Escape Rooms for Green Entrepreneurship

PEDAGOGICAL SEQUENCE

A Shopping Spree to the New GreenMall



KEY TOPICS

sustainability | greenwashing | social washing

Target group: learners aged 16+
Duration: 4 sessions (approx. 45 - 60 minutes each)

Introduction

In an age where marketing often disguises unsustainable practices behind appealing green slogans, it is critical for young people to develop the tools to navigate and question what they consume. This learning path is designed to equip learners aged 16+ with the knowledge and critical thinking skills needed to recognize ethical business practices, identify greenwashing and socialwashing and evaluate sustainability claims across the fashion and food industries.

The scenario is a preparatory stage to a dynamic, immersive experience, “A Shopping Spree to the New GreenMall”, where learners take on investigative roles to apply their learning in a real-world simulation. Through four sessions, participants will move from foundational understanding to active inquiry, ending with a reflective assessment that reinforces lifelong critical consumer habits.

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Overview of the pedagogical sequence

SESSION	THEME	MAIN FOCUS	KEY METHODS
1	Sustainability & ethical business	Introduction to key concepts & climate impact	Lecture, group discussion, case study
2	Greenwhasing & social washing	Marketing manipulation, label literacy	Ad analysis, interactive quiz
3	Sector investigations	Industry-specific green claims	Comparative tasks
4	Escape briefing & role training	Review, team prep, gameplay roles	Quiz, mock investigation
5 (opt.)	Post-escape reflection	Consolidation of knowledge & application	Report, journaling, oral discussion



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SESSION 1: Understanding sustainability & ethical business

Focus

Introduce basic concepts of sustainability and ethical business to build foundation.

Learning outcomes

- Define sustainability and explain its relevance to consumer choices
- Identify key features of ethical companies (e.g. fair labor, eco-friendly materials, transparency)

Key concepts, definitions and examples

Sustainability in consumer choices

Sustainability is the idea of meeting current needs without harming the ability of future generations to meet theirs, by balancing environmental, social and economic concerns. In consumer choices, sustainability matters because what people buy affects resource use, pollution and production practices, meaning informed purchasing decisions can help reduce environmental harm and support more responsible businesses.

Good and bad fabrics

Good fabrics include natural fibers like organic cotton, linen, hemp, wool, which are more durable and biodegradable, or recycled materials, which are made from reused resources and textile waste. Fabrics to limit: Polyester is fossil-fuel-based, non-biodegradable and releases microfibres during washing. Nylon also depends on fossil fuels, requires energy-intensive production and sheds microfibres. Acrylic releases plastic fibres, is rarely recycled and may have a short useful life because it pills easily. Blended synthetic fabrics are particularly difficult to recycle.

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Supply chain

The supply chain refers to all the stages involved in bringing a fabric from raw material to the consumer, including extraction, production, transport, retail, use and disposal.

Fabric choices matter at each step: sustainable materials tend to reduce resource use and pollution along the chain, while synthetic fabrics rely on fossil fuels and energy-intensive processes that increase environmental impact from start to finish.

Fair trade marks

Fair trade marks are labels placed on products to show that they meet specific social, environmental, and economic standards throughout the supply chain. They indicate producers, often farmers or workers in low-income regions, receive fair pay, work under safe conditions, and that child or forced labor is prohibited. For consumers, fair trade marks signal that a product supports more ethical and transparent trade practices, helping reduce exploitation while promoting sustainable livelihoods.

Activities

- Introduce the key concepts with a mini-lecture
- Compare 2 brands with evidence to be considered ethical/ unethical
- Learners discuss in pairs before classroom brainstorming
- Small groups build a 5-point checklist: “What makes a business ethical?

Evaluation

Exit slip: “3 traits of an ethical business”

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SESSION 2: Spotting greenwashing & socialwashing

Focus

Understand deceptive marketing practices and how to identify them

Learning outcomes

- Define greenwashing and socialwashing
- Identify common marketing tricks and vague claims
- Recognize authentic vs fake sustainability labels

Key concepts, definitions and examples

Greenwashing

Greenwashing uses vague, selective or unsupported claims to make a product appear more sustainable than it really is. For example, a brand may promote recycled packaging while hiding harmful materials or production practices.

Socialwashing

Socialwashing refers to the practice of presenting a product or brand as socially responsible or ethical without meaningful action behind the claims. For example, a company may highlight support for workers or communities in its marketing while failing to ensure fair wages, safe working conditions or genuine respect for labor rights throughout its supply chain, giving consumers a false impression of social responsibility.

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Marketing tricks

Common marketing tricks used in greenwashing or socialwashing include using vague terms such as “eco-friendly,” “natural,” or “clean” without clear definitions or proof and nature-themed imagery (green colors, leaves, earth symbols) to suggest sustainability. Brands may also highlight one small positive action (for example, recyclable packaging) while ignoring larger environmental or social impacts, create fake or self-designed labels that look like certifications, or promote emotional messages about “caring” or “ethical values” without transparent evidence.

Activities

- Introduce the key concepts
- Brainstorm on an example label: green or greenwashed?
- Learners sort real vs fake or weak eco-labels using cards with label images
- Play an advertising video with AI-manipulated content: what is true, what is fake?
- Discuss in a group what makes a fashion brand trustworthy
- Divide group into smaller ones; each groupe evaluates an ad using a worksheet: - Are claims backed by facts?
  - Is it mostly image-based?
  - Are there certifications?

Evaluation

Written reflection:
“Which brand do you suspect of greenwashing now and why?”

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SESSION 3: Sector investigations

Focus

Explore green claims across fashion and food industry

Learning outcomes

- Assess credibility of product claims using set criteria
- Compare sustainable practices between products and brands
- Use eco-labels and critical analysis to make ethical choices

Activities

Fashion

- Analyze fake brand T-shirts with tags, pricing and posters
- Decide: fast or slow fashion?
- Identify red flags: vague slogans, synthetic fabrics, hidden supply chains

Food

- Match real and fake fair trade labels to food products or samples
- Use a scoring grid for environmental/social standards
- Discuss: Can you "taste" the difference?

Evaluation

Group worksheet: for one product, explain: ethical or greenwashed? Why?

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SESSION 4: Escape room briefing & role training

Focus

Prepare for gameplay, reinforce critical thinking and assign roles

Learning outcomes

- Recall sustainability vocabulary and evaluation techniques
- Prepare to role-play as investigative thinkers
- Develop strategies for collaboration and observation

Activities

- Quiz review of labels, slogans, fast vs slow fashion, etc.
- Brief analysis of a product tag together: Is it greenwashed?
- Groups give verdicts and support with evidence
- Role briefing: Introduce role badges (investigators, infiltrators)
- Assign team roles (note-taker, spokesperson)
- Strategize how to spot fake claims and collect proof

Evaluation

Completed analysis worksheet (graded by rubric)
Observation of strategic thinking and collaboration

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SESSION 5: Post-game debrief & reflection

Focus

Consolidate knowledge, reflect on consumer responsibility

Learning outcomes

- Justify greenwashing assessments with evidence
- Reflect on personal consumption
- Understand how to transfer knowledge to real-world decisions

Activities

Final verdict report

- Rate each shop: ethical or greenwashing?
- Vote for infiltrators with explanations
- Support with stamps and clues

Journal entry

Prompt examples:

- “What did you find most surprising?”
- “What will you now look for when shopping?”
- “How did your team collaborate under pressure?”

Circle discussion

- Share one learning and one action step
- Optional:”Would you trust the GreenMall brand?”

Evaluation

Final report sheet: completed with evidence
Journal: assessed for reflection and clarity
Discussion: teacher observation of insight and engagement

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

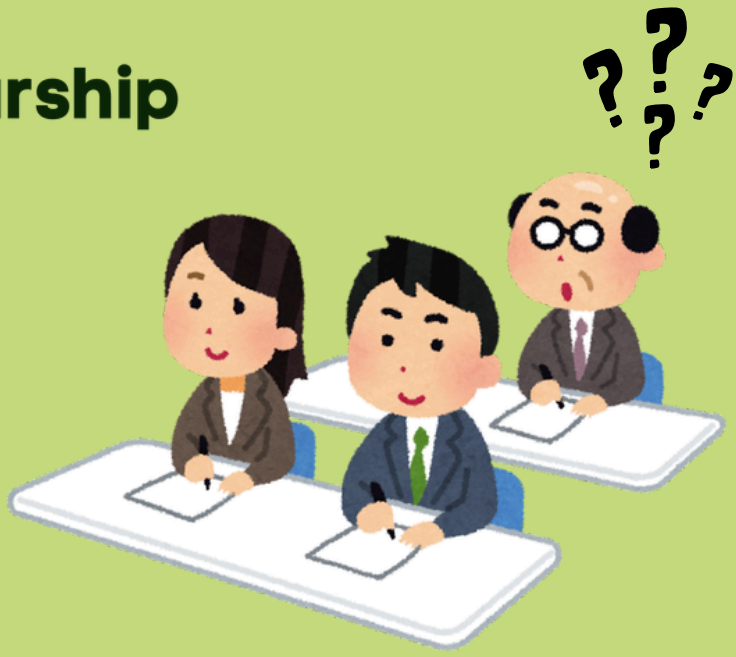
Several independent websites and databases help consumers verify sustainability and ethical labels by explaining what certifications really mean and whether they are credible. These platforms provide information on standards, auditing processes and common misleading claims.

For example, Fairtrade International explains fair trade criteria and certified products, the EU Ecolabel details environmental standards for products sold in Europe, and B Lab provides transparency on companies certified as B Corporations. Using such sites helps consumers distinguish trustworthy labels from marketing-driven or vague claims.

Selected sources from which to acquire additional resources for this pedagogical sequence (e.g. fair trade marks, labels)
https://www.ecolabelindex.com/ecolabels/
https://www.consumerreports.org/food-labels/seals-and-claims/
https://www.fairtrade.net/en.html

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