

Tupperware *Teacher's Guide*

The film *Tupperware!* and this companion Web site offer insights into topics in American history including the post-World War II economy, advances in plastics technology and manufacturing, direct selling and business history, women's changing roles in society, women and work, social networks, consumer culture, the American Dream, and the Cold War. You can use part or all of the film, or delve into the rich resources available on this Web site to learn more, either in a classroom or on your own.

The following activities are grouped into 4 categories: history, economics, geography, and civics. You can also read a few helpful hints for completing the activities.

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Civics

Tupperware has become so familiar that the word is often used, uncapitalized, as a generic term for any resealable plastic container. As a class, see how many other brand names you can list that are used generically. How does it help a company to have its trademark used this way in conversation? Can you think of any potential drawbacks for the company?

Read about [positive thinking](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/general-article/tupperware-positive) (www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/general-article/tupperware-positive) in America, and browse some [self-help](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/primary-resources/tupperware-wishes) (www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/primary-resources/tupperware-wishes) primary sources from the 1950s. Books of advice on how to get rich, have a successful career, improve relationships with family and friends, or be happier and more content have long enjoyed great popularity in the United States. Find a "self-help" book at your local library or bookstore -- or in your own house -- and read it. (Another place to look for possible titles is the best-seller list, which usually includes several self-help books.) Select from the book a one- or two-sentence piece of advice that you find especially important or true, and write that excerpt on the board. When everyone has finished, have the class examine and compare the excerpts. What do the books' messages have in common? How do they differ?

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Economics

With a partner, select two identical perishable food items, such as two pieces of bread from the same loaf. Put one item in a sealable plastic container (it need not be Tupperware) and the other in a paper bag. Place both items in your refrigerator. After three days, remove the items from their containers and bring them to class. Can your classmates tell which of each pair of items had been kept in a plastic container?

Read a short biography of [Brownie Wise](#)

(www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/biography/tupperware-wise). Brownie Wise was neither the first nor the last American woman to achieve great success in the business world. Divide the class into seven groups and assign each group one of the following women: Mary Kay Ash, Helen Gurley Brown, Katharine Graham, Madonna, Martha Stewart, Madam C. J. Walker, Oprah Winfrey. Each group should prepare a five-minute biographical presentation on its subject, including the woman's background, how she became involved in the business she excelled in, and why she was so successful, and present it to the class.

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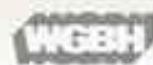
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Geography

Though the Tupperware factory was in central Massachusetts, [Tupperware Home Parties Inc.](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/general-article/tupperware-parties) (www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/general-article/tupperware-parties) bought land in central Florida for its corporate headquarters. To appreciate the contrast between the two states -- and perhaps understand why Tupperware chose Florida for its headquarters -- have the class create displays for both states. The displays can include maps, photos, original drawings, products from each state, timelines of key events in the state's history, graphics showing climate or other data, and other items.

Read about the [business of Tupperware](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/general-article/tupperware-business)

(www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/general-article/tupperware-business). As it and the film explain, many "Tupperware families" moved to new communities to help the company extend its reach across America. For these families -- as for any family moving to a new place -- adjusting to a new life could prove challenging, for children as well as parents. Write a 500-word account of an experience that you or a family member had in building a new life in a strange town, such as making new friends in school, adjusting to a new job, acclimating to a new climate or physical environment, or just learning your way around town.

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History

Read about [women and work](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/general-article/tupperware-work) (www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/general-article/tupperware-work) after World War II and read the questions and answers with historian [Elaine Tyler May](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/interview/tupperware-may) (www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/interview/tupperware-may) on the same subject. The movement of large numbers of women into the work force has been one of the most significant changes in American society of the past half-century. To begin to understand its effects, conduct a multi-generational survey on women's attitudes and experiences regarding working outside the home. First, divide the class into two groups: one to survey adult women, the other to survey female students in your school. Each group should then prepare a list of questions. Questions for adult women could include: Have you worked outside the home? What factors led you to seek employment? Do you work full-time or part-time, and why? Questions for female students could include: Do you plan to work outside the home? What would be your goals in seeking employment? Would you like to work full-time or part-time? Other questions might explore the effects of women's movement into the work force on methods of raising children, on husbands' domestic responsibilities, and on women's personal happiness and self-confidence. Once the questions are complete, each group member should survey at least two persons. Groups should then examine their findings and summarize them for the class. When this is done, discuss as a class what you have learned. Do you notice any differences between adult women and female students in their attitudes toward work?

Read about conceptions of [the future](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/general-article/tupperware-future) (www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/general-article/tupperware-future) in the 1950s. Space exploration had a strong hold on Americans' imaginations in the 1950s -- much stronger than today. Divide the class into five groups and assign each group one of the

decades between the 1950s and the 1990s. Have each group select the five most important events in that decade related to space exploration and the American imagination; at least two of these should be illustrated with photos or other artifacts. Using these materials, prepare a timeline of America and space over the past half-century. Why might Americans' interest in space have waned in recent decades?

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Teacher's Guide: Hints for the Active Learning Questions

Civics

Possibilities include Gatorade, Q-tip, Kleenex, Post-it, Band-Aid, Rollerblade, Bic, Velcro, Gore-Tex, Coke, Jell-o, and Jeep. Students may want to consult the Web site of the [U.S. Patent and Trademark Office](http://www.uspto.gov/trademarks/index.jsp) (www.uspto.gov/trademarks/index.jsp), where they can read basic facts about trademarks and use a search engine to see if a given term is trademarked. Presumably, sales of a given product will be helped if consumers look for the product by brand name -- if, for example, they go to the store looking for "tupperware" instead of just any resealable plastic food container. On the other hand, if a company is unable to protect its trademark, rival companies will begin to use the term as well.

You might ask for volunteers to read the classic works cited in the reading: *Poor Richard's Almanac*, a story by Horatio Alger, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, and *The Power of Positive Thinking*.

Economics

Students should be sure to get their parents' permission before putting the items in the refrigerator (!). After the presentations, you might discuss as a class the question of whether the qualities that make a woman successful in business differ from those that make a man successful.

Geography

One way to start this activity would be to have each student write down the first word or image that comes to mind when he or she thinks about each of the two states. (You might also try this experiment with other states to see how students' views of various states compare.) Information on the two states can be found at <http://www.mass.gov>

(www.mass.gov/portal/) and <http://www.myflorida.com>. Ask volunteers to read their accounts to the class. You also might discuss as a class whether moving is more difficult for parents or for children.

History

As preparation for this activity, you might have the class prepare graphs showing the growing share of women who work outside the home or other data related to women in the work force. Data for more recent decades can be found in the Census Bureau's annual publication, [Statistical Abstract of the United States](http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab) (www.census.gov/compendia/statab). Note that the timeline can include events outside the United States (such as the launch of Sputnik), as well as developments in popular culture (such as the "Star Trek" television series and the "Star Wars" movies).

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