

Green Court Claims

Are Green Companies REALLY
Green? Let the Jury Decide!



Laura Candler
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Green Court Claims

Are Green Companies Really Green?

Lesson Plan by Laura Candler



Lesson Overview

In the Green Court Claims lesson, students will investigate claims companies make about their products and business practices to imply that they are environmentally friendly. This lesson would work well in a unit on propaganda or as an environmental science lesson and will take approximately 3 days to a week depending on the age level and maturity of your students.

Background Information

Many companies include “green” claims on their labels or in the advertisements, but not all of those claims are solid when examined closely. For example, the peanut jar label on the right proclaims, “85% Less Packaging” which sounds like a good thing. But underneath those words, in smaller letters, the label says, “Than glass jar by weight.” So is this actually helpful or harmful to the environment? The company has replaced glass jars which are 100% recyclable with plastic jars that are the same size but weigh less. Plastic is bad for the environment; it’s not fully recyclable like glass, and it takes hundreds of years to degrade in a landfill. So why would a company switch to plastic if it’s not good for the environment? Could it be that plastic is cheaper? Could it be that reducing the product’s weight makes it cheaper for them to ship those jars? These are inferences, but perhaps they switched to plastic to save themselves money. Yet they are promoting the switch as being good for the environment!



Courtroom Analogy Note: Throughout this lesson, you’ll use courtroom terms such as argument, jury, and verdict. This lesson is loosely based on courtroom procedures, but it’s not intended as a lesson on how cases are tried in a court of law. These terms are not explained in the directions below, but when you do use them, you will need to take a moment to explain each new term as it is introduced.

Suggested Lesson Sequence (3 - 5 Days)

Day 1 – Introduce Green Concepts

1. **Introduce the term “going green.”** You might begin by saying that “going green” is the practice of trying to change wasteful habits and adopt new ways of behaving that are friendlier to our environment. Ask students for examples of “green” behaviors such as recycling, car pooling, planting trees, and so on.



2. **Discuss “green company claims.”** Explain that many companies are now claiming to change their businesses or products to become more environmentally friendly. However, sometimes their practices are not “green” at all, and their claims can be downright misleading. (If you are using this as a part of a propaganda lesson, you can explain that this is a form of propaganda.)

3. **Provide examples.** Share the example of the peanut jar provided in the background section or something else from your own experience. You might find some ideas on the Consumer Reports Greener Choices website (www.greenerchoices.org). As you explain the example, show a copy of the Green Court Claims recording sheet (page 6) and add the relevant details:



a. The peanut jar claim would be “85% Less Packaging than glass jar by weight. Same amount of nuts.”

b. What the company wants us to believe is that 85% less packaging is better for the environment.

c. There aren’t many arguments to support the claim that plastic packaging is helpful to the environment. The jar does weigh less which may save on the amount of fuel needed to transport the peanuts, but I can’t think of any other benefits to the environment. (Can you?)

d. Arguments that the claim may be harmful include the fact that plastic is not as recyclable as glass and it takes hundreds of years to degrade in a landfill. Furthermore, some studies have shown links between plastic and some types of cancer. Plastic is made from petroleum which is a non-renewable resource. Also, the amount of packaging is less by weight but the jar is still the same size.

4. **Discusses the claim and write the verdict.** After you present the arguments, tell the class that they are going to serve as the jury and discuss the arguments before coming to a decision. Facilitate the discussion, and then poll the class with heads-down vote or secret ballot. Based on the decision of the majority, ask the class to help you write up a statement at the bottom that is the “verdict.” In this case, the verdict would be that changing packaging to plastic is probably not good for the environment.

5. **Students look for examples.** Next, ask students to look at product labels and advertisements to find their own examples of “green” claims by companies. Each student should come to class the next day prepared with one example to share. You can use the Green Court Claims Research form provided on page 7.

They should each try to find at least one claim a company is making that something is “green” or environmentally friendly. If you don’t want to assign this for homework, you could bring in a variety for products from your home that have green claims on them, or allow students to look for items in the classroom that display these types of claims.

Day 2 – Select Claims and Investigate

1. **Choose ONE claim.** Students present the product claims that they found to their team and discuss those claims briefly. Then the team chooses just ONE of the claims to discuss in detail and investigate.
2. **Discuss company green claims and complete the form together.** Each student will need a copy of the Green Court Claims form on page 6. Together, team members discuss the questions at the top of the page and enter the information in their own words.
3. **List arguments and discuss.** When they get to the question about whether or not the company’s practices are helpful or harmful to the environment, they should list the arguments on both sides of the issue and discuss them.
4. **Investigate claims.** If possible, allow class time for the team to investigate questions that come to mind about the product or the claims. For example, a can of tuna might claim to be “dolphin safe” but not really explain what that means. Students will either need classroom access to research materials and the Internet, or they will need time to take the assignment home to investigate further.

Green Court Claims Name _____
Product _____ Company _____
What is the "green" claim being made by this company?
What does the company want us to believe about this claim?
Is this claim more helpful or more harmful to the environment?
Arguments for Claim Being Helpful
Arguments for Claim Being Harmful
What's the jury's verdict? Is the claim more helpful or harmful to the environment? Explain.
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Days 3 and 4 – Teams Present Cases to the Jury

1. **Present Cases to the Jury.** Team members will present their cases to the class, and their classmates will serve as the jury. Before those presentations, give teams about 10 minutes to discuss their findings and prepare the statements that they want to present to the jury. Tell them that each person has to have one part in the presentation. On a four-person team, you might assign the tasks as outlined below:

Presentation Roles

- Person #1 – Present the company, the product, and the claim.
- Person #2 – Explain what the company wants buyers to believe.
- Person #3 – Present any arguments that the claim is actually true and this company’s practices are helpful to the environment.
- Person #4 – Present the opposing side to show that the claim may actually involve practices that are harmful to the environment.

Team Tasks

2. **Teams present their cases to the jury.** You will serve as the judge and preside over the courtroom during the “trial.” As each case is presented, facilitate a discussion of the arguments for and against the claim. Ask students to challenge any assumptions that might be made. You may have to “table” the discussion if you don’t feel that the jury has enough information to make a decision. If this happens, ask the team that presented the case to conduct more research on the topic and present the information the next day.



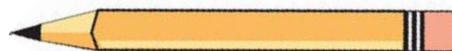
3. **Jury members cast votes.** When the class has finished discussing each case, ask everyone to vote whether the company’s practice is mostly helpful or mostly harmful to the environment. They can write “helpful” or “harmful” on individual dry erase boards and you can “poll” the jury by having them show their boards. Or you can have them do a heads-down vote and raise their hands when you announce the choices. If the decision is not unanimous, you can bend the usual courtroom procedure and say that the majority rules.

4. **Jurors record notes.** Give each student one copy of the Green Court Claims Juror Notes on page 8. Explain that the word “jury” refers to a group of people and each individual member of the jury is a “juror.” After each case has been presented, have them record the name of the company, the product, and the claim. After the verdict is reached, they should circle either “Mostly Helpful” or “Mostly Harmful” and write a reason for their choice.

Company Information		The Green Claim	The Verdict and Supporting Arguments		
Company	Product	Claim	Verdict	Mostly Helpful	Mostly Harmful
Reason					
Company	Product	Claim	Verdict	Mostly Helpful	Mostly Harmful
Reason					
Company	Product	Claim	Verdict	Mostly Helpful	Mostly Harmful
Reason					
Company	Product	Claim	Verdict	Mostly Helpful	Mostly Harmful
Reason					
Company	Product	Claim	Verdict	Mostly Helpful	Mostly Harmful
Reason					
Company	Product	Claim	Verdict	Mostly Helpful	Mostly Harmful
Reason					

5. **Remaining Teams Present Cases.** Repeat by having the remaining teams present their cases one at a time. If there’s a lot of discussion, this step will take several days.

6. **Optional Writing Activity** - Ask students to choose one of the companies that made an inaccurate green claim. Have them write a persuasive letter to the company’s president explaining why they don’t believe the claim to be valid and asking the company to take steps to improve the product or packaging.



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Green Court Claims

Name _____

Product _____ Company _____

What is the “green” claim being made by this company?

What does the company want us to believe about this claim?

Is this claim more helpful or more harmful to the environment?

Arguments for Claim Being Helpful

Arguments for Claim Being Harmful

What’s the jury’s verdict? Is the claim more helpful or harmful to the environment? Explain.





Green Court Claims Research

Name _____

Due Date _____

Look at product labels and advertisements to find claims made by companies that imply that some aspect of their product or packaging is helpful to the environment. Record your findings below and bring this form back to class on the due date to share in our Green Court lesson.

1. Product _____ Company _____

What is the “green” claim ? _____

Where did you see this claim? (Label, TV ad, etc.) _____

2. Product _____ Company _____

What is the “green” claim ? _____

Where did you see this claim? (Label, TV ad, etc.) _____



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Green Court Claims

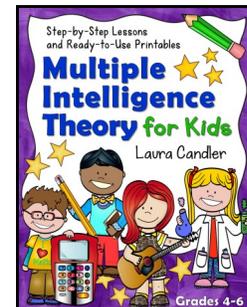
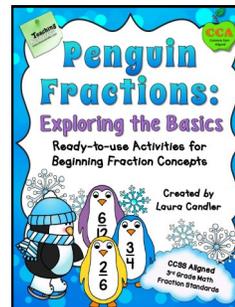
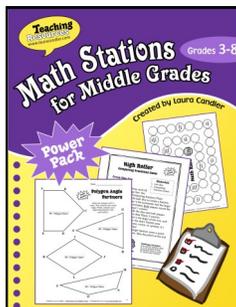
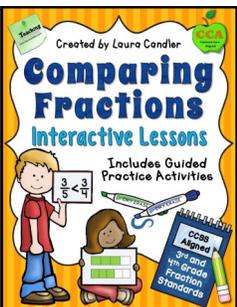
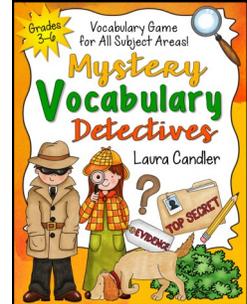
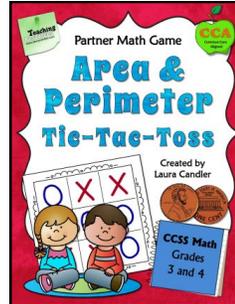
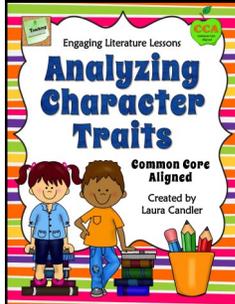
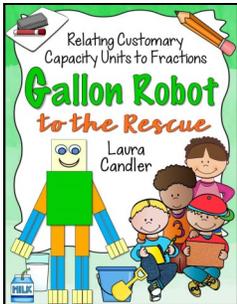
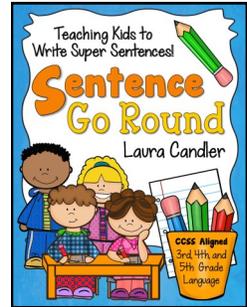
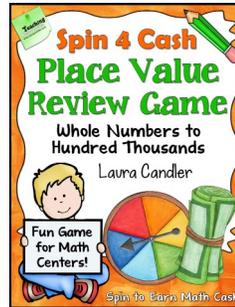
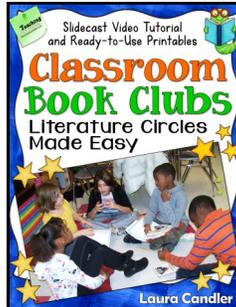
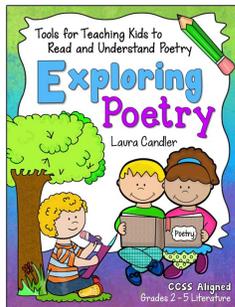
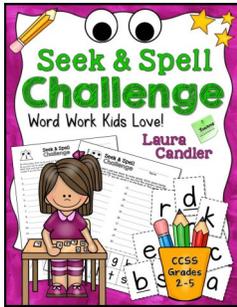
Juror Notes

Name _____

Date _____

Company Information	The Green Claim	The Verdict and Supporting Arguments
Company _____ Product _____	_____ _____ _____	Verdict: Mostly Helpful Mostly Harmful Reason _____ _____ _____
Company _____ Product _____	_____ _____ _____	Verdict: Mostly Helpful Mostly Harmful Reason _____ _____ _____
Company _____ Product _____	_____ _____ _____	Verdict: Mostly Helpful Mostly Harmful Reason _____ _____ _____
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Company _____ Product _____	_____ _____ _____	Verdict: Mostly Helpful Mostly Harmful Reason _____ _____ _____
Company _____ Product _____	_____ _____ _____	Verdict: Mostly Helpful Mostly Harmful Reason _____ _____ _____
Company _____ Product _____	_____ _____ _____	Verdict: Mostly Helpful Mostly Harmful Reason _____ _____ _____

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