

## Lesson Plan: Capitalism and Climate Change

A teacher-contributed lesson plan by Dr. Nupurnima Yadav, Sri Venkateswara College (University of Delhi), India.

As an **undergraduate Social Sciences** teacher, you can use this set of computer-based tools to help you in teaching about **Capitalism, Capitalist Modes of Production, History of Capitalism, Consumerism, Materials Economy** and its **effect on climate change**.

Students will learn about the history of capitalism- the factors that led to the creation of a capitalist society and be able to describe the various aspects of a capitalist economy. They will learn how capitalist modes of production have driven consumerism in societies and contributed to a large extent to climate change.

Thus, the use of this lesson plan allows you to integrate the teaching of a climate science topic with a core topic in **Social Sciences**.

Use this lesson plan to help your students find answers to:

- What is capitalism?
- Describe the global rise of a capitalist society.
- What are capitalist modes of production?
- What is a materials economy and how does it impact consumption patterns?
- How is consumerism increasingly being linked to cultural and social identities?
- How has capitalism affected climate change?

### About the Lesson Plan

**Grade Level:** Undergraduate

**Discipline:** Social Sciences

**Topic(s) in Discipline:** Capitalism, Capitalist Modes of Production, Rise of Capitalism, Consumerism, Materials Economy, Commodification, Production of Capital

**Climate Topic:** Climate and the Anthroposphere

**Location:** Global

**Access:** Online, Offline

**Language(s):** English

**Approximate Time Required:** 80-90 min

## 1 Contents

### 1. Reading (~40 min)

A reading that describes the history of capitalism and the capitalist modes of production.

This can be accessed at:

<https://libcom.org/files/immanuel-wallerstein-historical-capitalism.pdf> (only 'Introduction' and the 1<sup>st</sup> chapter, till pg. 43)

## 2. Video micro-lecture (~22 min)

A micro-lecture that describes the linear production and consumption pattern of a capitalist society (United States) that has led to the exploitation of Earth's finite natural resources.

This can be accessed at:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=8&v=9GorqroigqM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=8&v=9GorqroigqM)

## 3. Reading (~25 min)

A reading that describes the link between a capitalist/consumer economy and climate change.

This can be accessed at:

<https://academiccommons.columbia.edu/doi/10.7916/D86H4H4K>

## 4. Suggested questions/assignments for learning evaluation

- What is capitalism?
- Describe the global rise of a capitalist society.
- What are capitalist modes of production?
- What is a materials economy and how does it impact consumption patterns?
- How is consumerism increasingly being linked to cultural and social identities?
- How has capitalism affected climate change?

## 2 Step-by-step User Guide

Here is a step-by-step guide to using this lesson plan in the classroom/laboratory. We have suggested these steps as a possible plan of action. You may customize the lesson plan according to your preferences and requirements.

### 1. Topic introduction and discussion

Use the reading, '[Historical Capitalism with Capitalist Civilization](#)' (only 'Introduction' and the 1<sup>st</sup> chapter, till pg. 43), by Immanuel Wallerstein to introduce the topic of capitalism, explain the ideology of capitalism, and describe its historical development in societies. Explain how capitalism has always existed as a historical social process. Describe how commodification of processes led to the rise in capitalism. Use the reading to describe different modes of capitalist production such as unequal exchange of goods and vertical integration of processes. Discuss the factors involved, such as availability of labor, that influence the capitalist mode of production. Emphasize on the role of the proletariat in the building of the capital. Finally, describe how a feudal yet egalitarian European society in the 15<sup>th</sup> century was transformed by the 17<sup>th</sup> century, with the establishment of a capitalist society. Discuss the emerging of capitalism in the first industrialized nation- Britain- alongside the agrarian and industrial revolutions. Explain how social and economic developments led to the rise of capitalism in Britain- transformation from a feudal to a wage-labor society.

This can be accessed at:

<https://libcom.org/files/immanuel-wallerstein-historical-capitalism.pdf> (only the Introduction and 1<sup>st</sup> chapter, till pg. 43)

### 2. Extend the understanding

Play the video, '[The Story of Stuff](#)', by Annie Leonard to describe how capitalism leads to a consumerist society. Explain how commodification of the capital leads to a materials economy. Use the video to describe consumerism and to show how it is linked to social and cultural identities of nations. Explain how the linear production and consumption pattern of the United States that has led to several environmental and social issues.

Describe how the production and consumption of goods release large amounts of greenhouse gases and contribute significantly to climate change.

This video can be accessed at:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=8&v=9GorqroigqM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=8&v=9GorqroigqM)

### 3. Discuss how capitalism affects climate change

Use the reading, '[Climate Change and Capitalism](#)', by Jonathan T. Park, University of Utah, to discuss the link between capitalism and climate change. Explain how the consumer ideology in a capitalist society results in the overproduction and overconsumption of goods. Discuss the implications of this: exploitation of natural resources, high energy expenditure, excess waste production and extensive environmental degradation due to pollution. Emphasize that capitalist modes of production require large scale burning of fossil fuels to meet energy requirements, and these in turn contribute towards global warming. Thus, discuss with your students how the capitalist model can be modified for a sustainable future: preservation of natural resources and mitigating climate change.

This can be accessed at:

<https://academiccommons.columbia.edu/doi/10.7916/D86H4H4K>

### 4. Questions/Assignments

Use the tools and the concepts learned so far to discuss and determine answers to the following questions:

- What is capitalism?
- Describe the global rise of a capitalist society.
- What are capitalist modes of production?
- What is a materials economy and how does it impact consumption patterns?
- How is consumerism increasingly being linked to cultural and social identities?
- How has capitalism affected climate change?

## 3 Learning Outcomes

The tools in this lesson plan will enable students to:

- explain the concepts of capitalism and capitalist modes of production
- describe the rise of capitalism and a materials economy
- discuss the various factors and aspects of a capitalist society
- explain how social and cultural identities are increasingly linked to consumerism
- describe the link between capitalism and climate change

## 4 Additional Resources

If you or your students would like to explore the topic further, this additional resource will be useful.

### 1. Reading

A textbook reading, 'Forces, Relations and Modes of Production' by Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) on the theory of Capitalist Production outlined by Karl Marx.

This can be accessed at:

<http://egyankosh.ac.in/bitstream/123456789/18929/1/Unit-%207.pdf>

## 5 Credits/Copyrights

All the teaching tools in our collated list are owned by the corresponding creators/authors/organizations as listed on their websites. Please view the individual copyright and ownership details for each tool by following the individual links provided. We have selected and analyzed the tools that align with the overall objective of our project and have provided the corresponding links. We do not claim ownership of or responsibility/liability for any of the listed tools.

### 1. Reading; “Historical Capitalism with Capitalist Civilization”

Authored by [Immanuel Wallerstein](#). Provided by [libcom.org](#).

### 2. Video micro-lecture; “The Story of Stuff”

Presented by Annie Leonard. Provided by [The Story of Stuff Project](#).

### 3. Reading, “Climate Change and Capitalism”

Authored by Jonathan T. Park, University of Utah. Provided by [Columbia University Academic Commons](#).

### 4. Additional Resources

Reading, “Forces, Relations and Modes of Production”, provided by [Indira Gandhi National Open University \(IGNOU\)](#).