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# The big actors and factors impacting the environment

## teacher reference

<b>Capitalist global economic system</b> based on consumerism and maximizing profits	<b>Major governments</b> International and domestic policies and actions including war, diplomacy, and legislation developed by politicians with political and economic interests	<b>Large and powerful corporations</b> exploit natural resources and provide goods and services to drive consumerism
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The following notes are derived from the video **“The Story of Electronics.”** Teachers may reference them while facilitating the student-led discussion on this topic after the breakout session.

<b>Capitalism and economic systems</b>	“Unsustainable linear materials economy”: a five-stage economic model in which corporations extract raw material from natural environments, treat and assemble these materials to produce material goods (often in factories overseas), distribute them to big box stores and locations all over the world so that we can consume them for a short while before they are disposed into large landfills, often in other parts of the world. The five stages are: extraction, production, distribution, consumption, and disposal. Environmental damage occurs in every stage of this process.
<b>Governments</b>	<p>Governments allow corporations to extract thousands of raw materials from natural environments, through mining and extraction. These materials—silicon, lithium, mercury, copper, lead, and gold—are turned into products and treated with PVC, solvents, mercury, and flame retardants, all of which are toxic chemicals causing harm to both humans and the environment.</p> <p>“Outsource manufacturing”: large corporations (e.g. textile, apparel, and electronics) often outsource the assembly and production of their products to foreign countries around the world to minimize cost and maximize profit. In many of these countries, labor and materials are cheaper and often subject to lax health codes and less environmental regulation.</p>



## Corporations

“Designed for the dump”: a strategy employed by corporations in which material goods, such as electronics, are made with short lifespans so as to sell more stuff after consumers dispose of the old stuff. Electronics, especially, are hard to upgrade, easy to break, and impractical to repair. Another word for this is “planned obsolescence,” which is a purposeful strategy in industrial design/economics of producing consumer goods that rapidly become obsolete and so require replacing; this is achieved by frequent changes in design, termination of the supply of spare parts, and the use of nondurable material.

“Moore’s Law”: a prediction that electronics designers can double processor speed every 18 months. Companies turned this law into a profitable business model that has consumers replacing their electronics every 18 months with a new model with twice the processor speed.

“Externalizing true cost of production”: a strategy employed by corporations to minimize costs and maximize profit by forcing negative effects (human and environmental costs) to a third party. In the case of electronics, corporations avoid paying more to make their facilities safe. Instead, employees exposed to toxins at home and abroad pay for it with their health; communities in third world countries pay for it with the safety of their water and air; the environment pays for it with the corruption of its natural habitats in the extraction and disposal stages.

The following notes are derived from the video [“The Story of Bottled Water.”](#) Teachers may reference them while facilitating the student-led discussion on this topic after the breakout session.

## Capitalism & Economic Systems

“Manufactured demand”: a tactic used to scare, seduce, and mislead consumers. Large corporations began by scaring consumers into believing tap water was dangerous to drink. From there, corporations hid the reality of their product by misleading the consumer with pictures and advertisements. Lastly, the corporations misled the consumer by causing them to believe they are being environmentally friendly with their products.



## Governments

Government systems are allowing large corporations to continuously extract oil for use in the production of water bottles. These water bottles have quick turnaround - they take a lot of energy to be produced, only to be tossed away after two-three minutes of use. City governments are accumulating more plastic than they can control so they are resorting to landfills, incinerators, and exporting waste to third world countries.

The United States is underfunding tap water by 24 billion dollars because of the belief in this country that clean water only comes from bottles and not the tap. This is leading to failure in improving our water systems and preventing pollution altogether.

## Corporations

Corporations typically work to beat out competition that exists against their multi-million dollar company. In the case of bottled water, the competition is the basic human right to clean, safe drinking water. Large corporations such as Pepsi lead campaigns to spread the belief that tap water is dangerous, hence they entice people to buy products from their company. Ultimately, they are creating a model that pushes consumers to purchase what they don't need while destroying the resources that are needed the most.

Corporate lobbying: a corporate strategy to influence the actions, policies, and/or decisions of elected government officials using many forms of persuasion. The Plastics Industry Association and the American Progressive Bags Alliance are America's largest lobby groups for plastics. Many corporations that depend on plastics come together and invest millions of dollars into these lobby groups (i.e. plastic advocates), who then pursue law-suits and pro-plastic marketing to ensure that the production of plastic remains legal around the country.