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| **Unit 1 Lesson 1** | **PSYCHOLOGY** |

**Caring About What Others Think**

Today, many self-help books claim to have the recipe for healthy, wealthy, and wise living; one of their most frequent suggestions is “be yourself.” As Roy T. Bennett’s The Light in the Heart advises, readers should “stop caring about what others think.” As with many clichés, there may be some wisdom behind Bennett’s advice. Certainly, worrying too much about others’ opinions can be stressful and leave us feeling doubtful and depressed, but have writers like Bennett considered the effects of everyone on earth ceasing to care about how they are perceived?

Emotions such as embarrassment and shame are usually the result of feeling as though we’ve made a mistake in the eyes of others—they don’t feel good, but they serve an important purpose. Imagine you are walking to the supermarket check-out. You are not paying attention and accidentally cut in front of someone in line. Another customer points out your mistake, and you head to the back of the line. How do you feel? Slightly embarrassed, maybe? This is because you have broken a social convention: these are the small, everyday codes and rules that we live by, and they are essential to the smooth running of societies.

Embarrassment and shame prove that humans instinctively care about what people think of them. But why should this be? Cutting in line would be helpful for us, right? Well, while emotions such as embarrassment help maintain a healthy society, many psychologists argue that humans actually developed them for self-preservation. Suppose we deviate from social conventions too often. In that case, we may soon find ourselves alone, without friends, and on the margins of our society—something we instinctively know would not benefit us as individuals.

Also, without these painfully memorable emotions, we are likely to repeat our mistakes. We can illustrate the personal learning value of embarrassment more clearly with another example. Let’s imagine you’ve now left the supermarket. You didn’t remember to bring a bag, so you are struggling to hold many loose apples, oranges, and bananas. Suddenly, you lose your grip, your precious fruit rolls all over the busy street, and you are left desperately chasing after it. If you are feeling embarrassed again, as might be expected, then subsequently, you’ll probably remember to bring a shopping bag to get your food home safely.

“Not caring about what others think” suggests that whatever the situation, we should not change or adapt our personalities—instead, as the saying goes, we should “be true to ourselves.” In English, the idea of being “two-faced” is extremely negative and is used to describe people who are deceptive or false. Of course, most of us know it’s usually not healthy—or even helpful—to lie or consciously pretend to be someone else. However, is it such a bad thing to have more than one “face”? For example, most of us would naturally find ourselves talking very differently to our ten-year-old niece, eighty-year-old grandmother, boss, and best friend. The image we present around others functions as a sign that we are thinking about their expectations, and the adaptations we make are signs of empathy—they show that we have considered others’ thoughts, needs, and feelings.

In fact, there is a saying that we have three distinct faces: one for the world, one for our families, and one for ourselves. This seems quite realistic; however, it might also suggest that the last of these faces is the true or “real” one. Can we really say that we are most honestly ourselves when we are alone? Most psychologists argue that we are just as capable of lying to ourselves as we are to others, so perhaps it’s other people’s opinions of us that “keep us honest.”

As with many things in life, the truth probably lies somewhere in between. Worrying too much about how we are seen could be a waste of time—or even dangerous, especially if it is based on shallow judgments about what we wear or how we look. On the other hand, being concerned about how others view us as intelligent, emotional creatures is essential to our well-being and the success of our communities.

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| **Unit 1 Lesson 2** | **PSYCHOLOGY** |

**Don’t Go Along to Get Along**

There is one area of education that, to everyone’s disadvantage, is often forgotten: learning about the importance of personal autonomy, or making your own decisions, even if it means going against the crowd or being criticized by others. Of course, schools are not the best places to learn the value of individuality. They are places where being liked is extremely important, and deviating from the norm usually brings nothing but trouble. The idea of “going along to get along” may well be necessary for surviving school life, but here’s a piece of advice for soon-to-be graduates: do not carry it into the real world. Remaining true to yourself means leading a more sensible, rewarding, and moral life.

Autonomy protects you from making bad decisions. For example, a well-known concept in advertising and politics is the “bandwagon effect.” Ads often include “best-selling” and “number-one” because people like to buy brands that are already popular, even if an almost identical product is cheaper. Another example is that many voters tend to choose the most popular candidates in elections because they want to be on the winning team—which does not seem like the best way to decide on a leader.

Personal autonomy does more than prevent foolish behavior. It is the key to a life rich in experiences and achievements. Fear of judgment by others must not prevent you from pursuing what you want, whether it is a relationship, a career goal, or a personal project. Teaching English to non-native speakers, I notice that many students shy away from speaking in class, despite sincerely wanting to improve their English. So, at the start of each class, I say a few words in the students’ native language. Sure enough, there are a few laughs at my pronunciation and broken grammar. Nonetheless, most students cannot help but notice that I fight on. Who’s sillier—the person who makes mistakes while working toward a goal or the person who achieves nothing due to fear?

Sometimes, excessive respect for authority, rather than fear of embarrassment, keeps you from remaining true to yourself. But part of being an autonomous person is to be able to disagree with powerful people when necessary. Twelve publishers rejected J. K. Rowling’s first Harry Potter novel before it was finally accepted. If she believed what the “experts” told her, she would not be one of the best-selling authors in history and one of the wealthiest women in the world. In addition, sometimes, the rewards for standing your ground against authority are much more substantial than success and fame. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Mahatma Gandhi challenged and angered those in power by maintaining their integrity, and in the process, they helped liberate millions of people.

Autonomy also keeps us from falling prey to a “mob mentality.” This term refers to people’s often damaging and uncharacteristic behavior when they are part of an angry crowd. In August 2011, a peaceful protest turned into riots in London and several other UK cities. For a week, crowds of mostly young people broke windows, set fires, and stole from stores. Many of those who took part had previously been good citizens whose turn to crime seemed inconceivable—until it happened. People looked to psychology for insight, and while there is no definitive explanation, two theories were mentioned most. One is what psychologists call “deindividuation,” which seems to happen when a group considers itself under threat. Each individual’s identity becomes temporarily less important than their group identity, and the group’s values become their own for the moment—even if those values include violence. The other theory says that people in unfamiliar situations are unsure how to behave, so they look to others for clues. Both of these factors likely contributed to the UK riots and other cases of mass violence.

For many people, fitting in might seem like the smart move. But doing so will only hold you back from your true potential. If you refuse to let ridicule hurt you, to let the powerful threaten your beliefs, or to mindlessly copy others, your life will be better in ways large and small.

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| **Unit 2 Lesson 1** | **SPORTS** |

**Sport or Art?**

It’s easy to understand why women’s figure skating is the most popular Olympic event. Athletes perform amazing jumps and spins, accompanied by thrilling music. But a predictable debate happens every four years among sports fans. Some aren’t happy about including figure skating in the Olympics because they believe it’s more of an art than a “real” sport.

This view rests on the fact that figure skaters receive two different scores from a panel of judges. The technical score is based on the difficulty of the routine and whether the skater performed certain required moves correctly. The program components score depends on more subjective factors, including choreography and “interpretation of music.” That second score is the part that critics have a problem with. In 2018, a sports reporter named Edward Egros started an online argument when he tweeted that figure skating is “too subjective” and lacks “quantifiable metrics to determine a winner.” Other users pointed out that scores are, in fact, quantified precisely. But Egros was not convinced. According to him, figure skating requires impressive skills, but it’s not a sport. He is mistaken, however. What he and other critics of Olympic figure skating are missing is the fact that the domains of sports and art overlap a great deal.

Take skateboarding, for example, which became an Olympic event for the first time in 2021. Participants are judged on a scale ranging from zero to ten. The criteria include not only difficulty and speed but also timing and originality. Skateboarders value the creative elements of the sport so much that many had mixed feelings about it being added the Games. Ian Michna, a skateboard magazine publisher, explained to NBC News, “I think as a community, people were attracted to skateboarding because it was not part of something like the Olympics. … It was more of an artistic activity you could do on your own.” But even stars like Tony Hawk have changed their minds on this point. Hawk used to oppose the “sportification” of skateboarding, but he agreed to report on the event for a US TV channel, saying that he hoped more people around the world would be encouraged to take up the sport he loves.

The great Brazilian soccer player Pelé [pelay] famously called his sport *o jogo bonito* [oh scho-go bo-ni-tto], or “the beautiful game.” There are various ways to interpret this phrase. Soccer players’ athleticism can be amazing to watch; for example, Ronaldinho, another Brazilian star, became famous for his dance-like footwork. Or maybe Pelé was referring to soccer’s ability to surprise—anything can happen at any time. Another beautiful part of the game, as one sportswriter pointed out, is how it makes fans all over the world feel like they are a part of something: “When they go to a match and add their voice to the thousands already chanting, they feel they are making a difference.”

All sports—even those that judges don’t score—include some subjective or arbitrary factors. A tennis umpire might make the wrong call. A loud fan might distract a golfer during a crucial shot. A million chance events can affect the results. Near the end of the final game of the 2016 baseball World Series, the Chicago Cubs were winning by two runs and feeling confident when the other team suddenly tied the score with a home run. Then it began to rain, and the game had to stop temporarily. Thanks to this pause, a respected older Cubs player had time to address his teammates—some of whom were crying—with an inspiring speech about teamwork and determination. The Cubs went on to score two more runs and become champions. Afterward, players told reporters that their leader’s well-chosen words helped ensure their victory.

In summation, it isn’t true that emotions and aesthetics are outside the scope of sports. If you ever wonder whether figure skating should be categorized as a sport or an art form, that’s something to consider. All sports are art forms. They don’t just require training and skill; they also appeal to our sense of beauty and inspiration.

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| **Unit 2 Lesson 2** | **SPORTS** |

**For Fame and Fortune?**

Growing up, many children and teenagers dream of becoming sports stars. They are drawn not only to the fame but also to the fortune that goes along with it, as they see their favorite football players or basketball stars on TV driving the latest cars and living in the most magnificent houses. Therefore, many young people are willing to spend both time and their parents’ money chasing a career in sports. But what are the chances of sports success? And once an up-and-coming young athlete has attained pro status, how much financial reward is really going to come their way?

For those young people who resolve to achieve sports stardom, the investment starts early. The route to success requires young athletes to train daily and follow a healthy diet. This often means having to turn down invitations to parties and trips to fast-food restaurants with friends, so many sacrifice their social lives completely. Such sporting aspirations can also be very expensive. According to a recent report in USA Today, twenty percent of US families have a youth sports budget exceeding $12,000 a year per child. Spending includes buying expensive equipment, covering travel expenses, and paying for sports camps. And the costs don’t stop when a child reaches adulthood. Many suffer from “forced amateurism,” in which sports leagues in the US, in practice, force young people to go to college before they can go pro and start getting paid. Although many of these promising young athletes receive college scholarships based on their abilities, many of their day-to-day expenses fall on their families.

Even those that make it through college on a sports scholarship often find they have a rough road ahead. For example, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), an organization that helps facilitate scholarships, has over 450,000 athletes. Of these, only around 4,000 will ever become professional players in the four major US sports leagues: the NFL, NBA, MLB, and NHL. For those that do get drafted, the yearly salary is, of course, huge. Hockey players in the NHL get a minimum of $750,000 annually, while football players in the NFL make at least $660,000. But considering that an average athletic career lasts just five years, those numbers don’t seem so unreasonable. Many athletes find themselves out of work completely once they retire, and this issue can be compounded by injury and a lack of experience in other areas. Retired pros may find themselves either physically unable or lacking the skills necessary to go into other lines of work.

The financial risk associated with pursuing a professional sports career is more notable in sports such as track and field, swimming, and gymnastics. Many of these athletes rely on prize money from competitions to make a living. Such prizes can be generous; for example, competitors in the TYR Pro Swim Series can expect to receive $1,500 for each race they win, while second- and third-place finishers can win $1,000 and $500, respectively. However, a long gap between wins can leave athletes financially unstable. This is a particular problem when events are canceled unexpectedly, as was the case during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. Many athletes found themselves without a way to earn money and, as they were classified as self-employed, received little support from the government. Sarah Hirshland, CEO of the US Olympic and Paralympic Committee, called these athletes “classic gig workers” because, while their work was potentially lucrative during good times, it left athletes financially vulnerable during bad times.

For the vast majority who don’t find success in professional sports, the risks are even higher. Many young people who have spent their years at school and university tirelessly training will have had little time left for their studies. This can leave them underqualified for the world of work they will one day find themselves in.

Sports can certainly be great for individuals, allowing them to test their limits and win applause for brilliant performances. And for those looking to become sports stars, it seems clear that this should be the driving force, not profit.

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| **Unit 3 Lesson 1** | **MASS MEDIA** |

**I Want to Be a Content Creator**

In 2021, 1,000 children in the US were asked what they would like to be when they grew up. In the past, sports star, pop star, and astronaut were the most common answers, but this is no longer the case. While these occupations still feature significantly—along with the perhaps more realistic teacher—YouTube creator or influencer now has a clear lead, with twenty-nine percent of children naming this as their number-one ambition.

These findings are perhaps not surprising; successful YouTubers like PewDiePie are now earning as much as $160,000 a day, and financial rewards are not the only attraction. Social media measures popularity: it gives creators precise numbers that tell them exactly how popular—or famous—they are. To date, PewDiePie has accumulated 110 million followers, and top TikToker Charli D’Amelio, having made an estimated $4 million by the age of 16, has been sent 8.6 billion “hearts.” It seems that the incentives for being a creator are endless.

However, as with many supposedly desirable jobs, the reality may not match the illusion. Just as successful sports stars endure tough early-morning training sessions and pop stars find themselves on endless, tiring flights, creators often spend hours sitting alone in front of a camera, repeating the same activities again and again. And while they always seem positive and energetic, it’s important to remember that appearing to be happy is their job. As creator Sinem Günel put it, “If content creation is your job, you need to get it done even if you don’t feel like doing it.”

So, although we feel we know the stars we follow, a large part of being a social media creator is hiding your real feelings, which can come at an emotional cost. Many creators—including PewDiePie—have announced plans to take a break from social media, reporting underlying mental health issues. However, taking a break is not always possible because even a short one can see a creator’s numbers fall dramatically. In the world of social media, people move on quickly. Stuck in this trap, Lilly Singh—a YouTuber who once went by the name Superwoman—found herself exhausted, “lying on the kitchen floor and just crying… I turned into such a machine,” Singh explained. “I was feeling that I was completely losing what it means to be human.”

Other creators achieve fame by actively revealing their secrets and allowing followers total access to their lives. Fifteen-year-old YouTuber Lev Cameron recently asked his 1.5 million followers, “Have you ever wanted to control my life?” before adding, “Now is your chance.” Cameron’s followers regularly vote on how he should spend his time and whom he should date, and Cameron follows their instructions to the letter. Corporate sponsors also control what creators do and say—they pay influencers to promote their products and services—so while social-media creators may seem to “be their own bosses,” this is rarely true.

In fact, for many social-media creators, it seems everything is for sale; they themselves become commodities. Their content often includes family members and personal relationships, which can suffer as a result. This high level of exposure also leaves creators and their families at high risk of online abuse and cyberbullying, something that many—especially those who become famous overnight—do not anticipate.

The pressures of being a social-media creator can sometimes have tragic consequences. Over the past few years, there have been several deaths among young creators. Etika, a popular US gaming YouTuber, took his own life in 2019. Speaking shortly before his death, Etika said: “Let my story be one that advises caution on too much social media… Unfortunately, it consumed me… I was so consumed with this great image that I thought I was invulnerable.”

Like sports and music, social media will remain a hobby for most young people, and for many, it is a place where they can make friends and grow in confidence. But when hobbies turn into jobs, things change. Fame is the primary aim for many social-media creators, and as Marilyn Monroe once said, “Fame doesn’t fulfill you. It warms you a bit, but that warmth

is temporary.”

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| **Unit 3 Lesson 2** | **MASS MEDIA** |

**Media Coverage of Stars**

On July 19, 2013, at the Los Angeles International Airport, musical artist Kanye West and celebrity photographer Daniel Ramos got into a physical argument. Like most paparazzi, Ramos makes money by taking candid photographs of celebrities. After Ramos asked Kanye why he refused to talk with him, the star attacked the photographer in an attempt to take his camera. Although extreme, the situation between West and Ramos is not uncommon in Hollywood; in fact, many celebrities have been caught on camera attacking persistent photographers. Many more have complained about the lack of privacy.

But do celebrities really have any right to complain? I would argue that a lack of privacy is the price celebrities pay for their fame and fortune. Far from hurting anyone, the attention that celebrities get from the media helps their careers and creates benefits for society beyond simple entertainment.

Many new and relatively unknown stars find it difficult to get into the limelight; however, this is not the case for more established celebrities, whose every move is documented by paparazzi. Through a mutually beneficial cycle, the prying media and the sometimes camera-shy celebrities help each other. Free press exposure is so important to a celebrity’s chances of staying relevant in the entertainment business that certain celebrities’ careers could collapse entirely if not for the media attention that they receive by just going about their daily lives.

So let’s look for a moment at exactly what the media and, in particular, the paparazzi are up to here. In effect, they’re doing nothing more than creating buzz. Of course, many would argue that the paparazzi do this for entirely selfish reasons, as a provocative photo of an A-list celebrity can net the photographer an impressive sum of money. According to the Sydney Morning Herald, photographer Jamie Fawcett took home $250,000 for a single candid photo of Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie vacationing in Namibia. Yes, $250,000!

It’s easy to see why celebs are upset at paparazzi who profit by exploiting their images without permission. Or is it? This buzz does much more than just fill a photographer’s pockets. It also generates interest in the stars. Many fans have a natural curiosity about the personal lives of their favorite celebrities. And it’s the paparazzi who give the public a look into those celebrities’ lives, thereby satisfying and increasing that curiosity. Furthermore, this heightened interest is what packs movie theaters the world over, which can be a very good thing indeed for a star. After all, higher box-office sales fuel stars’ careers and make them wealthy in the process. This is why some fame-hungry celebrities are even known to coordinate with the paparazzi to arrange “accidental” encounters.

So the benefits of publicity exceed the costs for those on both sides of the camera lens. But there’s another often-overlooked beneficiary: society. Everyday people wishing to make a statement must go to great lengths to gain even the smallest amount of attention. The media, however, give celebrities a substantial advantage when they want their voices heard. Famous people who wish to offer their input on important causes already have a microphone set up for them. By utilizing media platforms, celebrities like Kim Kardashian and Leonardo DiCaprio can use their fame to support charities such as the Humane Society and the World Wide Fund for Nature. The singer Beyoncé and the actor George Clooney are well-known for their support of disaster relief charities such as the Red Cross and Habitat for Humanity. Celebrities have the ability to draw attention to causes that the public might not otherwise hear about. It’s not wrong, then, to say that society profits from the buzz created by celebrities.

Sure, the constant media attention may be annoying. But when compared to other occupational hazards, it’s relatively harmless. It drives celebrities’ careers and even gives society a boost. So, if anything, celebrities should be grateful to be getting such attention. Kanye West may think that he doesn’t want the cameras following him around every time he leaves his house, but the day the cameras stop showing up may be the day his career comes to a close.

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| **Unit 4 Lesson 1** | **CHILD PSYCHOLOGY** |

**Learning by Living**

The behavioral model of raising children uses natural first-hand experiences and the psychology of children to help them learn and develop. For some, this may suggest a more “hands-off” version of being a parent, and while it is not always the right choice, there are many benefits to this parenting framework.

Behavioral parenting uses reinforcement theory to influence children’s behavior. There are four main types of reinforcement. The first two are positive and negative. Positive reinforcement involves rewarding good behavior to encourage it; a simple example might be that if a child eats their vegetables, they will be allowed some ice cream. On the other hand, negative reinforcement means removing an unpopular rule when good behavior occurs; for example, a child may be allowed to stay up past their usual bedtime if they are particularly well behaved.

Supporters of a more authoritarian parenting style argue that these forms of reinforcement do not teach discipline and that children should learn to do things simply “because I say so” and not because it benefits them in some way. While it is true that adults cannot always expect to be rewarded when they do the “right thing,” children are not adults, and if reinforcement is used well, the process is both logical and effective. However, if a reward becomes an expectation, it loses all impact. Thus, permissive parents cannot expect their children to respond to positive and negative reinforcement consistently.

The third type of reinforcement is extinction, which involves removing reinforcement of behavior that has previously been reinforced. This can be clearly illustrated when a child repeatedly drops a toy, knowing that a parent will pick it up. Advocates of extinction would argue that the child learns an important lesson when their parent walks away and leaves the toy on the floor. Similarly, the Ferber method is used by some parents early in their children’s lives to get them to adjust to a healthy sleep pattern. The technique was first developed by Richard Ferber of the Boston Children’s Hospital, and it involves ignoring children’s crying or calls for attention for precise periods.

However, critics suggest that this practice is unhealthy because it inherently reduces a child’s trust in their parents. They often refer to it as the “cry-it-out” method. This name is misleading, though, as it does not involve leaving the child until they stop crying. Opponents also say that it causes children unnecessary stress. However, even the most attentive parents must accept that their child will cry; at least with the Ferber method, children can be expected to develop an ability to sleep without being held. This early independence will serve them well in later life.

The final form of reinforcement is punishment. This is something we are all familiar with, although it has changed in form over the years. Up until the nineteenth century, for example, children could expect—whether at home or school—to be physically punished when they were naughty. To modern ears, this presents a problem, as corporal punishment may create a cycle of violence. However, expressing anger on occasion can be a natural deterrent to misdemeanors like stealing, and it teaches children that these things are widely considered wrong. Being authoritative can also help keep our children safe; most of us can remember being shouted at for running into the street or playing with matches.

Whether they realize it or not, all parents make some use of reinforcement. What is perhaps of greater significance is the way in which it is used and how often. Every child is different, and the ability to distinguish between what children want and what they need is an ongoing battle, one that none of us can expect to get right all the time. Behavioral models of parenting may not be perfect, but their flexibility provides parents with more realistic and instructive options than many rigid and authoritarian models.

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| **Unit 4 Lesson 2** | **CHILD PSYCHOLOGY** |

**Modern Intensive Parenting**

Parenting has always led to theory and debate; a brief look through history will show that various styles have been popular or fashionable, only to be replaced with new and apparently definitive models. While they differ from each other, what many of today’s parenting models have in common is that they are highly intensive.

One such model is “tiger parenting,” a term made familiar by Amy Chua, author of The Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother. In her book, Chua, a law professor at Yale University, describes how she raised her daughters in what she called “the Chinese way.” They were not allowed to play video games, watch television, play with friends, or even take bathroom breaks—so that they could focus on studying. Certainly, in Chua’s terms, her strict methods seem to have worked: her daughters both graduated from Harvard University.

However, Chua’s book is not a scientific study; it is an anecdotal account of just one family. Research by the University of Chicago has shown that the children of the strictest parents do not actually achieve the highest grades overall. The economic position and educational history of one’s parents have been shown to have a greater impact on academic achievement. Furthermore, other developmental criteria, such as creativity and emotional intelligence, are more challenging to measure than academic success. We can’t know how happy Chua’s children are, but critics argue that authoritarian tiger parenting does not allow for pleasure or individual personal growth.

Chua’s book has been criticized for supporting Western stereotypes about East Asian parenting models by promoting and celebrating such extreme restrictions. In fact, Chua’s chosen parenting model is no longer particularly fashionable in modern China, where styles have become more liberal over the past twenty years. Furthermore, an eight-year study by the University of Texas found forty-four percent of Chinese-American parents could be called supportive rather than tiger (twenty-eight percent) or easy-going (twenty percent). It is important to remember that parents are not defined by ethnicity, and few conform to any one constant parenting model. Chua is rare in that she seems happy to use a reductive term like “tiger mother” to describe herself.

In fact, most modern models of parenting are criticisms of other styles. As such, very few people would use parenting buzzwords to describe themselves. It is doubtful, for example, that anyone will ever introduce themselves to you as a “helicopter parent.” This term negatively describes mothers and fathers who constantly follow their children, overseeing every detail of their lives and engineering conditions that they—often wrongly—believe are beneficial. While they may not have unreasonable academic expectations or deny their children pleasures, they always decide what form entertainment takes, worry too much about what their children eat, and even dictate which friends their children can have.

The so-called model of helicopter parenting describes another stereotype: the well-meaning but overly involved Western liberal parent. The term is perhaps most used by a previous generation who believe in more hands-off forms of parenting and feel as though they were the beneficiaries of tougher, more independent childhoods. The mistakes we make and the problems we have, these older people would argue, “make us who we are.” Presumably, supporters of hands-off parenting would also find the “lawnmower parent” deeply misguided. Lawnmower parents seek to remove obstacles before their children reach them: to make their children’s paths through life perfectly smooth. Where they exist, helicopter and lawnmower parents are probably motivated by a certain amount of—perhaps understandable—paranoia about the modern world and its risks. As with all intensive parenting, the need to be constantly active in our children’s lives may also result from thinking of parenting as a professional job rather than an unpredictable and occasionally messy family relationship.

Whatever their motivation or name, intensive parenting styles may have the opposite effect of what is intended, as children often rebel against the initial conditions that parents create. Furthermore, such unnatural situations are unlikely to educate children about the complexities and inconsistencies of a world they are born into—not one they are “preparing to enter.”

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| **Unit 5 Lesson 1** | **PHILOSOPHY** |

**The Value of Lies**

Lying is sometimes viewed as an entirely negative phenomenon, and you will often hear people simplistically say that they “hate liars.” But in fact, lying is completely natural, and we all do it because it serves many different purposes—some crucial to our survival, others to the functioning of our relationships and societies.

We only need to look at the natural world to understand that distorting the truth is not as perverse as it might seem. Killdeer—a type of bird—will often pretend to be injured to appear to be an easy meal, a skill they use to distract animals from their vulnerable eggs before safely flying away. We might like to think we are better than animals, but humans begin lying early, and research has shown that most of us know that it can benefit us by the time we reach six months old. By this stage, we have learned that pretending to cry or laugh guarantees us the attention of our parents. After this, older children tend to experiment with less rational lies: most of us can remember telling a lie at school that now seems entirely pointless. In fact, this is part of a learning process, and before long, we can evaluate which lies are of genuine benefit—and which will be believed.

A large part of this learning curve is understanding that usually, lying is more trouble than it is worth. However, studies have shown that adults continue to do it throughout their lives, often using lies to “save face”: to hide mistakes or weaknesses and maintain their valuable sense of pride and dignity. Others casually lie to impress others, make connections, or build friendships: using lies as a kind of social lubricant that allows a smoother, more comfortable passage through life. For the majority of lies told, we have special names, such as “white lies,” “fibs,” or “bending the truth.” These are lies that most of us would not only consider harmless but sometimes regard as an act of kindness: “This soup is delicious!” “Your painting is really great!”

Of course, more serious lies are told to manipulate others, hide terrible crimes, or gain unfair advantages, but these are rare. Recent US studies have revealed that the most common place to lie is the workplace, where lies are predominantly used to get us out of responsibilities: common excuses include feeling unwell, family emergencies, and doctor’s appointments. Psychologically speaking, this is probably done to avoid overwhelming and unhealthy levels of stress or pressure. Of more than 1,000 Americans surveyed, only twenty-seven percent regretted having lied like this at work. Fundamentally, we think of our jobs as financial transactions, so, unlike with our personal relationships, we seem not to experience such a strong sense of guilt when we lie at work.

Besides being a moral issue, lying also creates stress, which is created from our limbic system (the part of our brain that produces feelings of anxiety). Normally, this anxiety would dissuade a person from telling larger lies. However, there are those who lie habitually; compulsive or pathological liars cannot help but lie. In 2001, a Spanish woman in her twenties claiming to be called Tania Head said she had escaped from the World Trade Center during the terrorist attacks and also claimed to have been dating someone who had died there. She even went so far as to lead the Survivors’ Network. However, not a word of her story was true, and once her lies were exposed, the media attacked her. Yet even though her lies were indeed deeply inappropriate, perhaps we would do better to think of Ms. Head as unwell or desperately trying to compensate for something important missing from her life. She had slipped to the far, lonely end of a spectrum that, in truth, we are all on.

Most of us lie less as we age because we learn it is not worth the stress, and we become more comfortable with who we are and with responsibilities we may not really want. But at almost every age, we rely on our ability to briefly “turn off” the truth and say, “Yes, that haircut really suits you.”

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| **Unit 5 Lesson 2** | **PHILOSOPHY** |

**Liar, Liar**

When I was a kid, I stole five dollars from my mother’s purse and couldn’t sleep for two nights straight because of the shame that it brought me. When my mom found out what I had done, she didn’t punish me; instead, she said that my guilt had been punishment enough. You’d think that incident would’ve taught me about the importance of honesty, but the sad truth is that I still tell lies all the time—in all sorts of situations.

Luckily, I’m not the only one. A 1996 study by Dr. Bella DePaulo, a psychologist at the University of Virginia, revealed that most people are liars. She studied 147 people between the ages of eighteen and seventy-one and found that most of them lied at least once or twice a day, and college students lied to their mothers in one out of every two conversations. Another study, cited in The Day America Told the Truth, revealed that it’s not just moms to whom people lie: seventy-five percent of people lie to their friends, seventy-three percent to their siblings, and sixty-nine percent to their spouses. And, as a side note, most people are rather adept at this, with about three out of every four lies going unnoticed.

Most people do not consider bending the truth as a horrible act—a fact that Dr. Leonard Saxe of Brandeis University confirms—since it can help people escape potential punishment without harming others. If you show up late for work because you forgot to set your alarm, you’re better off telling your boss that you were stuck in traffic. In these situations, people don’t lie because they have malicious intentions; they’re just trying to avoid trouble. And lies like this, while dishonest, really don’t do any harm.

In fact, not being able to lie could signal developmental issues in young children. The Institute of Child Study at the University of Toronto researched 1,200 children aged two to seventeen and found that about twenty percent of two-year-olds could lie. By age four, that number skyrocketed to ninety percent. The director of the institute, Dr. Kang Lee, admits that while children’s habit of lying may distress their parents, it’s a totally normal thing to do. Lying is a sign that a child has developed critical cognitive skills, such as recognizing what other people know and don’t know.

In addition, kids don’t learn to lie entirely on their own; they learn it from the very people who tell them not to. From the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences at the University of Massachusetts, Robert Feldman points out a clear contrast in the lessons that adults teach their kids. For instance, parents tell children to always be honest; however, whenlittle Jimmy receives an ugly sweater from his Aunt Betty—knitted by her own hands—Mom tells Jimmy that he should say he loves the gift. You can see what’s going on, right? Instead of her usual teaching, Mom instructs her son to lie, and in doing so, she teaches her son that bending the truth can be useful. Thus, children deduce that lies are acceptable as long as there appears to be a good reason for them.

Not everyone agrees that lying can be morally acceptable. The eighteenth-century German philosopher Immanuel Kant wrote that lying is always wrong, no matter the justifications. However, there are certain situations in which telling the truth seems incompatible with behaving morally. Take, for example, a woman whose husband abuses her. When she moves out, the husband confronts her brother to find out where she is. Would it be all right for the brother to tell a lie to the abusive husband in order to protect his sister?

Lying is a part of human nature that is used as a form of social lubricant and a means of self-preservation, and children learn this from an early age from the very people who say that lying is wrong. While there are certainly times when honesty is best, there are gray areas in which that assessment can be debated. So, at least for now, I’m going to try and feel less guilty about lying.

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| **Unit 6 Lesson 1** | **SCIENCE** |

**Why Explore Space?**

Space exploration has been the dream of humanity for thousands of years; it’s drawn huge public interest and investment, with high-profile CEOs such as Elon Musk, Jeff Bezos, and Richard Branson all building their own commercial space agencies. Yet, despite the challenges, opportunities, and appeal of space, governments are far less eager to spend than most citizens assume when it comes to funding national space programs. In 2018, the average American believed that the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, or NASA, received 6.4 percent of tax dollars, and they wished to increase its funding to 7.5 percent. In truth, however, NASA’s funding was only 0.5 percent of the national budget, and even at its absolute peak in the Apollo era, it had only reached 4.5 percent. The 0.5 percent that NASA received in 2021 was equal to $23.27 billion—a small increase from the previous year but short of the $25 billion proposed by then-President Trump.

This conflict between humanity’s goals and the realities of paying for them raises a very important question about space programs: why are they so hard to fund? When it comes to space exploration, there’s sometimes the notion that it’s wasteful and that we shouldn’t spend money on problems in space when there are so many on Earth. So when it’s time to decide who gets government funds, space agencies are often low on the list of priorities.

But wait: is space exploration wasteful? As with any industry, there is some “waste.” Rockets, for instance, cost millions of dollars but typically can only be used once (a problem many space agencies are working to fix). However, from the enormous expenses come many clear benefits. Knowledge gained through space exploration can help to advance other areas of science, prevent future extinction events, and produce technologies useful here on Earth.

For example, in 2015, NASA launched the Soil Moisture Active Passive (SMAP), a satellite that maps water content in the soil around the globe and identifies whether soils are frozen or thawed. This technology helps scientists understand the links between Earth’s water, energy, and carbon cycles and their effects on weather and climate. Thus, SMAP can improve our ability to predict natural disasters such as droughts. This powerful tool is free to the public, so people around the world can benefit from the data it collects. In addition, SMAP is relatively cheap when considering the cost of damage from natural disasters; for example, in 2012, droughts throughout the American Midwest caused harvest failures equal to $30 billion.

NASA also protects us from potential extinction events through the development and monitoring of asteroid warning systems. Asteroids are rocks in space that travel around the sun and sometimes cross paths with Earth. To prevent one from hitting the Earth, NASA is designing technologies such as the Double Asteroid Redirection Test (DART). DART will test the use of a spacecraft to deflect approaching asteroids and will potentially become the first planetary defense system. Besides defending Earth, NASA is working on colonizing Mars, a project that could make humanity an interplanetary species and ensure our long-term survival.

Another benefit of space exploration is the creation of technologies we use in other areas. GPS, one of the world’s most important communication systems, was built from technologies invented at NASA. In the 1960s, NASA scientists built a network of radio telescopes that were meant to capture images of quasars in distant galaxies. In the following decades, scientists reversed this process to determine the precise location of the telescopes and create a picture of the Earth’s shape and orientation; this led to the development of positioning satellites and GPS. That’s not all—space exploration technologies have also been used in other fields. The word “pixel,” often used in computer programming, was first used by NASA to describe how images from space could be transmitted back to Earth.

Even with small budgets, space agencies around the world further humanity’s understanding of our universe. What NASA alone has done can be considered nothing short of astonishing. If it can achieve so much with just 0.5 percent of the US national budget, imagine what space agencies could do with the whole world’s support.

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| **Unit 6 Lesson 2** | **SCIENCE** |

**Red Planet Risks**

In his classic 1898 science fiction novel, War of the Worlds, H.G. Wells imagined creatures from Mars colonizing Earth. Today, though, spacecraft from Earth are the ones on Mars, and governments and businesses are making plans for accessing and utilizing the planet’s resources. Humans may even settle there before long, creating an exciting new paradigm for human civilization. However, before we reach that point, we must consider the obstacles that must be overcome to colonize the red planet successfully.

The US National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) first sent out spacecraft capable of exploring Mars in 1975. Two Viking spacecraft spent eight years looking for signs of life—and found none. However, they sent back enough valuable photos and knowledge to encourage NASA to continue the program. Since then, the agency has landed nine remote-controlled spacecraft on Mars, including Curiosity in 2011 and in 2020, Perseverance, whose mission was to investigate a single crater on the planet.

The US government allocated $2.7 billion to ensure the success of Perseverance. The simple fact that it successfully touched down on Mars is no small achievement: of the forty-nine missions sent to Mars, twenty-eight have failed, and four have partly failed. As for the reasons, they’re mainly related to Mars’s atmosphere being unsuitable for spacecraft to pass through: it is thick enough to cause some to break up and thin enough to fail at slowing down others safely. This means that with every launch, the spacecraft has a greater than fifty-percent chance of becoming a pile of Martian trash.

So why do governments take the risk? Well, many argue that these missions fulfill humanity’s need to “reach new horizons,” but that notion is rather abstract. More practically, missions increase national prestige and benefit economies. The US is not alone in its interest in Mars: Russia landed two rovers on the planet in 1971 (though neither managed to transmit useful data), and India placed a spacecraft into orbit around it in 2014. In May of 2021, the Zhurong vehicle made China the third country to land a Mars rover successfully. Although competition between nations is peaceful for the moment, growing influence on the planet could lead to future military confrontations.

National space agencies are not the only ones invested in Mars exploration. Business leaders such as Elon Musk and Jeff Bezos agree on the benefits of humans traveling to Mars to set up colonies. The advantages they point to include easing overcrowding on Earth and allowing our planet to recover from environmental damage. In addition, businesses like Musk’s Tesla could acquire valuable minerals from Mars, such as iron, titanium, nickel, and aluminum—material supplies that may soon become inadequate on Earth.

But making Mars habitable enough to mine is extremely difficult and will require companies to provide water, food, oxygen, and heat to colonists millions of kilometers away. Although water would be relatively easy to find at the planet’s ice caps and in underground lakes, energy is another matter. Large amounts of it would be needed to access water, grow food, provide heat, and fuel other human activity. As Mars is further from the sun than Earth and has regular dust storms, solar energy is not available, and the planet’s thin atmosphere rules out wind power. Thus, the only realistic choice is nuclear power, which would require transporting nuclear fuel and a reactor from Earth to Mars.

The planet also has high levels of radiation, which leads to cancer if not contained. So buildings on Mars would need to resist constant radiation and unpredictable events such as solar flares, effectively forcing settlers to live underground. Disasters are almost inevitable, and if private companies begin losing money, there is no guarantee they will remain involved. Therefore, governments may end up being forced to rescue their citizens, and with journey times at around seven months, any response would likely be too slow.

Even if we can successfully colonize Mars, this does not mean that we should. Exploring the planet has yielded little reward so far. Making the planet habitable could be damaging, expensive, and dangerous. Given all this, perhaps it would be best to admire the red planet through our telescopes and let its mysteries remain.

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| **Unit 7 Lesson 1** | **CAREERS** |

**What Do Gen Z Workers Want?**

Over the past twenty years, much has been written about what Millennials (those born between 1981 and 1996) expect from employment. In contrast to the generations that preceded them, they wanted fun, flexible, easy-going jobs and expected to be able to travel. They didn’t live to work, or so the saying went; instead, they worked to live. Today, those born after 1996 are entering the world of work, and Gen Zers, as they are known, have different expectations again—but why?

First, Gen Zers’ educational backgrounds may make a steadier, more traditional job desirable. By most measures, they are the best-educated generation that the planet has ever produced, but this has come at a great financial cost. University is now more expensive—and more essential—than ever before. Between 2010 and 2020, the average cost of undergraduate tuition in the US almost doubled. To fund this, in 2020, the average student borrowed $30,030. Thus, Gen Zers’ focus is less likely to be on perks than on finding a financially secure job, since most have finished university in debt.

Another factor affecting Gen Z’s expectations could be the COVID-19 pandemic, which had a disproportionate effect on younger workers. According to the Pew Research Center, half of Gen Zers either experienced a job loss themselves or had a family member who did. Considering these worrying circumstances, along with the ongoing impact of the 2008 financial crisis and the threat of climate change, it’s no wonder that young people have become anxious about their futures. So once again, instead of flexibility, many Gen Zers found themselves seeking stability.

With time, other trends may also be reversed. During the pandemic, many older workers appreciated the break from office life and felt that working from home might be “the future.” Conversely, and perhaps surprisingly, younger people did not feel the same. In one survey, just thirty-four percent of older workers complained about working from home, whereas forty-seven percent of Gen Zers did, often citing its negative effect on their mental health. In part, this may be because they typically have smaller, less comfortable homes or still live with their parents. In addition, some Gen Zers suspect that working flexibly between the home and office actually means an increased workload overall.

Young workers appreciate the clear distinction between home and work that a nine-to-five job provides. They rightly expect to be both trained and listened to by their bosses and know that this happens best face-to-face: research shows that members of this generation value personal development above all. Expanding on the initial investment of their educations, job seekers now put opportunities for continued learning and development at the top of their lists of requirements. Many look for programs like that of US communications company AT&T, which recently opened its own “university” for staff at its headquarters, which keeps its employees informed about the latest technologies.

Another change in employment expectations is an increased interest in social responsibility. When job-hunting, social and environmental considerations are now a bigger priority than ever before, with eighty-five percent of Gen Z job seekers saying that “serving a purpose and leaving a positive legacy for future generations” was important to them. Young people seek employment at companies like The Body Shop, which has targeted environmental sustainability and socially beneficial projects with its five-point policy: “support community trade, defend human rights, [stand] against animal testing, activate self-esteem, and protect our planet.” Furthermore, as the most ethnically diverse generation ever, Gen Zers also expect companies to have inclusive employment policies which reflect the world outside. As well as being ethically sound, these kinds of policies define a company as dynamic, progressive, and “going places,” making it a safe economic bet for the future.

Today, some employment experts have already moved on to consider the needs of Generation Alpha (children born after 2010), but this is probably a fool’s errand. Gen Z has shown us that unpredictable worldwide factors can quickly reverse trends and create new needs. Like Millennials, Gen Zers expect to be paid well for their work; however, the main perks they require are no longer flexibility and freedom but stability and ethics.

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| **Unit 7 Lesson 2** | **CAREERS** |

**How to Be an Attractive Employee**

Understanding employers’ wants and needs have long been important when looking for work. Today, though, with an average of 250 applicants for every corporate job and only four to six of those being invited for an interview, having a strategy to appeal to employers is more important than ever. One way to build a strategy is to get inside the mind of the contemporary employer.

The first thing to remember is that employers spend an average of just six seconds looking at an application, given the high volume of candidates. Employment consultants Accenture found that the most common way to fall at the first hurdle is to have a cold, impersonal cover letter. This is followed in second place by a resume not written for the job in question. It is always best to identify keywords in the job description and include them in any resume. Resume tailoring is becoming increasingly important as resumes are now being read by AI bots that rapidly check them for desirable words, terms, and phrases.

Also, remember that resumes are just the beginning of a long process of assessing potential employees. Eighty-seven percent of employers now turn to LinkedIn, a social-media website where people post their CVs, skills, and interests. In fact, several social-media sites may be referenced. This means it’s essential that candidates’ accounts represent them in the best possible light, not only as model professionals but also as well-rounded and likable people.

Given that most Gen Z job seekers have recently graduated from university, their paid employment history is likely limited to part-time jobs. These should not be left off resumes because they can illustrate transferable skills, even in vastly different fields. Accenture’s 2020 Gen Z job report found that internships have become an increasingly common way to boost employment history and display career commitment. Seventy-eight percent of graduates now complete one. In a typical internship, young people work unpaid within a company for six months to a year. While these roles can be very beneficial, they unfairly discriminate against young people from less wealthy backgrounds, who may not be able to spend a year working full-time without pay. Paid apprenticeships are also available with companies such as Sears, Walmart, and Hertz car rental, but competition for these can be as high as for many jobs.

There are alternative ways to increase experience, which show a bit of ingenuity and altruism. Charities are always looking for volunteers and are unlikely to reject offers of help in the evenings or on weekends. These roles are highly likely to require and therefore develop soft skills—social abilities that are highly transferable between industries. They include empathy, effective communication, critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving. In fact, ninety-three percent of contemporary employers say that soft skills are essential when deciding whom to hire and that young candidates should be allowed to prove they have them. Employers may be keen to find people with soft skills because of a perception among older interviewers that Gen Zers spend their lives online and have lost the capacity to deal with people face-to-face.

Hard skills, which are often technical and industry-specific, can seem harder to acquire as they rely on specialist technology and training only available at universities and companies. But hard skills can be taught later, and candidates who lack them can compensate with other skills that are more accessible. Many hard skills can be learned through books, online, or in evening classes, and they have the potential to impress employers by proving that a candidate is willing to make an effort. In fact, a college education can sometimes be considered a waste of time. According to business entrepreneur Elon Musk, a history of “overcoming problems” and “evidence of exceptional ability” are more important than any college degree. As Musk sees it, graduating from a top university could suggest desirable abilities, but it certainly doesn’t guarantee them.

With 10.7 million people, many of whom hold advanced degrees, looking for work in the US alone, entering the employment race can be intimidating. However, it remains the case that many employers are happy to allow demonstrable social skills and motivation to fill any gaps in a young person’s resume.

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| **Unit 8 Lesson 1** | **EDUCATION** |

**Thinking Twice about Schools**

What do Leonardo da Vinci, Mozart, and Thomas Edison have in common? They all achieved extraordinary things, and they were all educated at home. For most of human history, learning at home was the norm; very few people attended school. Now parents in many parts of the world are rediscovering the value of homeschooling. Home-based learning refers to children’s education by their parents or tutors under parental supervision at home rather than by teachers in school. In the US—where the movement emerged in the late 1960s—5.4 percent of households reported homeschooling in 2020. Homeschooling is also on the rise in several other countries, especially Australia, Canada, and South Africa.

Parents have many reasons for choosing not to send their kids to school. According to a regular study conducted by the US Department of Education, the number one reason parents choose to homeschool their kids is that they have concerns about the environment at school. This includes both public and private schools, and the concerns largely involve safety, peer pressure, bullying, and so on. Homeschooling allows kids to learn in an environment free of these harmful distractions. The second most-cited reason is that homeschooling lets parents personalize their kids’ education and provide the quality and content they want for their children. Other significant reasons include transmitting moral or religious values, special physical or psychological conditions, or a desire to approach education in a nontraditional manner.

Many parents choose to homeschool because they believe that they are better equipped to educate their children than the local schools are. The few studies that have explored this question suggest that those parents are right. One recent US study compared the achievement test scores of public-school students with those of kids who had been homeschooled. The homeschooled students were found to be at least one full grade level ahead of the public-schoolers in most subjects.

Opponents of homeschooling criticize its lack of reliable structures, which are found in a “real” school, not to mention teachers with training and expertise. Homeschooling parents reply that education means maximizing a kid’s innate desire and ability to learn, not just transmitting specific facts at a set time and place. The rigid, uniform nature of traditional schooling, they believe, is not the best way to achieve this. Children all have different strengths, learning styles, and interests. In a large group, even the best teacher cannot adequately accommodate the specific needs of each child. Some students will find the lesson too slow, while others will struggle to keep up. Likewise, some will gladly participate in class discussions, while others will prefer to think things over quietly. Parents who homeschool can tailor instruction to their child’s personality and needs, even if they are not experts in the subject matter.

Some may argue that traditional schooling is crucial for kids’ socialization and ensuring that they have plenty in common with their peers. However, this is precisely what many parents wish to avoid. Homeschooling parents seem to understand that the social habits acquired in traditional schools come with risks and may not be compatible with their own values. Statistics show that homeschooled children are no less socially adjusted than traditional school students; they have fewer behavior problems and are more likely to do volunteer work. So the argument could be made that being forced to socialize in the traditional school setting actually causes students to become more anti-social and selfish.

The shift from home education to universal schooling has happened only over the last two centuries or so. As with many other things that occurred over the same period, such as the adoption of fossil fuels, perhaps it’s time to reconsider that change. Who better to foster children’s personal development and natural hunger for learning than the people who love them most? Kids educated by their parents are flourishing academically, and they are doing so without the lack of freedom and the negative social influences found in formal schooling.

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| **Unit 8 Lesson 2** | **EDUCATION** |

**Homeschooled Kids Miss Out**

Homeschooling is legal in the US and is on the rise. During the pandemic years of 2020 and 2021, the percentage of US households in which children were being homeschooled increased from 5.4 percent to 11.1 percent. But in most other countries, homeschooling remains severely restricted or almost unknown. Most of the world seems to have concluded that kids ought to go to school. But why? Advocates of homeschooling argue that it is the oldest and best method of educating children. Yet, there are compelling reasons to believe that schooling is a surer way of producing well-educated, socially engaged citizens.

Everyone has a stake in the proper education of children, which is too important to be left to parents who may not be qualified. Admittedly, some studies have shown better academic outcomes for children who study at home, but these studies have a serious weakness: they are entirely based on the results of standardized tests, which are less than perfectly reliable. It is more likely that homeschooled kids end up with worrying gaps in their education. After all, they are (usually) taught by only one or two individuals. Most parents who homeschool are often not adequately trained to teach and are not even required to have college degrees, as school teachers are. Furthermore, professional practitioners all have specialties; how many parents are experts in advanced math, world history, and biology?

Children who do not attend school also miss out on the intellectual excitement of learning with their peers. Classmates compete with and challenge one another. The term ”peer pressure” has a negative connotation—being most often associated with bad behaviors such as smoking—but remember that kids can also pressure each other to excel. And they can help one another. Research shows that when a more advanced child assists a less advanced one in his or her studies, both students benefit.

Besides academics, homeschooling fails in another important function: integrating kids into the larger community. At school, kids spend six to eight hours every day working and playing with their neighbors. This is an unparalleled way for children to learn to get along with others, particularly those different from themselves. The German education minister has said that “in our increasingly multicultural society, school is the place for a peaceful dialogue between different opinions, values, religions, and ideologies.” In other words, it is a force for social harmony and tolerance—when everyone participates.

Some of the consequences of homeschoolers’ isolation are more personal. Kids who do not attend school cannot be members of the school band, soccer team, or computer club, resulting in somewhat socially inhibited children. A related problem is the “differentness” of children who are homeschooled. Even in the US, where the practice is more common than in any other country, these children comprise a small minority and are thus singled out by their peers as “weird.” When they attempt to integrate with other kids, they face questions and criticism about their parents’ choice not to send them to school.

Homeschooled kids also frequently feel shut off from popular culture compared to those who attend school. Often, their parents have an unusual amount of control over their exposure to TV shows, movies, and music. One homeschooled blogger wrote about her experience at university, “I was essentially missing all of the cultural knowledge and shared background the other college students around me had. It has taken me years to adjust to mainstream society, and I think that in some ways, I will always feel a little bit like a foreigner.”

Surely, parents who homeschool their children only want the best for their kids, but many of those kids view the decision to be taught at home as harmful. They’d rather be like the overwhelming majority of the world’s young people who go to school. The reluctance to make homeschooling legal in most countries is therefore understandable. People around the world realize that schooling provides opportunities for academic and personal development that home-based education cannot equal.

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| **Unit 9 Lesson 1** | **PSYCHOLOGY** |

**Creative People Are Different**

The car you drive, the song you love dancing to, the film that makes you cry, and the medicine that keeps you healthy—all are the results of creativity. The urge to create is uniquely human. It is part of human nature to imagine things that don’t exist yet, and the results of creativity include beautiful works of art and novel solutions to problems. However, it’s obvious that some people are better at this type of imagining than others. A minority of highly creative people are responsible for most ideas that shape our culture and everyday lives.

As you might expect, creative people’s minds work differently from others. Highly creative people particularly excel at divergent thinking—the ability to generate many possible answers by allowing the mind to connect ideas in unexpected ways. Creative people are also mentally resourceful. For example, most people always took it for granted that a painter could only depict an object from one perspective. Pablo Picasso wondered if it were possible to show multiple perspectives at once and thus created cubism. Surprisingly, scientists have witnessed how thought processes linked to revolutionary thinking in creatives utilize certain brain areas. One study compared the brain images of university art students to those of non-artists. An area that showed particular interest was the precuneus, the part of the brain that controls the “mind’s eye,” or the ability to visualize, combine, and manipulate images. Researchers detected greater precuneus development in artists than in non-artists.

A related characteristic that creatives share is a willingness to take risks. Psychologists have found a link between having a so-called “Type T” personality and being creative. Type Ts constantly seek out new and stimulating experiences, even when doing so is risky. They’re nonconformists who rely on their own judgment rather than obeying rules and conventions. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi [Mi-hal-ee Chik-zent-mi-hal-ee] was a psychologist and the author of Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention. He quoted a Nobel Prize-winning economist: “One of the most common failures of able people is a lack of nerve. They’ll play safe games. In innovation, you have to play a less safe game if it’s going to be interesting.”

The courage to take risks isn’t worth much unless it comes with a drive to keep going. Contrary to popular opinion, most highly creative people produce a lot that is so-so and only a little that is great. But instead of letting their failures discourage them, they keep working—sometimes obsessively—to refine their ideas and reach their goals. The composer Pyotr Tchaikovsky wrote a letter to a friend complaining that some colleagues of his gave up too easily: “We must always work, and a self-respecting artist must not fold his hands [just because] he is not in the mood.” This drive comes from within the creators themselves, not from a desire for money or other external rewards.

This combination of characteristics—unusual thought patterns, risk-taking, and the stubborn pursuit of a goal—is not the best recipe for a happy social life. Others often see divergent thinking as odd, and dedication to a creative project often entails many hours alone. The neuroscientist Nancy C. Andreasen, author of The Creative Brain, writes that “a highly original person may seem odd or strange to others.” The very creative may face “criticism or rejection for being too questioning or too unconventional,” resulting in feelings of loneliness and isolation.

Nevertheless, don’t feel too sorry for creative types, as being considered slightly abnormal seems like a small price to pay for the rewards of being able to create. Here is the biggest difference between the highly creative and everyone else: when they are alone, working late into the night on an original idea that deeply interests them or could change the world someday, highly creative people experience a joy that few others do. Csikszentmihalyi said that “The excitement of the artist at the easel or the scientist in the lab comes close to the ideal fulfillment we all hope to get from life, and so rarely do.”

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| **Unit 9 Lesson 2** | **PSYCHOLOGY** |

**Are Geniuses Normal?**

Geniuses are kind of odd—or so most people believe. There are stories about great creators throughout history who were more than a little eccentric. It is said that Michelangelo seldom bathed or changed his clothes; the poet Lord Byron kept a pet bear in his dorm room at Cambridge University; Nikola Tesla claimed he never slept more than two hours at a time; and Steve Jobs experimented with an all-fruit diet.

Scientific research even confirms that we associate creativity with being different. In one study, two groups looked at photos of a fictional artist and his work. One group was shown an ordinary-looking man in a suit, and the other an unusually dressed man with a strange hairstyle. Although the groups were shown identical works of art, the second group liked the art more. According to the researchers, we expect creative people to be free spirits and not constrained by the standard rules of society. But is this view of creativity accurate?

Despite the colorful tales about historical innovators, there is some reason to believe that creative people are not particularly odd overall. For one thing, many of these stories are exaggerated by popular imagination. In fact, it wasn’t that unusual for people to bathe rarely during Michelangelo’s time, before convenient water supplies and modern hygiene standards existed. The “fruitarianism” of Steve Jobs wasn’t unique to him but is shared by quite a few vegans (though its health effects are worthy of criticism). And so on.

More importantly, the stereotype of the strange genius doesn’t consider the many great creators who followed the rules, both in their work and in life. William Shakespeare is a giant of literature, but he largely followed literary convention in his poems and plays. He also lived a quiet, thoroughly ordinary life with his wife and their three children. Johann Sebastian Bach was another responsible family man who produced immortal works of art—within the fairly rigid musical structures accepted as proper in Germany in the 1700s.

One anecdote illustrates very well how creativity can occur without an eccentric personality behind it. When the psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi was researching creative people and what they have in common for a book he was writing, one of the innovators with whom he sought an interview was Peter Drucker. A business consultant and author, Drucker is widely considered the founder of modern management theory and education. In his reply, Drucker politely thanked the researcher for honoring him with the request before explaining why he couldn’t help and why he even rejected the label “creative”:

*“I am told I am creative — I don’t know what that means… I hope you will not think me presumptuous or rude if I say that one of the secrets of productivity (in which I believe, whereas I do not believe in creativity) is to have a VERY BIG wastepaper basket to take care of ALL invitations such as yours.”*

Drucker was an original and influential person who clearly disagreed with Csikszentmihalyi’s thesis that creativity is an exceptional trait or a set of features. He didn’t see himself as unique but believed that his achievements resulted from consistent hard effort and, above all, careful use of his time. (Many productive people seem to agree. Out of several hundred invitations to successful artists, writers, scientists, and other achievers sent by Csikszentmihalyi, only ninety-one people took the time to grant him an interview.)

In a way, this is a more attractive concept of creativity than the popular idea of the genius as a troubled rebel. Maybe creativity isn’t a rare personality trait that we are or aren’t born with but something we might all be able to attain through conscious effort and good habits. What could be more normal than that?

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| **Unit 10 Lesson 1** | **SOCIOLOGY** |

**An Aging World**

When it comes to trends in global demographics, there’s good news and bad news: the good news is that people around the world are living longer. The average woman can expect to live to age seventy-five, and the average man to seventy-one. As recently as 1950, these numbers were only fifty-three and forty-eight—principally because of much higher infant and early-childhood mortality levels.

Now for the bad news: this amazing increase in life expectancy has coincided with a steep worldwide drop in birth rates. For a country to maintain its population (without immigration), there must be at least 2.1 births per woman. Despite declines in recent decades, many developing nations continue to have birth rates at or above this level, but no rich country does. As of 2021, the US’s birth rate stood at 1.6, Germany’s at 1.5, China’s at 1.3, and South Korea’s at 0.9. Some would say this isn’t bad news but a welcome change in a too-crowded world. However, falling birth rates along with rising life expectancy mean that populations in developed countries are steadily getting older. And aging populations present a number of serious challenges.

Probably the most obvious problem is basic economics. With age comes retirement and, often, a need to supplement one’s income. Like other developed countries, the US offers a government pension program to its senior citizens, so the number of retirees compared to the number of working-age people has major implications for the national budget. Economists refer to this figure as the old-age dependency ratio, which is how many senior citizens there are for every hundred people aged fifteen to sixty-four. Over the last seventy years, this ratio has risen from 12.6 to 25.6 in America, and it’s still climbing. Stress on the economy is already showing: in 2020, Social Security (the national pension program) began paying out more money to seniors than it collected in taxes. Experts predict that by 2035, the program will lack the funds to pay retirees what it has promised. Similar worries affect governments across the world.

The challenges of an aging population inevitably extend to healthcare. Living longer doesn’t mean living healthier, and many older people suffer from at least one chronic illness. The World Health Organization conducted studies to see if payroll taxes could continue to support healthcare in countries with rapidly aging populations. The research concluded that the model would not be sustainable and suggested that countries find other sources of healthcare funding.

The health problems of old age are worsened by loneliness. We tend to picture ourselves growing old surrounded by children and grandchildren, but in a world where “family trees are upside down,” as one author describes the birth-rate crisis, more people find themselves alone at the end of their lives. In South Korea, the number of senior citizens living alone grew from 1.22 million in 2015 to 1.66 million in 2020. “Loneliness acts as a fertilizer for other diseases,” Dr. Steve Cole of UCLA explained in 2019. His research shows that loneliness is a risk factor for not only depression but also high blood pressure, heart disease, and Alzheimer’s disease, among other illnesses.

Some downsides of an aging population are hard to quantify. How do you calculate the lost value of great ideas from young people who don’t exist? Our elders rightly receive respect for their life experience, wisdom, and contributions to their families and societies, but it’s hard to deny that a younger population is more dynamic. The British novelist Kazuo Ishiguro said (at age fifty-four) he was “haunted” by the knowledge that most great novels were written by people under forty. Facebook, Google, Microsoft, and Apple were all founded by people under twenty-six.

That we’re enjoying longer lives is certainly something to celebrate. But just as certain are the economic and social issues that result when nations age and births decline. Some governments are instituting incentives to have more children, while others are focusing on extending the work lives and improving the health of the elderly. Combining these strategies is probably necessary to handle the massive changes we are seeing in the global population.

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| **Unit 10 Lesson 2** | **SOCIOLOGY** |

**Demographic Destiny**

In the eighteenth century, the British philosopher and economist Thomas Malthus predicted that the massive human population growth occurring at the time would lead to widespread starvation and conflict as communities fought over limited resources. Industrialization and market capitalism, however, would go on to prove Malthus wrong. As manufacturing and agriculture became more sophisticated, governments and businesses were consistently able to produce the goods and services that people needed. During the late twentieth century, academics again worried that large-scale population changes would cause social and economic problems—except that this time, the problem was an insufficiency of people. As populations began to stagnate and decline, most notably in rich, developed nations, these thinkers worried that without a constant supply of labor, societies would no longer be able to support themselves. However, in recent years, a growing number of commentators have been arguing against this belief and setting out a very different vision of a future with fewer humans.

Founded in the late 2010s, a campaign called “The Great Decrease” has been helping to convince people that a declining population will not necessarily lead to disaster. The movement began in the Netherlands, a country facing a steep population decline in the coming decades. Rural areas will be particularly affected by this change, with some likely to lose up to sixteen percent of their populations by 2040. Many experts have noted that a decrease in the working-age population in these areas will lead to stagnation in local economies. It could also cause a social-care crisis, as older adults will lack both the physical and economic support of younger family members and neighbors.

However, those behind the Great Decrease campaign believe that governments and businesses have the tools to deal with such issues. They suggest that governments increase workforce participation among underrepresented groups such as women and the elderly. They could also help retrain unemployed people to get them back into the workplace. In South Korea, for example, the government plans to aid female workers and businesses by giving incentives to small and mid-sized companies that retain employees for more than a year after they have children. They hope that they’ll be able to keep the economy stable and protected from population decline by doing this. Countries can also increase workplace participation among the elderly by implementing technologies that will help them remain productive. Efforts such as these can be combined to continue providing the tax revenue the state needs.

Some academics even argue that a shrinking population could help solve other crises. Of particular concern is climate change, the negative effects of which have become increasingly apparent in recent years as weather patterns shift and natural disasters occur more frequently. Climate change is directly linked to the population growth of the last few centuries: the ever-rising human consumption of raw materials and manufactured products has led to unsustainable levels of pollution. As the human population stops growing and eventually shrinks, humans will create less pollution, and climate change will become considerably easier to manage.

A declining population could also benefit human rights and equality around the world, both by promoting gender equality and by providing more opportunities for migration from developing to developed countries. In many regions, women still have fewer educational and employment opportunities than men do. As the population shrinks, governments will place more value on educating young women to fill gaps in the workforce. The same is true of immigration. Today, many governments still prefer to keep immigrants out in favor of their own citizens. To boost their economies in the coming decades, these governments will likely be compelled to allow much more freedom of movement.

The French philosopher Auguste Comte once said that “demography is destiny,” and it was long believed that countries with growing populations thrive, while those with shrinking populations go into economic and social decline. It would seem, however, that this old calculation needs to be revised. If the Dutch campaigners have it right, the coming population decrease could, in fact, be great.

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| **Unit 11 Lesson 1** | **SCIENCE** |

**First Line of Defense**

Today, in research laboratories across the planet, scientists are working to better understand how diseases behave and how our bodies work by testing chemicals, drugs, and procedures on animals before they are used by or on humans. For some, animal research is a highly controversial practice, but empirical evidence proves that it does not happen without logic or purpose.

Let us begin by examining some of the practical reasons why humans use animals for research. First, animals’ internal systems often share similarities with our own: this includes respiratory, circulatory, digestive, nervous, and immune systems. Although science can do many things, these systems are not yet possible to simulate using artificial technologies. However, mice—the animal most often used for research—are a ninety-seven percent genetic match with humans. Furthermore, as most animals have short lives and reproduce quickly, we can study them throughout their lifespan and see the effects of treatments on their next generation.

Another consequence of sharing similarities is that diseases that occur in humans are also very common among animals. Dogs, for example, naturally suffer from cancer, cataracts, and ulcers (a common stomach complaint). Meanwhile, rabbits are vulnerable to many of the heart conditions that humans can develop, such as blocked arteries. Animals can also develop diseases like the flu, and as is well known, COVID-19 seems likely to have begun within bats. In fact, it was due to preliminary research using animals—including mice and monkeys—that scientists were able to develop a human vaccine for the COVID-19 virus so quickly.

Animals have also helped us to better understand our bodies and develop state-of-the-art medical procedures. Much of what we know about the mysteries of the human brain is a result of studying neurotransmitters in giant squid and tiny worms called nematodes. These studies have allowed us to expand our understanding of problems such as memory loss. In addition, operations for people that are considered common today were first performed on animals. Hip and knee replacement surgeries were first performed on animals in nineteenth-century Germany by Dr. Themistocles Gluck. In the 1950s, the first successful heart operations and transplants were carried out by US doctor John Gibbon—on dogs. Within a few years, Gibbon used what he had learned to save the life of an eighteen-year-old girl with a heart problem. She made a complete recovery and went on to live a long life.

So, without question, animal research educates us and saves human lives, but does

that necessarily make it right? To answer this, we need to examine some philosophical arguments about animal research. In 1975, Australian philosopher Peter Singer’s influential book Animal Liberation was one of the first to make the case against animal testing, painting it as cruel and unnecessary. Singer suggested that we should acknowledge animals as our equals. This point of view, however, leads to an interesting question regarding what is good or bad: would it be right to hurt or even kill one human to save one million human lives? Then, how about one animal? Those opposed to animal research often seem to avoid this difficult question.

Despite the lack of conclusive answers to animal testing’s ethical problems, many of the systems we have in place ensure that animal research is as limited and painless as possible. For example, in the UK and the EU, there is legislation that states that animals can only be used for research when it can be proven that there are absolutely no alternatives. Testing on isolated cells and tissues should always be considered first. When there are no other options, the animals being experimented on should be as small as possible: worms or flies, for example. And if it is thought that an animal might suffer, anesthetics are legally required.

While it is a topic that people often respond to emotionally, it is important to understand the logic that informs animal research. As we have seen, it has a range of significant benefits, and humans do not experiment on animals simply because they can or because they enjoy it, but because to not do so would lead to greater, more long-term suffering.

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| **Unit 11 Lesson 2** | **SCIENCE** |

**A Case Against Animal Testing**

Each year, countless animals are experimented on worldwide. The Humane Society of the US estimates the annual number of animal test subjects in that country alone at over twenty-five million. Globally, the total is said to be more than one hundred million animals per year.

One of the main reasons such research occurs is the widely held opinion that animals are resources for human use. While most scientists oppose unnecessary animal cruelty, many maintain that animal testing is integral to the search for medical treatments that enhance the quality of human life.

In response, animal rights activists work to debunk the claims of the animal testing industry. They refute the arguments in favor of experimenting on animals and support the elimination of animal testing in all its forms. Let’s take a closer look at some of these animal testing myths and the arguments against them.

Myth: Animals aren’t capable of human-like intelligence or pain. “Bird-brained” and “bovine” (which means of or relating to cows and similar animals) are terms we apply to unintelligent people. Yet, careful observation of animals should cause a rethinking of these expressions. Crows and ravens, which are common, fairly large black birds found around the world, are now known to use tools and even plan tasks ahead of time, something once believed to be unique to humans. Furthermore, cows are more mentally complex than most people think: they can solve mazes, and they experience emotional suffering when separated from their mothers.

Intelligence aside, the consensus in the scientific community is that animals can feel pain. When put in painful situations, mice and rats show expressions on their faces similar to those shown by humans in pain. In addition, animals display an increase in brain hormones and protective reactions and a loss of interest in food when exposed to painful stimuli.

Myth: Very few animals are harmed or killed.

Let’s say that most animals being tested on are neither seriously hurt nor killed because of research protocols. Even if this is true, other aspects of the animal testing industry must be taken into account.

First, lab facilities are like prisons, where animals are kept in crowded cages and are exposed to various day-to-day stressors such as loud noises and bright lights. They are prevented from expressing their natural behaviors and interacting with other members of their species. These conditions create severe mental trauma, especially in primates. Investigations have revealed monkeys screaming, ripping out their hair, and running around in circles in laboratory environments.

Then there is the defense that government regulations protect animals from unethical testing practices. True, there are laws like the Animal Welfare Act in the US, but the protection they provide is limited. For instance, mice and rats are not covered under the Animal Welfare Act, and therefore, they do not receive the same safeguards of minimum cage size and transport. In fact, the federal government does not require mice and rats to be included in the annual count of animals used in research—a serious problem, considering that these species make up ninety percent of all animal test subjects.

Myth: There are no suitable alternatives.

Some scientists justify experimenting on animals by claiming that other research methods cannot produce useful enough results. However, there is evidence that animal testing itself is ineffective. In the US, for instance, ninety-two percent of medicines that have gone through animal testing fail in human trials. Moreover, human studies have produced a number of the most significant scientific findings. These include the link between smoking and cancer, the development of X-ray technology, and the discovery of the virus that causes AIDS.

Innovations in testing methods over the past few years are also proving to be very valuable, and there have been great improvements in research methods that use human cells or computer-modeling devices. In particular, Harvard University has created systems called Organs-on-Chips that behave like human body structures.

In brief, these options show that medical research can be done without animal testing. And given the speed of technological advances, it is only a matter of time before experimenting on animals becomes completely outdated. Therefore, why not act now and ban animal testing once and for all?

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| **Unit 12 Lesson 1** | **ENVIRONMENT** |

**Buy Locally**

Just yesterday, I was lost and came across a local farmers’ market. I’d forgotten that this market takes place every week, so I spent a bit of time wandering around and taking in the sights and the smells of fresh fruits and vegetables.

While there, I started talking with another shopper and suggested that I could buy fresh foods of similar quality at a supermarket for much less money. She assured me that the tomato I was squeezing was the best purchase I could ever make. I’d be supporting local farmers as well as helping the environment. And, with a flash of anger in her eyes, she said that I wouldn’t be “enriching the evil corporate agricultural machine.” Seriously—she actually said that. I set the tomato down and backed away slowly.

It’s easy to believe that buying locally produced food is better than buying food at a supermarket. But I left the market that day feeling that a bit of research was needed.

Certain problems became clear immediately; first, there’s no solid definition of “local” when talking about a food’s origin. The idea of eating local is so appealing to some people that one enthusiastic eater even came up with the term “locavore” to describe someone who only eats food grown within a set radius around the eater’s home. But what distance are we talking about? It could be a 250-mile or even 500-mile radius. There’s no real way to determine when it stops being “local” and starts being “imported.”

In an article titled “The Inefficiency of Local Food,” Steve Sexton creates a theoretical world in which all food production is local. In this system, food producers grow a share of food proportional to their state’s population rather than mass-producing a crop to export elsewhere. To start, these farmers would need to obtain more farmland. After the land has been cleared, the crops would need to be treated with fertilizer and chemicals. Then they would have to be gathered, moved to a distributor, and finally transported to stores. According to Sexton’s estimates, a local system would require 60 million additional acres of farmland, 2.7 million more tons of fertilizer, and 50 million more pounds of chemicals compared to our current systems. The environmental impact would be devastating.

While supporters of locally grown food argue that transporting food long distances increases carbon emissions, Dr. Alexander Kasterine of the International Trade Centre suggests the opposite. For example, you can grow pineapples and mangoes in hothouses in the UK. But farms in England, as it turns out, use more energy in their food production than do farmers in Africa, who rely on machinery less and more on manual labor. Transit from Africa actually results in lower carbon emissions than growing the food at home would. On top of that, deliberately avoiding the agricultural output of developing nations would be unfair to the farmers in those countries. The solution, Dr. Kasterine says, is not to grow locally and cut off the food supply from overseas but to focus on reducing carbon emissions at home.

What about growing your own food? Community gardens are multiplying in urban areas thanks to political initiatives, but I was surprised to find out that even growing your own vegetables doesn’t have as positive an impact as you’d think. In places like New York City, where space is already scarce and expensive, putting aside acres of land for planting a few vegetables instead of developing housing forces more people to live outside city limits and travel to work by car. Thus, sustaining a dense population within a small area, where people can walk and take public transportation, probably does more good for the environment than planting a few rows of squash does.

We are thus faced with a dilemma. Vast quantities of fossil fuels are consumed whether we ship our fruits and vegetables from another continent or grow them in empty city lots or small farms outside of town. But if you examine the numbers, the lesser of these two evils becomes apparent—shipping in food is our best, if less than perfect, choice in the long run.

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| **Unit 12 Lesson 2** | **ENVIRONMENT** |

**The Case for Local Food**

The foundation of human civilization was agriculture, which began in the Neolithic period between 7,000 and 10,000 years ago. Growing food rather than hunting and foraging altered the way that humans lived, as it meant that they were able to settle permanently in one place, spend time improving other things necessary for life, and expand their societies. Farming today remains at the center of human civilization and sustains life on Earth as we know it. Unfortunately, certain modern farming practices may also be simultaneously destroying life on Earth as we know it.

This sounds like a paradox, but the fact is that agriculture is now big business. According to the US Environmental Protection Agency, it is one of the top five economic sectors in terms of greenhouse gas emissions. Giant corporations have established industrial farms all around the world. They grow the most profitable crops and send them as far as necessary to make as much money as possible. Some nations are heavily dependent on the cultivation and export of certain crops—for example, corn in the US or bananas and mangoes in the Philippines. Because these crops are grown on massive farms and shipped far and wide, an enormous amount of fuel is burned in the process.

Another problem with industrial farming is the spread of illnesses. People need to be very careful about what they put into their bodies, and the health problems caused by modern agriculture have multiple layers. It is difficult to ensure that every single food item meets the safety standards expected by regulators and consumers on large factory farms. Hence, cases of food poisoning are quite common. Just as importantly, what is permissible in one place may not be in another. Even if farms attempt to follow regulations regarding which chemicals they can and cannot use for exported food, a nearby farm growing crops for the domestic market may not follow the same standards, and contaminants can travel from place to place.

Moreover, as animals, plants, and humans all come in greater contact with each other, zoonotic diseases such as Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (a variant of mad cow disease), swine flu, and coronaviruses become more widespread and dangerous. The human immune system is not prepared to deal with these illnesses. We also don’t fully understand the long-term effects that efforts to combat these diseases, such as antibiotics and genetically modified organisms, will have on humans and the environment.

Fortunately, all of these problems can be mitigated by keeping agriculture small-scale and local. Because it spends less time in transit, locally grown food requires less energy, thus reducing emissions. Food that doesn’t have to be shipped long distances also arrives at its destination fresher. It contains more nutrients, and less of it is lost to being spoiled. Moreover, small farms are usually family-owned and are passed down from generation to generation. The farmers thus feel a great sense of responsibility to take proper care of their land, livestock, and other resources. Research has shown that small farms use better soil and water conservation practices and fewer chemicals than “agribusiness” does.

In addition to being better for the planet and our health, locally sourced food has significant economic and social benefits. From the farmers who grow it to the people who transport it, to the people who sell it, to those who buy and eat it, the whole economic supply chain is kept inside the community. This creates jobs and allows family-owned farms to stay in business. Since consumers can buy their food directly from the people who grew it, locally sourced food fosters relationships among farmers and neighbors.

Whether your reasons for doing so are environmental, economic, social, or health-related, buying locally grown food is clearly the superior choice. While it may not be reasonable to ask people and institutions to buy exclusively from local producers, a conscious effort to do so as much as possible could go a very long way.