

#10537 WINNING OUR RIGHTS: HISTORY OF THE CONSUMER



LEARNING ZONE EXPRESS, 2002
GRADE LEVEL: 10-13+
20 MINUTES

DESCRIPTION

Traces the evolution of consumer laws from the early 1900s to the present. Focuses on John F. Kennedy's outline of consumer rights. Contains archival footage, as well as comments from experts and teenagers. Concludes with questions about consumer safety in today's technological markets.

ACADEMIC STANDARDS

Subject Area: Economics

- Standard: Understands the concept of prices and the interaction of supply and demand in a market economy.
 - Benchmark: Understands that relative prices and how they affect people's decisions are the means by which a market system provides answers to the basic economic questions: What goods and services will be produced? How will they be produced? Who will buy them? (See INSTRUCTIONAL GOALS 1.)
- Standard: Understands basic features of market structures and exchanges
 - Benchmark: Understands that not all competition is on the basis of price for identical products and that non-price competition includes style and quality differences, advertising, customer services, and credit policies. (See INSTRUCTIONAL GOALS 1.)
- Standard: Understands characteristics of different economic systems, economic institutions, and economic incentives.
 - Benchmark: Knows that in a command economic system a central authority, usually the government, makes the major decisions about production and distribution. (See INSTRUCTIONAL GOALS 3.)
 - Benchmark: Understands the types of specialized economic institutions found in market economies (e.g., corporations, partnerships, cooperatives, labor unions, banks, nonprofit organizations). (See INSTRUCTIONAL GOALS 6 and 7.)

C a p t i o n e d M e d i a P r o g r a m

- Benchmark: Understands that in a market economy the pursuit of economic self-interest directs people and businesses in most of their economic decisions (e.g., to work, to save, to invest). (See INSTRUCTIONAL GOALS 1, 3, 4, and 5.)
- Benchmark: Understands that many non-economic factors (e.g., cultural traditions and customs, values, interests, abilities) influence patterns of economic behavior and decision making. (See INSTRUCTIONAL GOALS 1.)

Subject Area: History

- Standard: Understands and knows how to analyze chronological relationships and patterns.
 - Benchmark: Understands historical continuity and change related to a particular development or theme (e.g., the Industrial Revolution, the evolution of democracy in the U.S.). (See INSTRUCTIONAL GOALS 2.)

INSTRUCTIONAL GOALS

1. To examine the importance of consumerism and its impact on the economy.
2. To explain the effect historical events had on consumerism.
3. To explain the government's role in influencing the economy.
4. To trace the emergence of consumer rights.
5. To analyze the four basic rights of consumers as outlined by President John F. Kennedy.
6. To identify various economic institutions established by the government to address consumer issues.
7. To discuss the watch-dog organizations that were founded to protect consumer rights.

VOCABULARY

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|-----------------|---------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. agenda | 6. deregulation | 11. muckrakers |
| 2. antimonopoly | 7. fraudulent | 12. quack medicines |
| 3. antitrust | 8. generic products | 13. transaction |
| 4. consumerism | 9. labor unions | 14. watchdog organizations |
| 5. defective | 10. marketplace | |

BEFORE SHOWING

1. Display pictures of today's most popular products (e.g., computers, clothes, automobiles, household appliances, etc.).
 - a. Discuss what makes these products popular.
 - b. Discuss the different ways of paying for these products and the advantages and disadvantages of each.
 - c. How does consumer buying affect the economy?
2. Discuss the power of materialism.
 - a. If you won a million dollars in a lottery, what would you buy with it?

C a p t i o n e d M e d i a P r o g r a m

- b. Discuss what factors influence a person's decision to buy goods (e.g., culture, customs, values, interests, comfort level, etc.).
3. Discuss problems or dissatisfaction you or your family have had in purchasing goods or services. What was done about it?

DURING SHOWING

1. View the media more than once, with one showing uninterrupted.
2. Pause at the section showing early television advertisements.
 - a. Discuss the effect that advertisements had on consumerism.
 - b. Discuss the tendency of advertisements to entertain instead of inform.
3. Pause at the section explaining Ralph Nader's attempts to challenge the auto industry regarding safety rights. Discuss other similar problems that the auto industry has had recently.
4. Pause at the section describing the scenario of the picketing outside the car dealership.
 - a. Discuss the right to air complaints publicly.
 - b. Are there limits to which these grievances can be carried?
5. Pause at the section explaining labeling of products. Discuss why this is important.
6. Pause at the section about the right to choose.
 - a. Discuss comparison shopping, generic products, and deregulation.
 - b. Discuss the challenges that the Internet poses for consumer rights.

AFTER SHOWING

Discussion Items and Questions

1. Why is consumer spending so important to the U.S. economy?
2. What effect did the Industrial Revolution have on society and consumerism?
3. In the early 1900s, *muckrackers* helped raise issues of unsanitary production and unsafe working conditions to alert the public.
 - a. Who were they?
 - b. What did they do?
4. What complaints did consumers have about the products that were being made and sold in the middle 1900s?
5. What contributed to the growth of the consumer movement after 1945?
6. Which three states were the first to respond to consumer dissatisfaction?
7. Why were many of the consumer spokespersons women?
8. President John F. Kennedy made consumer rights part of the national agenda in the 1960s.
 - a. What four basic rights of consumers did he talk about?
 - b. What council did he set up to help with consumer rights?
9. Who is Ralph Nader, and why is he considered "the hero of the consumer movement"?
10. The right-to-safety law was made by Ralph Nader. Describe how he accomplished this.

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11. Who were Nader's Raiders, and what did they do?
12. Where were PIRGs first formed, and what is their function today?
13. In 1972 the Consumer Product Safety Commission was formed. What was its purpose?
14. What product information laws have been designed to aid consumers in making informed choices (e.g., truth in lending laws, fabric care labels, nutrition labels, etc.)?
15. According to the program, what has the most important impact of the consumer movement in America?

Applications and Activities

1. Construct a timeline showing the history of consumer rights.
2. Research the factors that critically affect the U.S. economy. Create a pie chart to show the impact of each.
3. Research popular advertisements in the media. Report on the following:
 - a. What tactics are used to make the advertisements attractive?
 - b. What information is given about the product?
 - c. Are most modern-day advertisements informative or entertaining?
4. Create your own advertisement of a product. Include information that is important for the consumer to know.
5. Read and report on other books written by muckrakers.
 - a. *Shame of the Cities* by Lincoln Steffens.
 - b. *How the Other Half Lives* by Jacob Riis.
 - c. *The History of the Standard Oil Company* by Ida Tarbell.
6. Make a poster listing the four basic rights outlined by President Kennedy.
 - a. List and illustrate examples of exercising each right as mentioned by the students in the program.
 - b. List and illustrate examples of your own experiences in exercising each right.
7. Prepare a slideshow presentation on Ralph Nader and his accomplishments in the consumer rights movement.
8. Make a list of items to buy for school (e.g., notebook, calculator, paper, pencils, etc.) and list them by brand names.
 - a. Divide into teams, and do comparison shopping at various local stores.
 - b. Record the prices of all the items and make a table to display the results.
 - c. Determine some possible reasons for the variations in price, if any.
9. Research and report on the following:
 - a. U.S. Food and Drug Administration.
 - b. Consumers Union.
 - c. Consumer Advisory Council.

RELATED RESOURCES

Captioned Media Program

- [Persuasive Language #10436](#)

C a p t i o n e d M e d i a P r o g r a m

- [*That's Marketing: Understanding Consumer Behavior #9676*](#)
- [*Your Consumer Rights #9678*](#)

World Wide Web



The following Web sites complement the contents of this guide; they were selected by professionals who have experience in teaching deaf and hard of hearing students. Every effort was made to select accurate, educationally relevant, and “kid safe” sites. However, teachers should preview them before use. The U.S. Department of Education, the National Association of the Deaf, and the Captioned Media Program do not endorse the sites and are not responsible for their content.

• CONSUMER REPORTS

<http://www.consumerreports.org/main/home.jsp>

Contains information about the mission and history of the Consumers Union. Includes reports about the testing and ratings of popular products. Takes the viewer on a virtual tour of the auto test site.

• THE CONSUMER LAW PAGE

<http://consumerlawpage.com/article/lobby.shtml>

Includes a timeline showing consumer protection statutes.

• THE NADER PAGE

<http://www.nader.org/>

Contains information about the history of Ralph Nader. Includes opinions and editorials and letters and testimonies.

• STATE PIRGS WORKING TOGETHER

<http://www.pirg.org/>

Serves as a resource for public-interest research groups. Contains information about their goals: research, organization, and advocacy.