

5.1

Wants and Needs: Background Information

Have you ever wondered what it was like “in the good old days”? What about the not-so-good old days? How have times changed, and how have they stayed the same? How did people survive without our modern conveniences?

For most of human history, people have lived quite differently than we do today in the industrialized nations. As people developed different sources of energy and invented various machines, their lives changed. Today, in our country, most of us don’t have to find firewood or carry water from a stream to cook a simple meal. Most of us have electricity and electrical appliances. We have cars, telephones, computers, televisions, hair dryers, and microwave ovens. We use and discard paper napkins, aluminum cans, and plastic bottles and bags without thinking about it.

But are these appliances and other objects really needed, or are they conveniences that many of us want? What are our real needs?

Our physical needs include food, water, space, and shelter. We also have needs such as love, friendship, and a feeling of value and importance.

Many of the things that we take for granted or consider necessities have become common only in recent years. Many were invented only in the last forty years or so. If these things are such recent inventions, they must not really be necessities. Rather, they are things to which we have become accustomed, and that eventually come to seem as if we need them. It is important to keep these “needs” in perspective. What are our alternatives? What would we do without them? What prices do we pay for them, including the price that our environment pays for their production and use? What did people do before television? Before hair dryers? Were they all bored, unattractive social misfits?

Does it make sense to work twenty hours to pay for an appliance that will save us some work, and then pay more money and spend more time to exercise at a gym? Making and using electrical appliances takes energy and materials and generates air and water pollution. Our labor-saving devices cost us money, for which we labor. We work for money with which to buy them, operate them, and repair them. Are they worth it?

Do we buy things because they are really important, needed, or useful? Or do we buy things because the advertising agencies and manufacturers sell them to us? Are we healthier or happier because of our “things”?

It is interesting to think about the fact that many people leave their home and their “things” when they have a chance for a vacation. Many even go camping or backpacking and really leave the “modern conveniences” behind. They work fifty weeks a year so that they can get away from their things for two weeks!

Maybe we should all think carefully about what we really want out of our lives and what we really need. Which is more valuable to you, some time to relax with friends or the latest gadget or fashions? Which do you need more, clean air and water, or more manufacturing plants, trucks, and oil wells? Are roads and shopping malls more important than open spaces and wilderness?

5.2

Wants and Needs: Instructions and Data

When you interview a senior citizen, here are some things to keep in mind:

1. Have your interview planned thoroughly. Don't waste the person's time (and yours). Know who is going to do and say what, but don't get so tied to a plan that you don't allow the person being interviewed to talk freely.
2. Talk directly to the person whom you are interviewing.
3. Speak clearly. Be aware of any hearing difficulty.
4. If you can have a tape recorder or a VCR available, it will make it easier to remember what was said and relieve you of the task of taking notes.
5. Allow the person to tell stories and just talk about his or her experiences.
6. As the person talks, look for questions that build on what he or she says.
7. Except for when completing the Data table, try to avoid short-answer, yes-or-no type questions. Try to ask "open-ended" questions that allow and encourage the person to tell his or her story.

For example:

Rather than: "Did you like living here when you were a child?" (closed . . . yes or no answer)

Ask: "What was it like to be a child living here?" (open-ended . . . will tell you much more)

Rather than: "Did you have a television when you were a teenager?"

Ask: "What did you do for entertainment when you were a teenager?"

As part of your interview, but not the whole thing, you should find out whether the person had the things listed on the Data table. If not, what was used instead?

Also find out if the person did the things listed. If not, what did he or she do that was similar or filled the same want or need?

Be sure to assure the person that you aren't trying to pry into his or her personal life. You are just trying to find out what it was like when the person was your age. If he or she seems at all touchy about a question, move on to another one.

Person interviewed: _____ Age: _____ Year born: _____

Where did the person live as a teenager? _____

Was it a city or country area? (describe) _____

Activity 5.2: Wants and Needs (Continued)

Did He or She Have the Following Appliances or Objects?		
Yes or No?		If Not, What Was Used Instead?
Automobile		
Television		
VCR		
Radio		
Space heater		
Air conditioning		
Refrigerator		
Freezer		
Electric lights		
Food processor		
Microwave oven		
Clothes dryer		
Hair dryer		
Dishwasher		
Paper towels		
Paper napkins		
Paper plates		
Disposable razors		
Aluminum cans		
Hair spray		
Computer		

Activity 5.2: Wants and Needs (Continued)

**Did He or She Do the Following Things?
Have the Person Describe His or Her Activities.**

Go to church _____

Go to parties _____

Drive around in cars _____

Play video games _____

Play board games or card games _____

Read for pleasure _____

Play sports _____

Go to school _____

Do chores _____

Have a job outside the home _____

Date _____

Use public transportation _____

5.3

Wants and Needs: Questions

1. What is the difference between a want and a need?

2. List the true needs that each of us has.

3. Besides money, what costs do we incur with the use of each of the following:
 - a. Television _____
 - b. Automobiles _____
 - c. Power lawn mowers _____
 - d. Plastic bags _____
 - e. Disposable beverage containers _____
 - f. Electric hair dryers _____
 - g. Aerosol spray cans _____
 - h. Pesticides _____
4. What "things" are there at your house without which you could live just as well?

5. Job "A" provides enough money to pay for a large home, many electrical appliances, and expensive clothes. It also requires sixty hours of work per week. Job "B" pays enough money to pay for a modest home, a few basic appliances, and inexpensive clothes. It requires just twenty-four hours per week. Which job would you choose and why?

6. Discuss the idea that conservation means doing more with less.

