

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 2017, last update 2023

INTRODUCTION TO LET THERE BE ...STUFF?



Introduction

The Big Picture

People across all faiths share deepening concerns about the environmental crisis. The Earth is warming, forests are dwindling, water scarcity is increasing, weather patterns are becoming more extreme, sea levels are rising, and our life-support systems are unraveling. At the same time, many people are suffering from an unjust economic system and the gap between rich and poor is widening. The destruction of nature and the exploitation of the poor are often connected. Our ravenous relationship with our stuff is a major culprit. It is time to face reality, to uphold spiritual principles such as love for creation and justice for people, and take action!

The Story of Stuff

Since The Story of Stuff first premiered in 2007, it has been watched online over 10 million times. The Story of Stuff Project has received thousands of requests for educational programs, especially from the faith community, and has partnered with GreenFaith, an interfaith coalition for the environment, to meet this need. Together we have developed this 6 week series for youth designed to ignite their passion for Creation, help them understand the problems the planet is facing, raise awareness of the changes needed, and empower them to make them. We hope to support them in developing environmentally sustainable patterns of consumption that honor Creation and deepen their spiritual lives.

Acknowledgements

This course is the third faith-based version of the Story of Stuff for Teens. We thank the writers of the original Christian and Jewish versions, as well as the many people from the GreenFaith and interfaith community who offered suggestions. An enormous debt of gratitude is owed to Gwen Gordon who shepherded this project forth and put in countless hours of research, design, and development into the original version. And we thank Shana DeClercq, Community Engagement Manager for The Story of Stuff Project, who guided our work.

Welcome to the Baha'i Edition

The Baha'i version of the course is a grassroots effort by three participants of the Wilmette Institute courses on Sustainable Development and Climate Change. It is based on the original Christian and Jewish editions, using the same six session format and many of the original activities. We have further developed the materials and incorporated Baha'i perspectives. The course is interfaith in spirit and inclusive of young people of other faiths. The materials show equal respect to all religions, teach that all people worship the same God, just with different names, and that the core spiritual teachings such as stewardship of the earth and loving and caring for our fellow human beings are the same in all religions.

Welcome to the Story of Stuff - a Baha'i-inspired program for youth!

Let There Be...Stuff? Program Overview

The course is designed for six classes of approximately one and a half hours. You will find detailed explanations about each of the six sessions in separate files. This file contains an introduction to the course and basic instructions for the facilitator.

The course is designed for a group of 12 to 15 year old youth and a facilitator.

These are the main topics discussed in each session:

1. **Caring for Creation** – Opening ourselves to the awe and wonder of Creation and our role as Earth stewards.
2. **The Story of Stuff** – Revealing the whole Story of Stuff, from cradle to grave, its impact on people and the planet and hearing the **call for spiritual transformation**.
3. **Where Does Our Stuff Come from?** – Looking at the specific stories of some of our favorite 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.
4. **Think... Before You Buy!** – Learning how we are being manipulated by the media to keep endlessly consuming and how we can start thinking for ourselves, reduce our consumption, and lead a more meaningful and happy life.
5. **Waste Not** – Learning where our stuff goes when it leaves our hands, the true cost to people and the planet, and how we can reduce our waste.
6. **Onto a Path of Service** – Celebrating student's achievement in taking the course and supporting them in taking their next steps as Earth stewards beyond the course.

The youth will meet six times for about one and a half hours to study and discuss the materials. Each section provides opportunities for young people to:

- Think - gain new information about stuff and think about its impacts.
- Reflect - connect what they are learning to the Baha'i teachings related to the topic.
- Engage - explore the theme more deeply.
- Enact - take action on what they have learned.

Facilitator Information

Preparing for the Program

Start by getting inspired! First, watch [The Story of Stuff](#). This 21 min. film is the centerpiece of the program. Then consider your own purchasing habits. Reflect on how your choices impact Earth's life support systems for generations to come. Then imagine walking on a path to a more sustainable future, with guidance from the Baha'i Writings. Your inspiration and enthusiasm are contagious. Young people want to walk with you on this spirit-filled journey.

Announcing the Course and Finding Participants

Post an *announcement* in at least two community newsletters or e-mail communications before starting sign-ups. You could also make a short presentation at the Baha'i 19-Day Feast and ask the community to spread the word about the upcoming course. Especially encourage the youth to invite their friends of other faiths. *Word of mouth* is always most effective! A *sample announcement* is included below under Materials for the Facilitator.

The program is designed as a journey with each session building on the last. We recommend you enroll a group *with the understanding that they are committing to a six-session journey together*.

Communication with Parent(s)/Guardian(s)

Communication with parent(s)/guardian(s) is an important part of your work as a facilitator. We suggest you send them a letter at least one week before the beginning of the course. Include a link to the video <http://storyofstuff.org/movies/story-of-stuff/>. A *sample letter* is included at the end of this section under Materials for the Facilitator.

Perhaps you may like to host a gathering for parents to view and discuss the video together. After the screening, ask the parents how it relates to their children. Share with them your plans to frame the message of the film within the context of the Baha'i teachings and to provide constructive ideas for practical actions. You can describe the session themes and some of your favorite activities.

Finding a Room

Most of the exercises are set up for students to do sitting in a circle, but some require that they get up, move chairs out of the way, or move outdoors if possible.

Technological Requirements:

The Story of Stuff video is central to the program, so you will need a computer with a large monitor or projection screen. Make sure you test the technology at least one week before the course starts so that you would have enough time to deal with any potential problems. **If you have reliable internet**, you can just watch the video here: <https://storyofstuff.org/movies/story-of-stuff/>

If you don't have internet access at the class site, you can download the video for free off this website: <http://storyofstuff.org/movies/story-of-stuff/>

NOTE: For large groups, a high-resolution video file is available. See the [Movie Screening signup page](#).

Internet Access is desirable as the materials contain several other short videos.

Gathering Materials

To save natural resources and money, and make the community aware of the course, ask the friends to contribute:

- Folders or three-ring binders – make sure these are either being reused or are Earth friendly.
- Nature magazines like National Geographic for Session 1.
- Pop culture magazines full of advertisements relevant to youth for Session 4.
- Any other needed materials that you don't already have in stock.

General Supplies

You will always want to have your course materials, the handouts, and the student roster. Here are some other things you will probably want to have at every session.

- clock and/or timer
- computer and projector (if possible) for screening Story of Stuff segments
- tape
- a chime to get people's attention so you don't have to yell.
- note paper
- ballpoint pens and large colored pens or markers
- butcher paper or newsprint flip chart

Throughout the course, participants will be creating **murals** with butcher paper. Ideally, the murals stay on the wall. However, you can also use posters instead which you can transport more easily.

We recommend that participants keep a **folder** for the course. Reuse old file folders or three ring binders, or purchase Earth friendly ones.

When you **copy the handouts**, try to use 100% recycled paper and to copy double sided to save natural resources.

You may like to **copy each lesson plan** (generally three pages) for yourself for easy reference during the session.

Preparing for the Sessions

There are no hard rules about how to go through this material. Modify the activities according to the interests, needs, age, and circumstances of your group. Trust that you will be guided to give the students what they need. **Your inspiration and creativity are critical to its success. We welcome hearing about your ideas, insights, and experiences.**

Begin preparing for each session a few days before by reading through the whole session plan. Collect your materials, prepare your exercises, reflect on the spiritual texts, and make sure you are comfortable with the content and the flow of the session before you start.

We have designed each session to be an hour and a half long. You may like to meet with the youth for two hours to have some time for refreshments or an outdoor game. If your time frame is shorter, select the activities from the Lesson Plan you want to do. It is better to leave out some activities than to rush through. Decide before the session which activities you consider to be the most important.

You will find detailed explanations about the six sessions in separate files. They each contain three main sections:

- * TO THE FACILITATORS: Explanations about how to facilitate the session.
- * LESSON PLAN: A step by step guide through the session. Each activity is explained here.
- * HANDOUTS: These are all the readings and materials that need to be copied.

In addition to printing the handouts for the participants, you may like to print out the Lesson Plans for yourself for easy reference during the sessions.

Adapt the Materials to Your Group

Feel free to adapt the materials to the needs and circumstances of your group. For example: If your group consists of younger participants or if they have difficulties with reading, you may like to summarize or even skip some paragraphs of the readings. Allow yourself to be creative and to use the materials the way you think is most appropriate.

Individual Action Plans

At the end of each session, the youth will commit to taking some actions. They are invited to document their actions each week on the “Right Stuff Actions” mural or poster. This mural will become a focal point for the Session 6 celebration. As the participants share their experience and learning, they receive encouragement, and inspire each other.

Group Service Project

The youth will have the option to engage in a simple service project at the end of the course. In Session 6, you will help the youth consult on a service project, make an Action Plan, and then to carry it out. Advise the youth to consider their capacity, age, time and resources available, and the special needs of their community when they make their plans. The project should be small and manageable so that the youth can execute it with joy.

Spiritual Preparation

Take some time to pray and meditate on how The Story of Stuff speaks to you and your relationship with Creation. Ask God to give you the courage to guide the group with honesty, respect, clarity, humility, and humor.

Buddies

The facilitator has the option of introducing a buddy system to the group: At the end of each session, participants will be assigned a buddy for the week. Buddies will commit to having at least one check-in call with their buddy between sessions each week to provide support for their actions and make the program more fun. The participants will get a new buddy each week. The group or facilitator can decide whether they want to adopt the buddy system for this course.

Facilitation Tips

Setting the Tone

- **Welcome teenagers as they are** - Young people are mostly learning who they are by how peers see and respond to them. So don't be surprised if most of their attention is on each other. Just know that teens learn best with and through each other with a supportive adult guide.
- **Make it playful** - People learn best when they are playing. Feel free to bring humor and delight to the sessions. Participants will relax and be more free to express themselves. You can hold them accountable to their own goals, standards and promises for the course while encouraging non-disruptive fun.
- **Creating safety** - To be willing to take risks, students need to know that it's safe to make mistakes, and fail.
- **Be transparent** - Revealing your own mistakes without embarrassment creates an open environment in which it's safe for everyone to make mistakes.
- **Model the principles** - Walking the talk elicits respect and inspires participation. We learn a lot more from what we see than what we hear.
- **Make everything that happens right** - Whether students come in late, something breaks, or a participant becomes resistant, your response can either create more stress or turn an awkward moment into an opportunity to connect and/or learn. Don't resist anything. Just stay focused on the purpose of the course and on loving your students.
- **Promote Courtesy** - Ask the students to turn off and not use their cell phones at any time when you are together as a group. Of course, that would also apply to the facilitator and any guests that may participate in the program.

Practical Tips

- **Timing before the session** - Be sure to leave yourself enough time to prepare for each session, to gather materials, and to print out all the HANDOUTS.
- **Timing during the session** - Time estimates are given for each section/activity in the session plans. These are only rough estimates. Each group will be different, so feel free to spend more or less than the estimated time given for each activity. However, try to keep the activities and conversations going without losing track of time, because you want to leave enough time to engage fully in later exercises. You may especially want to allocate sufficient time for a relaxed discussion of the spiritual reading in each session.
- **Make sure they understand** - After giving instructions for an exercise, ask if there are any questions and make sure they understand what they are going to do.
- **Teach mindful reading** - Ask the participants to read the prayers and texts *slowly and with expression*. This will help everyone to understand what is being read. It may be helpful to model slow and clear reading compared with fast reading.

Prayers

Each session includes a video link to a different musical rendition of the prayer "Blessed Is the Spot". The different musical versions exemplify unity in diversity. You will find the links to the videos in each Session Plan under **ENTER AND CONNECT**. You will also find one opening and one closing prayer

in each session's handout. Feel free to add other prayers from <http://www.bahaiprayers.org/> or from other faiths. Over the six sessions, try to give each youth the opportunity to say an opening or closing prayer.

Group Conversations

- Know where you want to go with a conversation and at the same time, be flexible and go where the group needs to go at a given moment.
- Ask questions that will take the conversation deeper. Wait for thoughts to form. If a comment isn't clear, ask a question to clarify (e.g. "Could you say more about that?").
- Be patient with what may seem like an unrelated story or comment and listen for its relevance to the course.
- Let participants teach each other. They are their own best teachers. If someone has made a point, you can reinforce and affirm it.

Your Feedback Is Welcome!

Your **feedback** is welcome and will help shape the course and make it more fun, effective and usable for future groups. Please send your comments and suggestions to bahaistoryofstuff@gmail.com

And so It Begins...

God bless you and your group's journey. May you all enjoy yourselves, may it bring courage, hope, strength, and peace to your hearts and may it bring healing to our world!

Materials for the Facilitator

Sample Announcement of the Course

What is going on with our planet? What can we do to make a difference? How can the Baha'i teachings help me and my friends to walk a spiritual path toward a sustainable world?

If you are age 12 to 15, you are invited to the course LET THERE BE...STUFF? A SPIRIT-FILLED RESPONSE TO A CONSUMER-CRAZED WORLD. Take a journey in six sessions to understand the Story of Stuff. Discuss things that really matter with your friends and apply spiritual teachings to your life. Youth can change the world!

We will meet at (location _____) on (dates and time _____).

Contact _____.

On the next pages you will find a sample letter to Parent(s)/Guardian(s), a course schedule, and a course roster.

Sample Letter to Parent(s)/Guardian(s)

Dear Parent(s)/Guardian(s),

Your teenager is about to embark on a very special adventure. Let There Be...Stuff? is a Baha'i-inspired program for youth which helps them understand the impact of their consumption on the environment and on people around the world. It is based on the video [The Story of Stuff](#). The course aims to nurture their love of God, Creation, and humanity and shows them how they can apply the Baha'i teachings in every-day life. By engaging them in practical action and service, it will empower them to make a real difference in their own lives and in others' as well.

Youth from all religious traditions are welcome to participate. The materials show equal respect to all religions, teach that all people worship the same God, just with different names, and that the core spiritual teachings such as stewardship of the earth and loving and caring for our fellow human beings are the same in all religions. Certain topics are approached from a unique Baha'i perspective such as using both science and religion as tools for human progress.

This six week program is designed as a journey with each session building on the last. It is important that your teenager is committed to participate in all sessions.

You can play an important role in supporting your child on the path to becoming a good Earth steward and responsible global citizen. The youths will commit to doing some small actions at home between sessions. Talk with your child each week about their Action Plan. Your child may also be assigned a buddy each week to support them in taking action between sessions.

Your child will start to think about the impact and implications of their choices. We invite you to use this opportunity to examine the impacts of your own choices as well. That will demonstrate to your child that they can make a real difference not only in their own lives but in others' as well.

Thank you for the privilege of working with your child.

I've attached the course schedule with the dates, times, and themes for each session.

Please feel free to call me with any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Your Name, Address, Phone number, E-mail Address

Let There Be Stuff...? Course Schedule

Session	Date	Time	Location
Session 1: Caring for Creation			
Session 2: The Story of Stuff			
Session 3: Where Does Our Stuff Come from?			
Session 4: Think ...before You Buy!			
Session 5: What a Waste!			
Session 6: Onto a Path of Service			



“The Earth is but one country and mankind its citizens.” - Baha'u'llah

