits. It is a call to action!

Goals

- Develop the **virtues of discernment and of the independent investigation of truth.**
- Reveal the true costs associated with everyday household objects: clothing, jewelry, electronics, and cosmetics.
- Guide participants to think about where things come from before they buy them.
- Provide spiritual inspiration and guidance for making changes in their consumption habits.

Themes

Secular:

Looking at the specific stories of some of our Stuff: What's in it, how it was made, how it got to us, and the real cost of production to the planet and people.

Spiritual:

- The independent investigation of truth
- The importance of using both science and religion - using our minds and our hearts.
- Responsible use of our power

Materials for Session 3

- ☐ Your computer for "Blessed Is the Spot" and Story of Stuff video clip (see instructions in To Do List right below.)
- ☐ Bring copies of the handouts *for each participant* (pages 6 – 9 below).
- ☐ Right Stuff Action board to document actions following Session 2.

For the True Cost Exercise:

- ☐ Production Summary Sheets (A different one for each team, pages 10 - 17)
- ☐ Black and white copy of map of the world, page 18 below (1 for each team - ideally there will be four teams)
- ☐ Poster paper
- ☐ Your (the facilitator's) notes from Session 1 about the Promises
- ☐ Poster paper, butcher paper, colored paper
- ☐ Scissors
- ☐ Colored pens, markers, etc.

Session 3 To Do List

- ☐ Set up Story of Stuff video clip on extraction and production (from 2:30-8:05)
<http://storyofstuff.org/movies/story-of-stuff/>
 - Begin at 2:37 ("Okay, let's see what else is missing from this picture")
 - End at 8:11 ("pollution back at us - carried by wind currents")
- ☐ On your computer, open the video with the prayer "Blessed Is the Spot":
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AYRcuoRN3bg>
- ☐ Copy the handouts *for each participant* (pages 6 – 9 below).
- ☐ Make one copy of the following *for each team* (ideally you will have four teams, one for each team):
 - Production Summary Sheets (A different one for each team) Pages 10 – 17 below.

- Black and white map of the world (1 for each team) Page 18 below.

- ☐ Prepare Right Stuff Action board to document actions following Session 2.
- ☐ Set up a materials station for The True Cost materials

SESSION 3: OVERVIEW

ENTER & CONNECT – 7 MIN

- Opening prayer
- Promise Poster
- Check-in
- Reflection on Actions

THINK – 6 MIN

- The Story of Stuff Video Clip

ENGAGE – 55 MIN

- The True Cost – Group Activity

REFLECT – 14 MIN

- Spiritual Reading: Mind and Heart Together

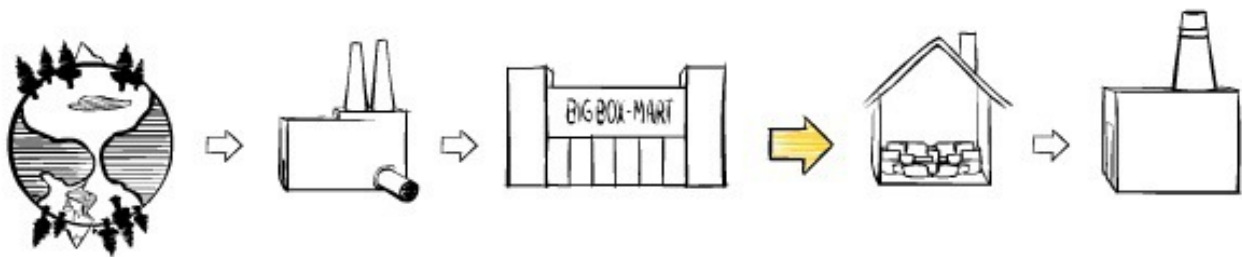
ENACT – 5 MIN

- Action Plans

EXIT – 5 MIN

- Closing Prayer

Total Estimated Time: 92 Minutes.



SESSION 3 – PLAN

Where does our Stuff come from?

ENTER AND CONNECT (7 Min.)

Opening Prayers

Warmly welcome students, then listen and watch another beautiful rendition of the prayer “**Blessed Is the Spot**”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AYRcuoRN3bg> The length of the video is 2:43.

Then ask one or more participants to say a **prayer**. Make sure that all youths get a chance to offer a prayer in at least one of the six sessions. You will find one prayer as a suggestion in the Handout for Session 3. (Just scroll down.) If you would like to use the prayer in the handouts, distribute them now.

Opening Conversation

Promises - Briefly review the Promises together with the group and discuss them.

Review and Reflection:

- What was it like for you this week to live with greater awareness of The Story of Stuff?
- Discuss how did you care for something? How were you just or fair to someone or about something?
- What did we learn from the last session?
- How can we use the *virtues of justice and moderation* when making decisions about Stuff?

Right Stuff Action Board - Discuss actions from last sessions. Let them post any pictures they brought on the Right Stuff Action board or poster. (Or let them write a sentence about it.)

THINK (6 Min.)

Preparation:

Set up Story of Stuff clip on extraction and production: <http://storyofstuff.org/movies/story-of-stuff/>

- BEGIN at 2:30 “Okay, so let’s see what else is missing”
- END at 8:05 “a lot of that pollution is coming right back at us, carried by wind currents.”

Instructions:

1. Tell students they are going to watch a section of the video with the themes you will be focusing on in this session.
2. Watch the clip.

ENGAGE (55 Min.)

Activity - The True Cost

Preparation

- Have black and white copy of map of the world (1 for each team) ready to hand out.
- Have True Cost sheets, 1 for each team: cell phones, clothing, jewelry, lotions, ready to hand out.
- Poster paper, colored paper
- Have a supply station with colored pens, markers, etc.

Summary

Using the information provided in the handout sheets at the back of this Session, participants will explore the first two stages of an object's life, what Annie describes in the film as Extraction and Production. The youth will learn where some of the most common stuff in their lives comes from and how it is made.

Participants will work in teams, with each team focusing on the true cost of a different object. They will study the information sheet for their object provided in the back of the session plan below. Once they have had a chance to digest some of the information, they will work together to create a visual representation of the earliest stages of their stuff - where it comes from, how it got there, what it is made of, who made it, etc. They will do a short teach-back presentation to the larger group to share their information. For their presentation they can use the map of the world to help convey the international elements of our relationship with stuff. The teams will incorporate their visual work into the collective mural or poster.

Instructions

1. Have the participants break up into four groups, for example by counting off by 4s. (All "ones" are together, all "twos," etc).
2. Have each group find a place in the room to work together.
3. Hand out one True Cost sheet (True Cost: Cell Phones, Clothing, Jewelry, Cosmetics) and one map to each group.
4. Tell the participants to follow the instructions on their True Cost instruction sheet. They will be teaching the other participants about the manner their object was produced, the places it has traveled, and its true cost to people and the planet. They can use the map and any other materials they want. Encourage them to be creative, but also to get their point across. If practical, they could already incorporate their visual work into the collective mural. Depending on the situation, it may be easier for the teams to mount their visuals onto the mural after their presentations. Allow 25 - 30 min. for each team to study the production of their item and to produce a visual.
5. Have each team take a turn to teach the rest of the group what they learned about the "True Cost" of their item. Each group will have 5 minutes for the presentation. Allow a few minutes for the whole group to ask questions after each presentation. (Four presentations with short Q&A: 25 min)

REFLECT: (14 Min.)

Hand out **Spiritual Reading for Session 3 "Mind and Heart Together"** if you have not done so before. Have participants take turns reading, one reader per paragraph.

ENACT: (5 Min.)

Instructions:

Distribute the Action Plan in the handouts of Session 3 if you have not done so earlier in this session.

1. Review the Action Plan instructions together (2 min.)
2. Have them decide on their actions for the week (5 min.)

EXIT (5 Min.)

Encourage students to practice the **virtues** of **discernment** and **independent thinking**.

Closing Prayer

You may use the closing prayer in the handout.

SESSION 3 HANDOUTS

Where Does Our Stuff Come from?

OPENING PRAYER

Send down out of the clouds of Thy generosity that which shall enrich all created things, and withhold not Thy favours from the world of being. Thou, verily, art the All-Bountiful in the heaven of Thine eternity, and the Lord of infinite grace unto all who inhabit the kingdom of names.

Look not upon the people and the things they possess; look rather upon the wonders of Thy gifts and favours. Gather then Thy servants beneath Thy shade that shadoweth all mankind. Stretch forth the hand of bounty over all creation, and the fingers of bestowal over all existence.

Baha'u'llah

INTRODUCTION

Shoghi Effendi encourages us to investigate the reality of things: *It is hoped that all the Baha'i students will...be led to investigate and analyse the principles of the Faith and to correlate them with the modern aspects of philosophy and science. Every intelligent and thoughtful young Baha'i should always approach the Cause in this way, for therein lies the very essence of the principle of independent investigation of truth.*

Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 6 August 1933

Today we are going to learn how to start appreciating the secret life of a few more ordinary things in our lives - our clothing, jewelry, electronic gadgets, and cosmetics - so we can start to see the whole story behind the things that surround us. When we can really see how God's Creation is affected by our consumption habits, it becomes clear that caring for Creation requires us to change those habits. It's not easy. Our habits are deep. But together and with the help of God, we can make changes in our lives that will offer respect to the earth, alleviate human suffering, and bring us greater fulfillment.

SPIRITUAL READING - MIND AND HEART TOGETHER

Many people think of science and religion as two different, even conflicting areas and are separating them in their personal lives. However, we need both science and religion to solve the problems we are facing today, including the problems with our Stuff.

You may already be familiar with the Baha'i teaching that science and religion should agree, that we should use both our mind and our heart in everyday life:

Religion and science are the two wings upon which man's intelligence can soar into the heights, with which the human soul can progress. It is not possible to fly with one wing alone! Should a man try to fly with the wing of religion alone he would quickly fall into the quagmire of superstition, whilst on the other hand, with the wing of science alone he would also make no progress, but fall into the despairing slough of materialism.

'Abdu'l-Baha, Paris Talks #44

A slough is place of deep mud or a swamp. You could sink in and drown! Figuratively, the word slough is also used as a state of spiritual and moral decline. Our society is deeply sunk in the muddy swamp of materialism.

In this course, we are using both science and religion, mind and heart.

Annie Leonard who informed us about the origins of T-shirts, jewelry, electronics, and cosmetics used her mind and the scientific method. That's how she figured out what materials are used in our stuff and where all the stuff is coming from, how it is made, who made it, and at what costs to human well-being and to the environment. When we learn about these facts, we are also using our minds.

So, what do we do with all that knowledge? Science cannot answer this question. This question has to do with our values which we get from our faith. It's a matter of the heart. Is it ok for us to trash the planet and to contribute to people's suffering, just so that we can accumulate a lot of Stuff? Our hearts and our faith tell us that this is not an option.

All religions teach that we must care about our fellow human beings and, of course, they include people who will come after us. Their lives depend on us leaving to them a healthy environment, with plenty of natural resources and a good climate. The divine Word creates love in human hearts which motivates us to live responsibly.

The Bible admonishes us:

Be compassionate as God is compassionate. Luke 6:36

So, whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them. Matthew 7:12

Baha'u'llah wrote:

Be worthy of the trust of thy neighbor, and look upon him with a bright and friendly face. Be a treasure to the poor, an admonisher to the rich, an answerer of the cry of the needy, ...

Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, CXXX

Ye are the fruits of one tree, and the leaves of one branch. Deal ye one with another with the utmost love and harmony, with friendliness and fellowship. ...

Bahá'u'lláh, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, p. 14

Briefly discuss what these teachings mean and how they can change the way we relate to Stuff. How can these spiritual teachings guide our actions in daily life? For example, how can you apply spiritual principles when you are giving a friend a birthday present, or you are buying some clothing for yourself?

CLOSING PRAYER

My God, Whom I worship and adore! I bear witness unto Thy unity and Thy oneness, and acknowledge Thy gifts, both in the past and in the present. Thou art the All-Bountiful, the overflowing showers of Whose mercy have rained down upon high and low alike, and the splendors of Whose grace have been shed over both the obedient and the rebellious.

O God of mercy, before Whose door the quintessence of mercy hath bowed down, and round the sanctuary of Whose Cause loving-kindness, in its inmost spirit, hath circled, we beseech Thee, entreating Thine ancient grace, and seeking Thy present favor, that Thou mayest have mercy upon all who are the manifestations of the world of being, and deny them not the outpourings of Thy grace in Thy days.

All are but poor and needy, and Thou, verily, art the All-Possessing, the All-Subduing, the All-Powerful.

Bahá'u'lláh

ACTION PLAN

Instructions

Read and think about the actions:

- Which actions would you like to do?
- Which seem like you could do them?
- Which seem like fun?
- Which seem as if they will really make a difference?

Decide which action(s) to take:

- Choose which of the many suggested actions you are planning to take. Remember to consider the time you will have available and your other obligations.

Remember to:

- Show your parents your action plan when you get home and ask them to support you.
- When carrying out your actions, remember to apply the **virtues of discernment and of independently investigating the truth**.
- If you are working with a buddy, check in at least once this week.
- You can change your action plans.
- You can catch up on any unfinished actions at anytime.
- Take pictures or document what you do so you can share it!

My Action Plan after Session 3

Create/Express

☐

Poem - Write a poem about the lifecycle of one of your favorite things.

☐

Make it up – Make a piece of art – only out of stuff you find in a recycling bin.

Communicate

☐

Talk Stuff - Talk to three people about where their stuff comes from, what's in it, who makes it. Write the names of the people and a note about what kinds of stuff you discussed in your notebook.

Learn/Get Smart

☐

Watch and share this 3 min. video of young people pleading with their parents to take science seriously and to take unified action on climate change:

<https://www.facebook.com/TheWeatherChannel/videos/10154769352100921/>

☐

What's in it? - Visit the SkinDeep Database or GoodGuide and figure out what's in the products you use every day. Make a list.

www.cosmeticsdatabase.com (You don't have to sign up to get into the website!)

www.goodguide.com

Try Something New

☐

Stop and think - Every time you want to buy something, stop for a minute, look at the object you want, and consider the people and places that were affected by that thing. Is the real cost of having that object worth it to you? Do you really need it?

Be an Example in your faith community

☐

E-stewardship - Do a bit of research online to find an e-steward where you can responsibly recycle electronics. Talk to the people in your community about making a box to collect old, broken cell phones. Check out <http://www.e-stewards.org/>

Better than recycling is up-cycling which means that a product is repaired and then sold to be reused.

Tips and Tools...

- Check out your products on www.GoodGuide.com before you make a purchase to give you a better sense of the environmental, social, and health impacts of a product.
- Need to make a gift? SoKind is an online gift registry designed to promote gifts of time, experience, and secondhand/used items over material gifts. <https://sokindregistry.org/>

Remember to take pictures of anything you did to share and put on the mural.

The True Cost - Cotton T-Shirt

Instructions

1. Read through this handout marking key/interesting points to use in your presentation.
2. Highlight 3 – 5 important points to convey to the group and add them to the map.
3. Estimate what you think the cost of the product should be.
4. Design your presentation for conveying the important points you chose and sharing your conclusion about the True Cost.

The Production of a T-Shirt - a Costly Journey

The journey from cotton crop to T-shirt is a long one that spans the globe and is filled with social and environmental costs that are hidden from view. These certainly don't show up in the \$5.99 price tag at your big box store.

To start the journey we have to look at where our cotton is grown. Right now, most cotton is grown in the US, Uzbekistan, Australia, China, India, and small African countries like Benin and Burkina Faso. And we are making a ton of it, 25 million tons to be exact. Each year, we produce 25 million tons of cotton globally, which is enough to make 15 T-shirts for every single person on earth.

Growing all this cotton means that we are also using a ton of water. Cotton is a very, very thirsty crop. In fact, some communities are driving themselves into drought growing cotton for our T-shirts because it uses so much water. People aren't getting enough water to drink because the cotton crops are taking it!

Half of the water for our T-shirt obsession comes from other countries, which means we are using and polluting their water to make our Stuff. Not only are we using tons of water, but it turns out T-shirt making is a pesticide-laden business. The majority of the world's cotton crops are coated in pesticides. In fact, cotton crops use 25% of the world's insecticides. For every pound of cotton harvested, in the US, about one-third of a pound of pesticides have been sprayed on the crops. All of the pesticides sprayed on these crops don't just kill bugs; they seriously harm people and the environment. Cotton farm workers and neighboring communities bear the brunt of this burden. They frequently suffer from nerve diseases and vision problems because of the number of toxic chemicals they are exposed to in their work.

And all that happens before it's even turned into a T-shirt!

Then you need tons of energy to take it from raw cotton to a T-shirt (which is fueled by oil drilling or dirty coal or likely something else nasty). Then you put all that cotton in the cotton gin, bale the cotton, fluff the cotton, press the cotton, and finally turn it into thread.

When we finally have that thread, we usually bleach the cotton even if we are going to dye it, usually using chlorine. Chlorine, bummer! Chlorine is toxic all by itself and when it leaves as wastewater it can become a carcinogen and a neurotoxin. That means it can cause cancer

and impair the way your brain works.

Once the cotton has been bleached and dyed and woven into fabric we want to make it as easy to take care of as possible, so we spray it down with formaldehyde (yep, like they put frogs in to preserve them before you dissect them) to make it “easy care” fabric. This use of formaldehyde might make our T-shirts soft, wrinkle-resistant, stain and odor resistant, fireproof, moth proof, and antistatic but it also causes respiratory problems, burning eyes, cancer and allergic skin reactions.

At this point, we finally have the fabric to make the T-shirt. Hooray? That fabric gets shipped to a factory or a sweatshop where folks in Haiti or China or Mexico work long days for low wages. Even with all the awareness we now have about dismal working conditions, it's still true that many factory workers are teens working 11 hour-days for 10-13 cents an hour. That's \$1.10/day. For example, in Haiti, where workers have been struggling for years for better working conditions, the legal minimum wage is still only \$3.75 a day!

Once the T-shirt has been whipped together by someone somewhere else working for next to nothing, it is shipped to the US or wherever you live to find its way to you for under \$20.

After reading all of the above, how would you answer these questions?

What are the social (non-financial) costs of a T-shirt?

What are the environmental costs?

Who bears most of that cost?

What do you estimate a T-shirt would cost if the cotton and and the manufacturing are produced under fair and sustainable conditions?



The True Cost - Cell phones

Instructions

1. Read through this handout marking key/interesting points to use in your presentation.
2. Highlight 3 – 5 important points to convey to the group and add them to the map.
3. Estimate what you think the cost of the product should be.
4. Design your presentation for conveying the important points you chose and sharing your conclusion about the True Cost.

The Production of a Cell Phone - a Costly Journey

How did the world work before cell phones? While the thought may boggle the mind, equally boggling is the incredible journey that the various components of our cell phones take, and their environmental and social impact.

Just by looking at one you can probably tell that cell phones are made of plastic, metals and some other hard-to-describe stuff. To be specific, most cell phones are made of 40% metals, 40% plastics, and 20% trace material and ceramics. All that stuff had to come from somewhere. As a cell phone is nearly half metal that means the metal had to be mined somewhere; that “somewhere” is usually Africa and South America.

One of the vital components in cell phone production is a metal called coltan, which is used in the circuit boards; 80% of the world’s supply of coltan or columbite–tantalite is found in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Like Annie mentions in the film, coltan mining in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is contributing to a continued civil war over the resource. Another metal in cell phone production is gold. That’s right, GOLD! Which is mostly mined in South America and Africa.

We would not expect it, but there is enough gold in 200 cell phones to make a nice sized ring. It turns out, gold mining is a pretty nasty process that pollutes water, destroys natural habitats, uproots communities, and leaches toxins into the environment. In addition to gold and coltan, most of our cell phones also have copper, beryllium, lead, nickel, and zinc, which all have to be extracted from the earth, putting both the planet and workers at risk.

Mining is a super toxic practice involving cyanide and tons of other nasty chemicals that leak into the groundwater of surrounding communities creating devastating environmental and health impacts. Mining is also dangerous to humans; it is one of the 10 most dangerous jobs in America with over 1,000 deaths in the last 15 years.

Another component of the phone is petroleum-based plastics. We already have used most of the reserves of fossil fuels (petroleum) that are easily extracted, so we are now exploiting those that are harder to reach and come with a much higher environmental, human, and financial cost, such as tearing up the Tar Sands in Canada to get all the oil it takes to make all the plastic.

The metal and plastics are combined to make a super tiny circuit board that makes our cell phones do all of the magical things they do. In addition to being magic it turns out those circuit boards are also...you guessed it...toxic! A number of plastics like PVC (polyvinyl chloride – one of the most toxic chemicals we know) and metals like lead (another super toxic metal) are persistent pollutants that build up in the ecosystem and in our bodies.

Eventually those circuit boards and plastic casings are snapped together with an LCD screen and a battery and voila! A cell phone! And...a ton more toxic stuff! The LCD (liquid crystal display) screens in our phones, so cool and high-tech, are made with mercury (another extremely toxic metal) and various man-made chemicals that are so high-tech we don't even know what they do.

The batteries come in all different sizes and styles: lithium ion, nickel cadmium, lead acid but they all have one thing in common—they all require more mining which is just more of the same destruction, displacement, and pollution.

Cell phones are really cool. There is no denying it! But there is also no denying the fact that they are extremely toxic and contribute to all kinds of environmental destruction. With over 1.3 billion cell phones in use across the globe, it's worth pondering how we could do this better.

We can pay less than \$100 dollars for a cell phone.

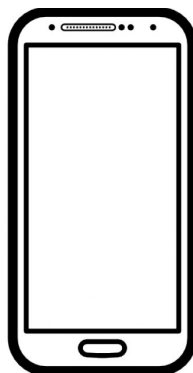
After reading all of the above, how would you answer these questions?

What are some of the social (non-financial) costs of a cell phone?

What are some of the environmental costs?

Who bears most of that cost?

What do you estimate a cell phone would cost if it was produced under fair and sustainable conditions?



The True Cost - Jewelry

Instructions

1. Read through this handout marking key/interesting points to use in your presentation.
2. Highlight 3 – 5 important points to convey to the group and add them to the map.
3. Estimate what you think the cost of the product should be.
4. Design your presentation for conveying the important points you chose and sharing your conclusion about the True Cost.

The Production of Jewelry - a Costly Journey

Our jewelry can hold a lot of meaning for us. We cherish it especially if we have received it from someone we love. If only it were that simple. Unfortunately, in addition to the beauty and meaning our jewelry has, there is also a true cost to the planet. Let's see what it took to get those rings onto our fingers.

First we have to extract the gold. As a metal, most gold we use is mined and 75% of the gold we mine is used for jewelry. While gold is found around much of the globe, South Africa is the biggest supplier currently providing at least a quarter of the world's gold.

Mining as it is most commonly practiced is a horribly polluting and toxic process. Gold is mined in the following manner:

- The little pieces of gold (ore) are taken directly from the Earth.
- Cyanide (a deadly chemical) is poured on top of a big pile of gold ore, separating the toxic metals like cadmium, lead, and mercury from the gold (any guesses where those metals go?).
- The gold is taken out of a big toxic puddle of heavy metals and cyanide.
- This toxic puddle gets jumbled together with all the mining waste to create a big, toxic mess which often ends up in rivers and lakes and creates environmental and health concerns for communities living near the mines. Yikes!
- Two-thirds of the gold we use is newly mined in this super wasteful, toxic way.

Just one gold ring generates about 20 tons of mining waste. That's equivalent to four pick-up trucks or very fat (and angry) elephants.

Not to mention the fact that mining is a dangerous job, in the top ten most dangerous jobs in the world. Workers are often put in extremely unsafe conditions.

While diamonds are pretty, what the diamond trade has done to Sierra Leone is not. Because of their value, they create violent social upheaval. Diamonds are sometimes referred to as "conflict diamonds" or "blood diamonds" because they create violent wars over

economic resources.

The attempt to control the diamond mining (and its financial profits) played a significant role in fueling the 11-year civil war in Sierra Leone. Trade in diamonds and other natural resources has underwritten some of the worst war crimes in the past two decades.

You can buy a gold ring for under \$100.

After reading all of the above, how would you answer these questions?

What are the social (non-financial) costs of a jewelry?

What are the environmental costs?

Who bears most of that cost?

What do you estimate a jewelry would cost if it was produced under fair and sustainable conditions?



Cosmetics/personal “Care” Products

Instructions

1. Read through this handout marking key/interesting points to use in your presentation.
2. Highlight 3 – 5 important points to convey to the group and add them to the map.
3. Estimate what you think the cost of the product should be.
4. Design your presentation for conveying the important points you chose and sharing your conclusion about the True Cost.

The Production of Cosmetics - a Costly Journey

Most of us use lots of personal care products everyday. Every day, the average woman uses 12 products containing 168 chemical ingredients while the average man uses 6 products with 80 different chemicals. We want to smell, look, and feel good. So we shampoo our hair, slather on sunscreen, roll on deodorant, apply mascara, and put on Chapstick. But what is all this stuff we are putting on our bodies? Reading the ingredients list on any of your cosmetics or personal care products doesn't give us much of a clue. For most of us, it's just a long list of strange chemicals.

With cosmetics and personal care products, extraction is a big issue. Let's start with just the container. Most products use a petroleum-based plastic container. This means that we are tearing up the Tar Sands in Canada to get access to all the oil it takes to make all the plastic for those containers.

Then there is what goes in those containers, there's a huge range of products used for “personal care,” and while the extraction process varies greatly for each one, the production process is pretty consistent across the board. Consistently toxic! In the US, much of the stuff that we slather onto our bodies to take good care of ourselves turns out to practically be poison. Some of the chemicals in them are even linked to cancer, birth defects and other serious health problems. In a study done in 2005 of thousands of personal care products, they found:

- One-third of all products tested contain at least one ingredient linked to cancer.
- Almost half the tested products contained at least one ingredient that is harmful to the reproductive system.
- One half include penetration enhancer that help them (and all the toxic chemicals) move deeper into the body faster.

How can this be? Isn't there anybody regulating this? The answer is, “No.” There is no neutral agency overseeing the cosmetic industry to insure our safety. It's a virtual free for all. The Cosmetic Ingredient Review Panel (CIR) is the only organization responsible for testing the safety of these products. This panel is part of the cosmetic industry itself (you know, the ones who profit when we buy the stuff). Why should we trust them when they are the ones

who profit from sales? As of 2005, CIR had tested only 13% of the products we use daily. That means 87% of the chemicals we put on our bodies are completely untested.

You can get a bottle of lotion for under \$10.

After reading all of the above, how would you answer these questions?

What are the social (non-financial) costs of our cosmetics?

What are the environmental costs?

Who bears most of that cost?

What do you estimate a cosmetic would cost if it was produced under fair and sustainable conditions?

NOTE: This is scary stuff! Luckily, thanks to the great work of some really dedicated people who started their own cosmetic watchdog organization, you can look up your products and see what's in them on the internet (go to [Skin Deep](#) and [GoodGuide](#)). The most effective way to fight against having these chemicals in our products is to make laws that keep toxins out and that keep our bodies and our families free from cancer and reproductive health issues.



