Period products: teacher notes

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The UK produces 200,000 tonnes of period product waste per year[1] and globally this number is expected to increase as disposable period products are more widely available around the world. In some countries there is limited information available about period products and across the globe people are uncomfortable talking about this topic.

Depending on the group of learners, you may wish to brief or warn them about the topic you are going to discuss, but this may affect the blind box activity. Learners will have already studied the menstrual cycle as part of the reproduction topic at 11–14.

Learners will work in groups to complete a life-cycle assessment (LCA) for three period products using the information provided in the accompanying sheets. Consideration should be given to appropriate groupings to ensure learners are not uncomfortable.

Equipment for each group:

- Tray containing some common hygiene products (4–6 products or empty packaging)
- Opaque box (such as a shoe box wrapped in black sugar paper) with a hand size hole cut in it
- Wrapped tampon
- Plastic sanitary pad
- A3 LCA table
- Set of information sheets

Demo equipment:

- Menstrual cup

Starter activity

You will need:

- A tray of hygiene products (this could be empty packaging)
  Some suggestions:
  - Toothpaste tube
  - Deodorant can
  - Shampoo and conditioner bottles
  - Hand soap
  - Moisturiser
  - Hand cream

Activity

1. List the hygiene products that you use daily.
2. Compare your list to the tray on your table. Are there any products that you do or don't use?
3. Does everyone use the same number of products?
4. Group the items based on how much an environmental impact you think each object has.
5. Ask learners to give feedback on how they came up with their decisions.

1. S. Garikipati, 2020, Thousands of women have run out of tampons under lockdown –time to talk about sustainable period products, *ZME Science,* https://www.zmescience.com/science/women-sustainable-menstrual-products-crisis-pandemic/ (Accessed January 2021).

Activity 1: blind-box thinking

You will need*:

- 8 opaque boxes (such as a shoe box wrapped in black sugar paper) with a hand size hole cut in them
- 8 wrapped tampons
- 8 plastic sanitary pads
- 1 menstrual cup (optional)

*Based on a class of 30 learners with one box for each group.

In the box for each group there should be a sealed tampon and a sanitary pad. Learners are not allowed to open the box or remove the sealed items from their packaging. One person from the group must put their hand into the box and describe what the product feels like to the rest of the group. The group should attempt to guess what the product is and what it is used for.

You could also pass a menstrual cup around the classroom after the groups have identified the products in the black box.

This activity generates good discussion and helps to break down some of the stigma around talking about period products. You know your group best, so groupings are important here.

Activity 2: life-cycle assessment activity

You will need:

- 1 A3 LCA table per group
- 1 set of information sheets per group

Learners work as a group to complete the life-cycle assessment table using the information sheets about the three products. You could give the stages independent from the titles and have students first put the stages for each product in the correct order if wanted. Students need to award each product a score out of 5, based on how much impact the product has on the environment.

Following the activity invite the groups to feedback or discuss the activity:

- Which product would they would recommend and why?
- Why might it be difficult to complete an LCA for a product?
- Did you have any difficulty reaching a judgement?
- How do we overcome issues with separating facts and opinions when assessing products?

Challenge

Where might we be able to make a stage of the life cycle more sustainable?

Learners could also be asked to identify ways in which some of the products could be made more sustainable.

For example, what other materials could be used instead of using plastics? Are there alternatives to using applicators? What other products are there available? (Washable sanitary pads, period pants etc.)