

‘What the Car Means to Me’

Learning Outcomes

- Students will be aware of their personal perception of car ownership and will be able to distinguish between their aspirations and reality
- Students will have a broad idea of the costs of car ownership and will have considered ways of meeting those costs
- Pupils will have an awareness of the power of advertising and that ‘subliminal’ messages may be embedded in an advert

Background Information

It will not be long now before the students of Year 11 will be booking their driving lessons and thinking about getting a car. The activities in this lesson plan are designed to encourage students to discuss a variety of issues related to car ownership. They will be able to challenge driver behaviour and will have had the opportunity to discuss with their peers the perception of the car as an extension to the owner’s personality. They will have explored their own attitudes towards it, thought about the image it creates for them and the way it can affect their lives and independence.

They will also have thought about the costs involved in owning a car and considered how they are going to finance the whole ‘learning to drive’ process, from driving lessons to purchasing, maintaining and running a car.



Part 1: Behaviour Questionnaire

By completing this activity students will gain an understanding of the responsibility of being a driver – what behaviours have they observed in other drivers? – what will they do when they are the driver? – what attitudes do they already have towards aspects of driving such as speed, and other road-users such as older people?

Discuss some of the conflicting statements and how they answered them.
(e.g. 2-22; 3-12; 5-17; 6-21; 7-15; 8-11; 9-14; 10-3; 13-1; 18-21; 20-26; 22-25; 23-24)

Try to let the students discuss all these issues from personal experience rather than what you know and can tell them as a driver, and what you know the Highway Code or the law says – but it would be a good idea to finish the session by looking at a Highway Code - just to see how vast a rule-book it is! After all, by the time they take their test they will have to know their Highway Code thoroughly and that will only be about 1 year away now!

Part 2: What the Car Means to Me

Try to guide the discussion rather than lead it and encourage the students to discuss the advantages and disadvantages for both them as an individual and for society.

Encourage them to think about how being able to drive and having access to a car will affect their way and quality of life, especially in the near future. It is easy to say that they will be able to use their parent’s car when they need to, but what if they move away from home to University or for work? Do they have access to good public transport? Would they be able to get to work without a car, especially if they do shift or night work?

What about social issues such as ‘being green’, sustainability, diminishing resources, congestion, pollution, global warming? Are their opinions changing on these issues, the closer they get to owning a car? How will they balance any beliefs about sustainable transport against their personal need to have a car?

Think about, then discuss with the students, your own situation. Maybe you don’t have a car – you ride a bike to school. Or maybe, despite having concerns about the environment, you have to use your car – to maybe drop your children off at school/nursery before coming to work, or because you have too much to carry to walk or use public transport, or you live in a rural area without public transport, or a long way from the school. Would you still be able to work at the school if you didn’t have a car? Would you find any work closer to home?

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Part 3: How Much is it Going to Cost Me?

A You could say 'how long is a piece of string'? BUT students deserve to have some idea, however approximate, of the costs of car ownership. It is likely that a car is the biggest expense they have ever had. (And probably the biggest responsibility!) They need to be aware of this so that they can start saving towards it and so that they understand that it isn't a 'one-off' purchase there are ongoing costs and several elements that are 'per annum'.

Most of them will be fully aware that it is going to 'cost a lot' but many will push this to the back of their minds, as although it is in the very near future, at this age a year can also seem a very long time away (compare with handing in assignments deadlines are months/weeks away – plenty of time!). Discuss the costs (see below) is it worth cutting corners on any of them? Why/why not?

They probably won't believe you when you tell them that, on average, it takes about 47 lessons to pass the test. But it is true! 47 lessons at an average of £24 per lesson is £1,128.00. As recommended by the DSA (Driving Standards Agency). Add on costs of fuel, tyres etc for practice sessions. The cost of the Theory Test is £23 and for the Driving Test it is £62 weekdays and £75 at Weekends and Bank Holidays.



The students should research the following costs under the headings '**Standing Charges**' (basic costs incurred just keeping the vehicle ready for use on the road) and '**Running Costs**' (those that depend directly on using the vehicle):

- Purchase of car (Standing)
- Depreciation (Standing)
- Road tax (Standing)
- Insurance including Breakdown Insurance (Standing)
- MOT (Standing)
- Maintenance, servicing and repair (Running)
- Parking and tolls (Running)
- Tyres (Running)
- Fuel, oil, windscreen wash, etc (Running)

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Part 4: Car Adverts

Make sure the students have collected a good variety of car adverts – this exercise on its own may reveal something about car advertising before you even start the session – check that they have some 'ordinary' cars amongst the collection – not just Porsches, BMWs, Ferraris, etc but ads for cars that they themselves might drive or buy such as Fiestas, Peugeots, Puntos etc.

In your discussions explore the way in which the car adverts influence our beliefs (such as our driving skills) or sell us a dream.

We are bombarded with messages from the car industry. This can lead us to drive with excess belief in both our car and our own driving skills. They are experts at using exciting images that grab our attention. Even if we are not bothered about buying a car, we will have been subjected to these images either on TV or in magazines.

Encourage the students to look for any indirect or even 'subliminal' messages in the adverts.

Look at the setting e.g. a building site (car is tough and rugged); mountain or beach landscape (car is edgy, wild); car is in photographic studio pictured against folds of plush material (car is romantic, sensuous and perfect like a model)

Look at the angle of the picture, or is it slightly flattened – (makes the car look sportier) Is there a blurred background (makes the car look fast)

What about the words and slogans – e.g. 'Designed to move you'; 'Feel the sky, rule the road' 'Quickest off the Marque'; 'Rally inspired'

Ask the students 'Do safety features sell cars?'



This might lead to a discussion on some of the new vehicle technology. Is this something they should consider when buying their first car, particularly as they will be novice, inexperienced drivers? Would features such as satellite navigation, ABS (anti-lock braking system), ESC (electronic stability control), parking sensors, remote locking, warning features etc be something that would influence their choice of car?

Finally:

You could finish off by asking the students to make a prioritised list of their personal parameters for buying their car. This might include:

- Cost – initial and running
- Cost of insurance
- Image required/desired
- Purpose for use
- Safety features
- 'Green' issues
- Others

