

## 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](http://www.storyofstuff.org)    [www.greenfaith.org](http://www.greenfaith.org)    Story of Stuff Baha'i Team    2017, last updated 2023

# SESSION 2: THE STORY OF STUFF

These materials contain three main sections:

- \* TO THE FACILITATORS: Explanations about how to facilitate Session 2.
- \* SESSION 2 – PLAN:  
A step by step guide through the session. Each activity is explained here.
- \* SESSION 2 - 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 2 - Plan.

## TO THE FACILITATORS

### Preparing for Session Two

#### Overview

This session is about the problems our current consumption patterns create. It uses the film, The Story of Stuff to show that the way we consume things is trashing the planet, hurting people, and that we are not even having fun! It provides an overview of the themes for the whole course. Future sessions will take segments of the film, deepen the learning and make them more relevant to the participants' lives. This session provides the opportunity for the youth to reflect on the impact of consumption as a whole and be open to all its implications.

#### Goals

- Develop the **virtues of justice and moderation**.
- Provide an overview of the impact of consumption on vulnerable populations and the planet.
- Orient the youth to the journey ahead and encourage them to learn and act.
- Support the youth in facing the truth about how our choices affect the planet.

#### Themes

##### **Secular:**

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 to take action. Our system is in crisis. The way we make, use, and throw away stuff is trashing the planet, poisoning our bodies and not giving us any real joy.

## Spiritual:

The world's religions promise a time when people will live in harmony with each other and the planet. The teachings of Baha'u'llah provide guidance on ways to address our current problems in order to develop a spiritual and peaceful civilization in harmony with nature.

## Facilitation Preparation

Watch the film and reflect on the thoughts and feelings it stirs in you. What is your own relationship to your Stuff? How does the message of the film challenge it? Be ready to share honestly about your own experience with the youth in your group.

We offer some suggestions for responding to some challenging questions young people might ask after seeing the film. (See Helpful Hints for the Discussion after Watching the Movie.) Read these and familiarize yourself with the responses. If you are not comfortable responding or you don't know the answer, don't pretend you do. You can ask the whole group what they think the answer is.

Recognize that often, underneath a challenging question or general resistance is fear. Asking them what they are feeling, and validating the feeling without invalidating the challenge can help. Help them see how much courage it really takes to face challenging truths. Acknowledge courage in comments that are made.

## Materials for Session 2

- ☐ Your (the facilitator's) notes from Session 1 about the Group Promises
- ☐ DVD player or computer & projector if needed
- ☐ The [Story of Stuff video](#): This may take some preparations, see To-Do List
- ☐ Video of Blessed Is the Spot: <https://youtu.be/Dn1Ne6kVPMs>
- ☐ Handouts for Session 2 (Pages 8 -11)

## Session 2 To-Do List

- ☐ The Story of Stuff video: Download the video for free off the website:  
<http://storyofstuff.org/movies/story-of-stuff/>  
  
If you will be showing this for a larger group, you can sign up on the Movie Screening signup page:  
[http://action.storyofstuff.org/event/screenings2014/create/?utm\\_source=nav&utm\\_medium=website](http://action.storyofstuff.org/event/screenings2014/create/?utm_source=nav&utm_medium=website)  
Following signup, you will receive an email with hi-resolution electronic video files.
- ☐ On your computer, open the video with the prayer [Blessed Is the Spot](#). You may like to shorten it by starting the video at 1:50.
- ☐ Make copies of Session 2 handouts, one for each student, and have them ready to hand out. (Pages 8 -11)
- ☐ Right Stuff Action Board – Post a piece of paper on the wall and write “Right Stuff Actions following Session 1” as the title.
- ☐ Have tape and pens available.
- ☐ Keep or re-post Caring for Creation mural on wall.

## Helpful Hints for the Discussion after Watching the Movie

Some participants won't have any problem with the message of the film. Others might. It's natural for people to have resistance to and feel threatened by the message in the film. For many youth today, their material possessions are a source of identity and status. Some won't let anybody tell them that it is a problem without putting up a fight. It is important to welcome the resistance and show that it reflects legitimate feelings. Show that you understand their perspective and address their questions, while also guiding them to consider a new perspective. When someone asks a question, ask if other participants have an answer before you provide one. *Draw out responses from the youth whenever possible.*

To help you mentally prepare for the session, here are some FAQs and possible answers:

Q : Annie is telling me it is wrong to consume anything. But we can't live without Stuff. What are we supposed to do?

A: Annie isn't saying it is wrong to consume. She is saying the WAY we consume is hurting us and the planet. She is telling us we need to change the way we make, use, and throw away Stuff and to stop consuming so much. She isn't against Stuff. She just wants us to cherish it, and the world, better. God understands that we need a certain amount of stuff in order to live. But God doesn't want our lifestyles to hurt other people – and that's what the film is getting at.

Q : Is Stuff bad?

A: Stuff isn't bad. Valuing Stuff over people and the environment is the problem. We need Stuff in order to live. But when we take the resources of the Earth that God made and turn them into poison, I think we all can agree that that is bad.

Q: Who does she think she is? Why should I listen to her?

A: Sometimes, when people hear a message they don't like, they attack the messenger, for example by questioning their personality or their competence. But the important question here is, "What do I believe in my heart of hearts about the message that the film offers?"

Q: What am I supposed to do if I need a cell phone, then?

A: Use your cell phone! And make it last and take care of it and don't chuck it just because a newer, fancier, faster version came out. While we need to take better care of our Stuff, we also need to advocate for better designs that last longer and push electronics companies to take the toxins out of cell phones like they are doing in Europe.

Q: I'll bet she has a cell phone. What's up with that?

A: Of course she does. She struggles with the same challenges as everyone else. No one can pretend to be perfect, but just because it is hard to live according to our values doesn't mean that the message is wrong or that we shouldn't try.

Q: If we stop using Stuff, doesn't the economy collapse?

A: Figuring out how to shift away from an economy that depends on large-scale, harmful consumption to one that is more life-affirming is a long road. This is exactly why we have to start thinking about it now. If we are going to build a fair and healthy economy we have to design it that way and that takes time and effort!

Q: I don't think that this particular claim that Annie makes is true.

A: Explain that the video was made in 2007 based on up-to-date science at that time. All sources are diligently provided on the Story of Stuff website. It is possible that a detail may have changed in the meantime or that scientists have a different understanding of it today. However, the big picture and most details still hold true today. Unfortunately, the story of our Stuff has become even worse.

## SESSION 2: OVERVIEW

### ENTER AND CONNECT (18 MIN.)

Opening prayer(s)  
Sharing and getting organized  
Introduction

### THINK (25 MIN.)

The Story of Stuff Video

### REFLECT (20 MIN.)

Spiritual Reading Session 2 - A Call for Spiritual Transformation

### ENGAGE (15 MIN.)

Discussion

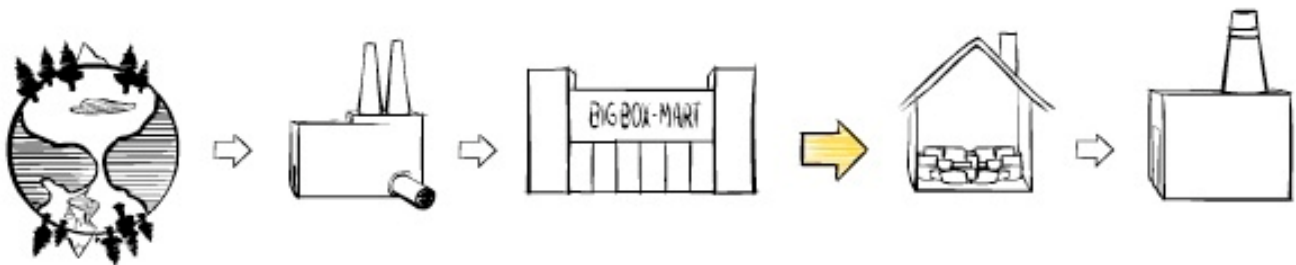
### ENACT (7 MIN.)

Action Plan

### EXIT (5 MIN.)

We are in it together – Optional Closing Activity  
Closing Prayer

Total estimated time: 90 Minutes



## SESSION 2 - PLAN

### The Story of Stuff - A Call for Spiritual Transformation

#### ENTER AND CONNECT (18 Min)

##### Opening Prayers

Warmly welcome the youth, then listen and watch another beautiful rendition of the prayer “Blessed Is the Spot”: <https://youtu.be/Dn1Ne6kVPMs> The length of the video is 5:19, but you may shorten it by starting at 1:50.

Then ask one or more participants to say a prayer. You will find one prayer as a suggestion in the Handout for Session 2. (Just scroll down.) If you would like to use the prayer in the handouts, distribute them now.

##### Sharing and Getting Organized

**Check-in** - Have the youth share their binder covers. Distribute Session 2 Handouts if you haven't done so before.

**Promises** - Briefly review the Promises together and discuss them.

**Review and Reflection** - Ask the youth: • What did we do last week? • What did we learn? • Ask what about Creation gave them the experience of awe and wonder last week. Encourage them to share how they were able to practice *Earth Stewardship*. (As they do, take role on the roster.)

**Right Stuff Action Board** - Discuss actions from last sessions:

- Let the youth share what actions they took from their list of actions and how these actions turned out. Who practiced the virtue of caring and what did they experience? (If you have a large number of youth, they could share their experiences in groups of two (not their buddies)).
- Have them post any pictures they brought on the Right Stuff Action board. Or let them write a sentence describing their action or experience. (5min.)

##### Introduction

Read together the brief **Introduction** in the handout.

#### THINK (25 min.)

##### Story of Stuff Video

**Preparation:** Set up Story of Stuff video: <http://storyofstuff.org/movies/story-of-stuff/>

**Instructions:**

1. Take out a cell phone and ask the youth the following questions, but assure them that it doesn't matter if they don't know the answer. You don't need to provide answers either.

- Where did this phone come from?

- Where did the materials come from? What part of nature? Where in the world?
- Where was the phone manufactured?
- What steps did it go through to get to their hands right now?

2. Tell the group that you are going to watch a video called The Story of Stuff. Ask for a show of hands if anybody has already seen it.

Say this:

Most of us don't really have a clue where our Stuff came from. We take for granted the fact that it just magically shows up on the shelf at a store when we want it. We use it for as long as we like and then just toss it in the garbage when we are done.

The video tells us the whole story of our Stuff. It was made by Annie Leonard, a woman who spent almost 20 years digging to get the answers to these questions. She is like a private investigator who followed our Stuff from its cradle to its grave and discovered a secret life most of us could never imagine - the one it had before it got to the store and the one it has after we throw it away. She did this so we can see the truth about all the hidden costs of our Stuff.

3. Tell participants the film is about 20 min. long. They will be watching it in silence. They will have a chance to talk about it afterwards. (Comment: Taking notes will distract tremendously. The video is very fast paced. The purpose of watching the whole video is to get an overview. The youth will see each segment again in the next three sessions.)

4. Watch The Story of Stuff. Notice whatever feelings the youth may have while watching.

## **ENGAGE (15 Min)**

### **Discuss the Film**

Instructions:

1. When the film is over, everyone might need a quick stretch break. It can help release some tension to get up, stretch and shake out your arms and legs.
2. Have them sit next to their buddy from the last week and share their initial response to the video. (3 - 5 min.) (You may like to skip this with a small youth group.)

3. Back in the large group ask the discussion questions below as needed to get a conversation going:

- What did you like about the film?
- What didn't you like about it?
- What questions did it raise for you?
- What do you feel when you think about changing your relationship to Stuff? What would make it easy? What would make it hard?
- What's the cost of not changing? To you? To the world? To your relationship with God?

4. Let the group know:

Since Annie doesn't tell us how to fix our broken system, it's easy to get discouraged after seeing the film. But there are a lot of things we can do to make a difference. We can change our individual lifestyles and help change the way our schools deal with

consumption. We can take action in our communities, and we can work to change the larger systems at a national or even global level. In the next few weeks, you will have lots of opportunities to explore different kinds of actions you can take that will help make a difference.

## REFLECT (20 Min.)

### Spiritual Reading

Read together **Spiritual Reading Session 2 - A Call for Spiritual Transformation**. Take turns reading. It's helpful to read some of the quotations twice. Allow a brief time for discussion where indicated in the text.

## ENACT (7 min.)

### Instructions:

Ask participants to pull out their Action Plan in the handouts of Session 2 which you distributed at the beginning of this session.

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

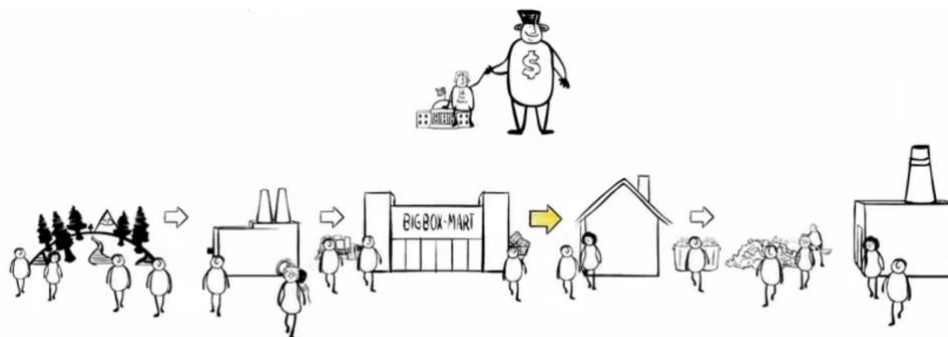
## EXIT (5 min)

### We are in it together - Optional Closing Activity

Have everybody mix up and find a random place in the room facing in any direction. Then reaching out each hand find another hand to hold. Then, closing their eyes, see if they can find their way to forming a circle. Once they have, have them go around the circle and each person say one thing they are taking with them from this session that they didn't have when they came.

### Closing Prayer

You may use the closing prayer in the handout.



## SESSION 2 HANDOUTS

### The Story of Stuff - A Call for Spiritual Transformation

#### OPENING PRAYER

O God! We are as plants, and Thy bounty is as the rain; refresh and cause these plants to grow through Thy bestowal. We are Thy servants; free us from the fetters of material existence. We are ignorant; make us wise. We are dead; make us alive. We are material; endow us with spirit. We are deprived; make us the intimates of Thy mysteries. We are needy; enrich and bless us from Thy boundless treasury. O God! Resuscitate us; give us sight; give us hearing; familiarize us with the mysteries of life, so that the secrets of Thy kingdom may become revealed to us in this world of existence and we may confess Thy oneness. Every bestowal emanates from Thee; every benediction is Thine. Thou art mighty. Thou art powerful. Thou art the Giver, and Thou art the Ever-Bounteous.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá

#### INTRODUCTION

Last session we opened our hearts to Creation and to each other. Today, we will watch a video that shows that the Earth and its people, all God’s Creation, are in grave danger. It is important for us to know about the pollution and the environmental crisis so that we can become healers of the Earth. We will learn how the Baha’i teachings can guide us on that path. In this session, we will learn how justice and moderation are important to protect nature and people. We will also start to take some small actions to tread lighter on the Earth.

#### SPIRITUAL READING – A CALL FOR SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

That video is quite shocking and depressing, don't you think so? Yet despite the sad state of our world, we do have much reason for hope:

Baha'u'llah foretold that humankind will experience severe crises. The Baha’i teachings explain that we are living in an age of transition, at a time when humanity has left its stage of childhood and is going through the tumultuous time of adolescence. These crises and difficulties will shake up humanity and propel it to listen to the divine guidance and to develop spiritually. This development will bring humankind to the stage of maturity, a time of peace and spiritual civilization, the Golden Age prophesied by the prophets of old.

Baha'u'llah brought the teachings humanity needs to preserve nature and to enable all the people of the world to live in harmony with the Earth and with each other.

As we go through the course, you will become acquainted with some of these teachings and learn how they will help us overcome our many problems with Stuff.

Let us begin with the teaching of *justice*. Another word for it is *fairness*. Justice is expressed in the Golden Rule, which we find in all religions:

*“This is the sum of duty: do naught unto others which would cause you pain if done to you.”* - Hinduism

*“Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful.”* - Buddhism



*"What is hateful to you do not to your fellow man. That is the entire Law; all the rest is commentary."* - Judaism

*"Do unto others what you would have them do unto you; this sums up the Law and the Prophets."* - Christianity

*"No one of you is a believer until he desires for his brother that which he desires for himself."* - Islam

*"Be fair to yourselves and to others, that the evidences of justice may be revealed, through your deeds, among Our faithful servants."* - Baha'i Faith

How would you put this Golden Rule as expressed in the previous paragraph in your own words? Perhaps you could write your personal version here:

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Baha'u'llah said that if we want to act with justice or fairness, we must be moderate:

*Whoso cleaveth to justice, can, under no circumstances, transgress the limits of moderation. ...*

*If carried to excess, civilization will prove as prolific a source of evil as it had been of goodness when kept within the restraints of moderation.*

Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah CLXIV

Clearly, these words refer to our material civilization and to our economic and industrial activities. That is where our Stuff plays a huge role. The words remind us that if we want to be just, we must be moderate. If we allow civilization to overstep the limits of moderation, it will have harmful effects.

As we have seen in the video, there are three serious problems with our Stuff:

1. The destructive processes of producing the Stuff that harm people and the environment.
2. The large amount of consumption by the rich people of the world.
3. The harmful pollution of the waste when Stuff is thrown away.

How can the spiritual teachings of justice/fairness and moderation help?

It is unfair to pollute the environment and make people sick, just so that the companies that produce our stuff can get rich. If products were made with justice in mind, the whole process of production would change: The well-being of workers would be ensured, the environment would be protected from pollution, resources would not be excessively exploited, products would be made to last, and would be designed so that after their life they can be disassembled and the resources reused. These are all issues where the government and business must apply justice.

As individuals, we can also help a lot. We all can apply moderation in our consumption of Stuff. If we buy less Stuff, that means less pollution, less people suffering, and more preservation of the Earth's resources for the use of future generations.

If we are thoughtful and considerate, we don't have to feel guilty about our Stuff. Baha'u'llah said that we should enjoy life and God's beautiful creation. All we need to do is to remember justice/fairness and moderation when we see a need to acquire more Stuff:

*Take from this world only to the measure of your needs, and forgo that which exceedeth them. Observe equity in all your judgments, and transgress not the bounds of justice, nor be of them that stray from its path.*

Baha'u'llah, The Summons of the Lord of Hosts, p. 193

## CLOSING PRAYER

O Thou loving Provider!

These souls have hearkened to the summons of the Kingdom, and have gazed upon the glory of the Sun of Truth. They have risen upward to the refreshing skies of love; they are enamored of Thy nature, and they worship Thy beauty. Unto Thee have they turned themselves, speaking together of Thee, seeking out Thy dwelling, and thirsting for the waterbrooks of Thy heavenly realm.

Thou art the Giver, the Bestower, the Ever-Loving.

'Abdu'l-Baha

## 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 actions 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.
- Remember to apply the **virtues of justice and moderation** when carrying out your actions.
- 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 2

### Create

- ☐ Imagine the past - Choose a favorite shopping place and either envision or research what natural landscape was there before the store was built. Draw or find a picture of it.

### Communicate

- ☐ Share the news - Talk to at least three people this week about what you learned in The Story of Stuff and maybe even encourage them to watch the film.
- ☐ Face this! - Post an interesting fact, article or link that talks about one of the issues in the film on your Facebook page.

### Learn

- ☐ More stories - Check out [www.storyofstuff.org](http://www.storyofstuff.org) or <http://storyofstuff.org/movies/> and watch one of the other films the Story of Stuff team has made. Or watch The Story of Stuff again with your family or friends.

### Have Insights

- ☐ Inventory - When you get home, look at all the stuff you have. On a sheet of paper, make a list of three categories: What you need, what you like, and what you don't use. Make a list of the stuff you own for each category. If you could only take with you whatever would fit into a backpack, what would you take?

### Set an Example

#### At home

- ☐ Have a Garage Sale - Talk to your parents and set a date to host a garage sale. Suggest to donate the profits to a charitable organization. You will not only reduce the amount of stuff in circulation, but you will also raise money for a good cause.

#### At school

- ☐ Show up – Attend a meeting for a club or organization at your school that is getting involved in your community or working to protect the environment. Working together not only lightens the load, it makes the work more fun. Looking for inspiration? Check out: [www.dosomething.org](http://www.dosomething.org) or <https://www.peacefirst.org/>
- ☐ Start a club – No environmental club at your high school? Start one!

#### In your community

- ☐ Consult about organizing a Stuff Swap in your religious community.

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