

Global Issues Lesson Plan 1: *Boycott!*

By David Royal

- Purpose:** 1. To give students experience finding and evaluating information from the Internet.
2. To deepen students understanding of the consequences and responsibilities of consumer choice.

Level: high school or older

Time: approximately 1 hour

Note: Handouts are not required for this activity, but if you are interested in using them, they are available here: <http://www.esletc.com/GIMaterials.shtml#boycott>. Also, students will need Internet access.

Step 1 (optional): Give some basic tips on doing Internet searches. The Using Google handout is one way to do this. I tend to focus on the benefits of using well-placed quotation marks and the importance of using multiple, specific keywords. If you are teaching in a room with computers and an overhead projector, demonstrating the various techniques could be useful. More Internet-savvy classes may skip this step.

Step 2: Introduce the pre-discussion questions (below) and answer any vocabulary questions that come up. I find it useful to give sample answers for some of the questions, especially 1 and 5. Have students discuss the questions in small groups (~15 minutes) and then have volunteers from each group share their ideas with the class.

Step 3: Using the last pre-discussion question as a starting point, introduce the concepts of boycotts and consumer responsibility. This may be new to some students, so it is best to proceed slowly. The idea of a boycott may be more difficult for students to understand if they are not particularly brand conscious. When I teach this, I explain that corporations exist primarily to generate wealth for their owners. That is their main responsibility. Therefore,

I explain, our responsibility as consumers is making sure that we give our dollars only to companies whose practices we approve of and wish to be a part of. We as consumers are responsible for controlling corporate behavior. I then explain that, sometimes, groups of people choose to boycott a company, withdrawing their support, because they do not approve of what that company is doing.

Step 4: Introduce the homework assignment. For homework, I ask students to investigate some boycotts. You can use the Boycott Activity handout, or simply ask them to look into some of the brands that came up during the discussion. I ask students to find out both who is boycotting a given company and the reasons behind it. I tell them that companies may have different people boycotting them for different reasons. On my handout I use Coca-Cola, Nike, Disney and Starbucks, only because (in Hawaii) these brands were familiar to my students. In addition to researching a few of the brands we discussed in class, I encourage them to look for a boycott that they agree with, but this is not required. This assignment could be done as homework or in a computer lab during class time.

Step 5: Ask students to get into small groups and have them use the post-discussion questions to share what they found. Next, have volunteers share their information with the class. If students are interested in the issues that come up, it is possible to use this activity to lead into a classroom activism project, where students try to spread awareness of an issue or take part in direct consumer action.

If you use this activity or have other ideas for bringing activism into language classes please visit my website. I'd love to hear from you!

Pre-discussion Questions

1. How do you decide what to buy? What things do you consider? (Brand, country of origin, price, environmental effects, treatment of workers, appearance / style, quality, etc.)
2. Which companies or brands do you like? Why do you like them? What do you know about them?
3. Are there any companies or brands that you don't like? What don't you like about them? What do you know about them?
4. Why do companies exist? What purpose do they serve? What good things can they do?

What types of bad things could a company do? Who is responsible for making sure that they don't do these things?

Post-discussion Questions

1. What did you find out about each of the companies you researched? Who is boycotting them? Why?
2. Do you agree or disagree with the boycotts that you found out about? Did anything that you learned change how you feel about these companies? Are you more or less likely to buy their products? Would you ever boycott a company? If not, why not? If so, what type of thing would make you boycott a company?

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