

The following questions were adapted to reflect the Canadian classroom by Dina Desveaux, Global Classroom Education Manager, with permission from “[Annie Says: A Guide to Discussion of \*The Story of Stuff\*](#)”.

### Group A Question

You likely came across some new words and expressions in the movie, like “materials throughput” and “perceived obsolescence”. With your group, pick any of the words in the list below, and come up with a definition. Then have each person add to the definition: what does it mean to you, and how have you experienced it in your own life?

List of words:  
Perceived obsolescence  
Planned obsolescence  
Materials throughput  
Synergistic impacts  
Externalized costs

### Group B Question:

“You can’t run a linear system on a finite planet indefinitely” is a quote from the movie. Another way to say this is: ‘you can’t have unlimited economic growth with limited resources’.

What does this mean for the future of the Canadian economy? What changes are needed to ensure that our economic system supports, rather than undermines, the planet’s biological systems on which we depend? Where, along the system, are the decision makers who can change the current patterns of production and consumption? How would one influence decision makers at each stage along the way? Which decision makers have the potential to most influence the system? What does that tell us about where to target our efforts to make change? In other words, whose behaviour and decisions need to change to create the most positive change and how can we hasten that change?

### Group C Question:

This movie makes the point that an important thing missing from the conventional textbook story of the materials economy is people. Who are the people that have the most say in how this system runs? Who are the people that are most affected by the loss of natural resources and pollution? Who are the people that work in the different parts of this system? Where are you in this system? What options do you have, from where you sit, to change the system to support sustainability and justice?

### Group D Question:

The video mentioned a chemical called BFR's: Brominated flame retardants. Have you heard of them before? Where did you hear about them? Do you know where you might find BFRs in your home? Where would you look for more information about them? Have you heard about any other dangerous chemicals that might adversely affect your health? Do you believe that human rights and children's rights are a factor in whether we can get industry to stop putting these notoriously toxic chemicals in our household items? Do you know what your rights are? Do you think the products containing toxic materials sold in Canada should be labeled to warn the shopper about the risks? Do you think they are?

The video asserts that it's the government's job to take care of us. Do you agree? Given the severity of the ecological crisis we're in, what is an appropriate leadership role for government? How can we let our government know what we expect of it at this critical moment?

### Group E Question:

Annie says that people in the U.S. have less leisure time now than they did in feudal times. In addition, most of that leisure time is spent watching TV and shopping. Do you think that same statement could be made about our leisure time here in Canada? How much of your time (per week, say) do you spend watching TV? How much do you spend shopping? (Be honest!) And how much time do you spend surfing the web? Finally, how much time do you spend with friends (outside of school), family, being creative, being in nature, reading books? What about happiness? When you think about the leisure time activities which activities bring you the most joy and rejuvenation? Does your leisure time schedule match your priorities?

What are some ways that we could change our economy and our community so that people worked less and spent more time on activities that brought them joy? How can we hasten those changes?

**Extra (or swap-out) Questions:**

**Question:**

In the movie, Annie says that, back in the 1950's, President Eisenhower's Council of Economic Advisers Chairman said "The American economy's ultimate purpose is to create more consumer goods." In one word, how does that statement make you feel? In current times, what do you think is the top priority of the Canadian government and the Canadian economy? What do you think the Canadian economy's ultimate purpose should be? How can we each contribute to turning this around, to getting our government to focus on sustainability and justice and things more valuable than consumer goods?

**Question:**

At the end of the movie, Annie describes a New School of thinking about stuff. She mentions: Green chemistry, Zero Waste, Closed Loop Production, Green Jobs, Renewable Energy, Fair Trade, Local Living Economies. Then she says these are already happening in lots of places. Ask if the people in your group know about these things. What organizations are people currently involved in addressing ecological or social issues? What have people seen or done lately that inspired them, that gave them hope? Ask them to talk about them, to share their stories.

**Note:** In addition to discussing the questions the option is left open for an on-line research project on any one, or several, topics if you would like that option over the action projects.