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CAST YOUR VOTE

Grades: 6 and up

Time: 20-40 minutes

Materials: Pretend money; product containers with “ingredients” lists (see below); cans with product choices and prices (see below)

Relevant Subjects: Social Studies, Economics, and Language Arts

1. Hand out pretend money to students, giving each person the same amount. Explain that although students cannot vote in elections until they are 18, they vote every time they spend their money. Every dollar they spend is a vote that says “Do it again!”

2. Place containers for common products on your desk, such as:

- a box for a name brand athletic shoe
- the container from a fast food hamburger
- the wrapping of a common chocolate bar

3. Ask the students if they recognize these items and if any of them have used, eaten, or purchased any similar items.

4. Ask a student to come up and open the shoe box. The student will find the following words written inside:

“Ingredients: When you buy this item, in addition to getting the shoes themselves, you contribute to creating jobs for people, and to economic growth. But you may also contribute to sweatshop labor, pollution, and animal suffering.”

Have the student read these words aloud.

5. Ask other students to come and read the “ingredients” inside the other containers. For the hamburger, they might read:

“When you buy this item, in addition to getting a tasty, convenient meal, you contribute to creating jobs for people and to economic growth. But, you may also contribute to rainforest destruction, species extinction, the suffering of cows, pesticide use, water

waste, pollution, increases in heart disease, cancer, and obesity, and strip mall development.”

For the chocolate bar they might read:

“When you buy this item, in addition to getting a delicious dessert, you contribute to creating jobs for people, to economic development, and to world trade. But, you may also contribute to child labor and slavery.”

6. Once the “hidden ingredients” in the products are read aloud, explain the connections between the products and the suffering or destruction they may be causing and ask students to think of similar products that might not come with as many hidden ingredients that cause harm (e.g., shoes produced locally by people paid a living wage, an organic veggie burger, fair-trade chocolate).

7. Place cans that name product choices (one product choice per can, with accurate price tags on them) on a large shelf or desk. Include several choices for each product category, such as:

- secondhand athletic shoes
- sweatshop-free athletic shoes
- conventional new athletic shoes

- a fast food hamburger
- a hamburger made from organic, local beef
- a veggie burger

- a common brand of chocolate bar
- a chocolate bar with “fair-trade” and “organic” written on the label
- a piece of fruit

You can use your imagination and produce many cans for many other items, especially if you have discussed other products in previous activities (e.g., T-shirts, personal care products). Always include at least three choices for each item, for example:

- a conventional new T-shirt
- an organic cotton T-shirt
- a thrift store T-shirt

8. Ask students to use their pretend money to “buy” what they would like by coming up and putting their money in the cans they want to “vote” for.

9. Analyze the votes. Which products did students vote for with their dollars, and which ones did they withhold their money from? Why? Which products did they buy despite the fact that the product cost more than a counterpart? Why?

10. Discuss the ramifications of people living their lives conscious of the fact that their dollars are votes. What might change? How might the students spend their money differently after this activity? Ask students how products have already changed because of consumer voting (e.g., the availability of organic foods, the production of hybrid cars and fair-trade and cruelty-free products).

11. Explore the ways in which students are and are not inspired to make humane “voting” choices in their own lives.

Activity from *The Power and Promise of Humane Education*