

JOURNEY OF BOTTLED WATER

page
1/8

OBJECTIVE // Participants learn about the journey of bottled water, from source to store, and its contribution to the water crisis. Participants discuss how active global citizenship can make possible clean safe water available for everyone

TIME // 30 minutes

GROUP SIZE // Between six to 60 people (divided into smaller groups of up to 12 participants each)

MATERIALS //

- One ball of yarn/string per group
- One 'Journey of Bottled Water' story (print out) per group
- One set of Water Journey cards per group (printed out and cut to size)

PREPARATION // Print materials and cut out Water Journey cards for each group

ACTIVITY GUIDE

- Divide participants into groups of 12, and have each group form their own circle.
- Provide each circle with a ball of yarn, and have each participant randomly select one of the 12 Water Journey cards. If they are less than 12 in a group, have one or more people take a second card.
- Explain: We are about to explore the trip water takes from source to store in the 'Journey of Bottled Water.' Each card indicates a stage in the voyage and the person holding the card represents that step (for example, the plastic bottling factory). The journey starts with the Water Source.
- Explain: As the story is read aloud, you will pass the ball of yarn to the person representing the next stage in the journey. Its important to hold onto one end of the yarn as you pass the ball along to the next person (you'll probably need both hands for this). This continues until the yarn has been passed to each person through all 12 steps of the journey.
- Ask, "Who is the Water Source?" and read the first stage of the story. When done, ensure the ball of yarn is passed it to the 'Water Source.' Read the second stage of the story and ensure the 'Water Source' passes on the yarn to the 'Multi-national company' while still holding on to one end of the string.
- Close the activity with the debrief questions to generate discussion on bottled water and access to water, as well as the role that active global citizenship plays in making safe, clean water accessible for all.

JOURNEY OF BOTTLED WATER

page
2/8

TELL THE STORY //

If you have just a few participants, read the story aloud so that everyone can hear your voice.

If you have many participants, designate one person per group as the story reader.

JOURNEY OF BOTTLED WATER

- 1** Imagine any part of the world where you can see water flowing. It might be a stream or a river, a well or a tap. Wherever and however you imagine this flowing water, this is where the journey begins.

The journey begins with the WATER SOURCE.

- 2** This water source has recently been bought up by a multi-national bottled water company, like Coca-cola or Pepsi. What that really means is the land has been bought where the lake or the spring exists. Now the multi-national will start removing the water, as they will use it to manufacture and sell bottled water. The bottled water company has proudly announced that they plan to make big profits from the sale of bottled water. From now on, the company says, "Tap water should be used just for washing clothes and taking showers."

Since the bottled water company has purchased the land, local people have now lost access to their water source.

The water source makes its way into the hands of the MULTI-NATIONAL COMPANY.

- 3** As the multi-national company hauls the water out from the source, the water is funneled into a large, heavy truck. This truck will burn litres and litres of gasoline in order to ship this water to its next destination where it will undergo transferring and bottling.

This part of the journey is long, as the truck now travel hundreds of kilometres. In fact, it travels across several countries and the ocean by container ship!

JOURNEY OF BOTTLED WATER

page
3/8

The water moves from the multi-national company to TRUCK and SHIP TRANSPORT.

NB: At this point, the yarn should be connecting the person representing the 'Water source' to the person representing the 'Multi-national company', to the person representing 'Truck and Ship Transport'.

4

After reaching land, the container is loaded onto a new truck, which takes the water to its next destination - the factory where they produce plastic bottles.

Before the factory can proceed, it needs petroleum (oil) to be mined (from the ground or the ocean), and refined, so it can be made into plastic bottles. To manufacture the bottles, workers use chemicals to transform the oil into polyethylene plastic, which releases toxins into the air, and creates waste water. All of these steps go towards the production of plastic bottles containing the water extracted from the original source.

The amount of oil and energy Americans use to make plastic water bottles could fuel over a million cars every year!

Truck and ship transport gives way to MAKING THE PLASTIC BOTTLES.

5

Upon arrival to the bottled water factory, the water from the truck is channelled through a filtration process. To move the water from the truck through to the filters, the factory requires an uninterrupted supply of electricity, which is something the local utility structure cannot always support. So the factory often supplies its own electricity, using three big generators running on diesel fuel.

Now the costs are adding up, but for whom? Guess how much does the multi-national company actually pay for the water? (Answer: Only about \$0.13 for three (3) million litres of water!)

JOURNEY OF BOTTLED WATER

page
4/8

At the factory, the water is now funnelled into plastic bottles, labelled and sealed with another kind of plastic.

With the bottles made, the WATER GOES INTO PLASTIC BOTTLES.

6

With the plastic water bottles ready to go, they are put in 12- packs with cardboard bases, and each pack is wrapped in heavy plastic and placed on a wooden pallet. Once full, each pallet is wrapped in more plastic and moved to the shipping department with a forklift. From there, the water is loaded onto another truck and travels from the bottling factory by sea or by train and truck to their next destination. During the shipping process, the outside temperatures range from hot to cold.

When the water bottles arrive, they are unloaded into a warehouse where they will sit until they are moved to their next destination. They may sit there for a while, sometimes even years.

The water now moves to the BOTTLED WATER WAREHOUSE.

7

An order has come through to the warehouse from a big box supermarket, so a forklift now lifts a pallet of water onto another diesel-fueled truck at the bottled water warehouse, so it can hopefully be sold.

The water is now transported by TRUCK TO STORE.

8

After reaching the store, the water gets unwrapped from its packaging and moved onto the shelves for individual sale. The multi-national company also spends some money marketing their product; \$0.30 from the cost of bottled water is spent on magazines ads, billboards, and celebrity endorsements.

With consumers paying from \$1.50 to \$4.00 per bottle, the company makes a huge profit on the \$0.13 they originally paid for three (3) million litres of water!

The journey passes to the LOCAL STORE.

JOURNEY OF BOTTLED WATER

page
5/8

9

At the local store, store staff decide to refrigerate the bottled water (using more energy) so it looks more enticing and refreshing for customers.

People like you and me, customers, look at the label and think: 'It's convenient. It looks good. Natural spring water? Probably a lot of health benefits there. Maybe it tastes better than tap water? I'm a bit thirsty too.'

Someone in the store picks up a bottle, gives it to the cashier and pulls \$2.50 from their pocket to pay.

That water in the bottle has travelled such a great distance, but this part of the journey is probably the shortest of them all. The water will be consumed within just a few seconds or minutes.

The journey reaches the **CONSUMER**.

10

After the consumer purchases and drinks the water, they discard the plastic bottle. If they throw it in the garbage can, it will end up like 80% of all the world's plastic bottles - either in a landfill or in an incinerator where it will be burned and release many toxins into the air.

If the consumer throws the plastic bottle into the recycling bin, it will likely be down-cycled into something later sold at the dollar store, turning the plastic into a lower quality product that will be chucked later on. Alternatively, the bottle may be shipped overseas to another country, like India, only to end up in a gigantic mountain of plastic bottles, like those just outside Chennai.

Our journey continues, with the bottle **DOWN-CYCLED** or shipped to **INDIA**.

11

In either case, this stage of the journey requires transportation to ship the discarded bottle to its next destination. After traveling hundreds of kilometres, the bottle is dumped into a pile of thousands of other bottles, and sits between a river and a land fill, where it could remain in tact for up to 1,000 years. Between now and then, the bottle could get moved in several more directions, but for now, it just sits, and it sits, and it sits.

Our journey arrives in the **LANDFILL SITE** by the river.

JOURNEY OF BOTTLED WATER

page
6/8

12

As the bottle sits near the river, it is spotted by a child nearby. The child and their family scrapes by on less than \$1.25 a day, as do 36% of city inhabitants. Yesterday their child's family spent their entire day's earnings on clean drinking water from another water company. The child contemplates picking up the empty plastic bottle and filling it with water from the river.

At this stage of the journey, the plastic bottle is at a crossroads of its own cause and effect, forcing the child to decide between purchasing water again (spending the remainder of the family's daily income), or filling up the old bottle from the river beside the land fill and risking exposure to water-borne diseases. The child fills the bottle with river water.

Our journey proceeds to WATER-BORNE DISEASES.

13

In the landfill site, thousands of other plastic bottles remain untouched for decades. After a LONG time (a few centuries), the plastic begins breaking down - and its toxins pollute the earth, the surrounding ecosystems and local people's water sources - like the one from where this journey began.

**Our journey finds its way back to the WATER SOURCE,
the beginning and the end of this story.**

Ask participants to step back so the web is taut.

Leader:

"What happens if we do not want to support this system?
Can we stop it? Can we change it?"

"What if we remove the consumer from the web?
CONSUMER, let go of the string."

"What if we protect the water source?
WATER SOURCE, let go of the yarn. What happens?"

JOURNEY OF BOTTLED WATER

page
7/8

DEBRIEF AND NEXT STEPS //

The game demonstrates one of the many reasons why we want to create bottled water free zones in our school, parishes and communities.

“In the U.S. and Canada, for the most part, we have strong, safe public water systems. But in much of the world, this is not the case. This doesn’t mean that in these countries bottled water is the solution, because it’s not. It means we need ever-increasing efforts to understand the root causes of the world’s drinking water crisis, and efforts to beat the crisis that are based in human rights, care for the environment, and the common good”.

Taken from the Story of Bottled Water, watch it at storyofstuff.org/bottledwater

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS //

- What water source did you imagine at the beginning of the story and why?
- Where along the journey can the negative aspects be prevented and/or avoided?
- How is bottled water contributing to the water crises?
- How we can personally make a difference in the world’s water crises?
- Ask participants if they know about the different water sources that bottled water companies are using (eg. Canadian springs, filtered Toronto tap water). Does bottled water all come from pristine glaciers? (A third of all bottled water in North America actually comes from the tap, including Dasani).
- Remind participants: The good thing is that when we understand the journey of bottled water and the system of the bottled water industry; we can start to turn problems into solutions!
- Share success stories of how change is happening (For instance, people are saying no to the privatization of water; Canadians are signing the Development and Peace pledge and committing to going bottled water free in their lives; schools, parishes and institutions are creating Bottled Water Free Zones).

JOURNEY OF BOTTLED WATER

page
8/8

WATER JOURNEY CARDS

 WATER SOURCE	MULTI-NATIONAL COMPANY	TRUCK & SHIP TRANSPORT
MAKING THE PLASTIC BOTTLES	WATER INTO PLASTIC BOTTLES	BOTTLED WATER WAREHOUSE
TRUCK TO STORE	THE LOCAL STORE	THE CONSUMER
DOWN-CYCLED / SHIPPED TO INDIA	LANDFILL BY THE RIVER	WATER-BORNE DISEASES 