

SPECIAL REPORTS

JOHN STOSSEL MYTHS, LIES and NASTY BEHAVIOR

Subjects: Social Studies and Language Arts

Grade Levels: 9-12

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Synopsis

John Stossel, co-anchor of ABC's *20/20*, debunks a top ten list of beliefs on topics ranging from gasoline prices to sharing. (Does sharing possessions make the world a better place—or not?) In order to disprove these “lies” and “myths” and expose “nasty behaviors that are [costly as well as] annoying,” Stossel interviews and investigates government officials, litterbugs, noisy nightclub patrons, politicians, farmers, and unemployed workers whose jobs have been “outsourced,” among others.

The video contains the segments described on pages 2-3. You might use any or all segments as part of a language arts or social studies unit focusing on current events, critical thinking, drawing conclusions, and distinguishing facts from opinions.



NEWS
Classroom Edition

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Nasty Behavior #10

Illegally dumping garbage on public land

[Begins at start of videotape]

Via a hidden camera strategically placed to catch litterbugs in the act, Stossel shows us a form of nasty behavior that's unfortunately all too common: dumping garbage on public land. Apparently untroubled by the mess and environmental damage they cause, people hurl bag after bag of trash from their car trunks and pick-up trucks. By the sides of back roads they hastily drop off old TV sets, couches, and bikes. Picnicking teenagers toss beer cans into pristine rivers. One man even discarded a sack full of live puppies—his punishment was probation, a mere slap on the wrist.

Nasty Behavior #9

Tacking government surcharges, regulatory fees, and "gross receipts" taxes onto people's cell phone bills

[Begins at 2:54]

Though competition has brought cell phone charges down, all levels of government keep inventing new taxes to add to customers' bills. Cell phone bills are so complicated already, Stossel suggests, that lawmakers hope most people won't notice that they are paying a whopping 14.5 percent in taxes (the nationwide average) above and beyond what traditional land-based phone companies charge.

Nasty Behavior #8

Making noise in public without regard for others' wellbeing

[Begins at 4:40]

Noise pollution is all around us. Being forced to listen to car alarms, noisy nightclubs, and strangers gabbing on cell phones endangers some people's health. Noise can raise your stress level and deprive you of sleep. This can lead to high blood pressure and other health problems. These days, you can't even escape noise pollution by traveling far from big cities. Jet skis, snowmobiles, and off-road motorbikes can make the great outdoors as noisy as the metropolis!

Myth #7

Gas prices are higher than ever

[Begins at 8:03]

According to the media and popular belief, we're paying more for gas than we ever did in the past. But John Stossel contends that, adjusted for inflation, current gas prices are no higher than they were decades ago. He cites U.S. Department of Energy statistics that reveal a startling fact: Gas costs less today than it cost during most of the twentieth century. To drive this point home, Stossel compares gasoline prices to convenience store prices for bottled water and gourmet ice cream. By the gallon, these commodities cost far more than gas does.

Nasty Behavior #6

Spending federal funds on unnecessary state projects

[Begins at 10:46]

In this segment, Stossel deplores "pork barrel" spending by politicians such as Representative Don Young, a Republican congressman from Alaska. Young hopes to earmark federal funds for a bridge linking Ketchikan, Alaska to an island where the community airport is located. The project has a \$200 million price tag. Stossel asserts that most local residents are perfectly satisfied with the ferry service that currently provides transportation to and from the airport. Yet Young seems determined to push this legislation—and other "pork" for Alaska—through Congress.

Nasty Behavior #5

Providing and accepting federal "welfare for farmers"

[Begins at 14:15]

Many U.S. taxpayers like the idea of helping family farmers, so they don't mind the fact that billions of tax dollars go to farm subsidies. But John Stossel calls people who accept such funds "welfare queens." Stossel points out that many of those who receive farm subsidies aren't farmers at all—they're agribusiness investors who live in big cities. Some of them don't even know what they're receiving farm subsidies for. Also, Stossel asks, why are some crops—such as cotton—subsidized, while others—such as peaches—aren't? In Stossel's opinion, farms that can't remain viable on their own steam should simply be allowed to go out of business as failing restaurants and stores do.

Myth #4

Outsourcing is bad for American workers

[Begins at 18:34]

Via the media and politicians such as presidential candidate Senator John Kerry, we've learned the evils of "outsourcing." American workers suffer when employers outsource their jobs to lower-paid employees in other countries. "However," Stossel asserts, "in reality outsourcing is not a crisis. The crisis will only come if we try to stop it." To prove his point, Stossel interviews American workers who've obtained better jobs than the ones they lost to outsourcing. He also cites statistics that show two surprising facts: 1) Outsourcing lowers prices on consumer goods such as clothing; and 2) Outsourcing some jobs helps U.S. companies create even more jobs here at home.

Myth #3

Politicians who champion public schools—and fight school vouchers—always send their own kids to the public schools that they claim to support

[Begins at 24:09]

John Stossel and others are in favor of a school voucher system. Under such a system, taxpayers could opt to receive some of their tax dollars back in order to send their children to private schools. This makes sense, Stossel points out, because many public schools are in terrible shape these days. He interviews a lower-middle-class mom who sends her kids to a parochial school—and struggles to pay the tuition. Next he interviews a dad who'd like to pull his kids out of the public school system, but can't afford to. Stossel claims that politicians who oppose school vouchers, such as Senators Hillary Clinton and Ted Kennedy, are hypocrites. They say that a voucher system would drain away much-needed funds from public schools. Yet they send their own kids to elite private ones. "This is one of those do as I say, not as I do things," says Stossel.

Myth #2

Suburban sprawl is ruining America

[Begins at 27:50]

Regarding urban and suburban sprawl, Stossel interviews James Kunstler, author of *The Geography of Nowhere*. "Most of the country," the writer contends, "really is living in these mutilated and defective environments [suburban housing developments]." Kunstler advocates "smart growth," a city planning method that limits development. Smart growth boosters hope to create denser, but more attractive inner-city communities, and to cut traffic congestion caused by sprawl. Stossel points out that in Portland, Oregon, where city planners follow smart-growth guidelines, land prices have skyrocketed and traffic is as bad as ever. The newscaster argues that since

95 percent of U.S. land is undeveloped, we don't really need to stop creating new suburban neighborhoods. Smart growth, Stossel asserts, "is destroying the lives of poor people, that [Kunstler is] basically telling low-income people who want backyards that they can't have one.... And even places that may look like soulless subdivisions to [Kunstler] are places where many people want to live. They have playgrounds, parks and backyards. What the busybodies call sprawl, others call homes they can afford."

Myth #1

Shared public property makes the world a better place

[Begins at 31:00]

Most people think sharing is a good thing, and John Stossel agrees that this is true in families and other small groups. He does not believe, however, that "sharing is caring" when it comes to public property. Stossel interviews an economist and a high school teacher who advocate privatization of public property for a simple reason: If you own something, you take better care of it.

To prove this theory, Stossel compares the cleanliness of a privately owned ballpark to the mess in a publicly owned park. He cites forest fires on carelessly managed public lands.

Elephant populations in Africa provide another example of privatization's advantages. In countries such as Kenya, where elephants are publicly owned, their population numbers have plummeted, even though elephant hunting is illegal. But in other nations, such as South Africa, villagers own their own herds. They are also authorized to sell a few astronomically priced elephant hunting licenses. This may sound barbaric, but according to economist Russell Roberts, "The villagers now say, 'These are our elephants.' [They] have a profit motive to make sure that the elephants don't get poached and killed. As a result, they take care of them." In African countries with privatized elephant herds, pachyderm population numbers have soared from 80,000 in 1960 to about 230,000 in 2000.

Concludes Stossel, "So while sharing may feel warm and fuzzy, it often makes things worse. By contrast, private ownership—whether it's public toilets or hunting and fishing licenses—makes the world better."

Objectives

The student will:

- explore controversial political, economic, ethical, philosophical, and sociological issues and problems such as littering, cell phone taxes, gas prices, farm subsidies, “pork barrel” spending, school vouchers, suburban sprawl, and privatization of public property;
- use critical thinking to detect faulty logic and distinguish between fact and opinion;
- determine whether to accept others’ opinions as valid, based on their credentials and the kinds of evidence they present;
- integrate individual stories about people, events, and situations to form a more holistic conception, in which continuity and change are linked in time and across cultures.

Background Information

John Stossel

Born in 1947, John Stossel is a 1969 graduate of Princeton University, where he earned a BA in psychology. He started his journalism career as a researcher for a Portland, Oregon, television station. When ABC TV first hired him, Stossel became the consumer editor on *Good Morning America*. He joined ABC’s newsmagazine show, *20/20*, in 1981 and rose to the role of co-anchor with Barbara Walters in 2003; in 2004 Elizabeth Vargas replaced Walters as Stossel’s co-anchor. Stossel began hosting his own one-hour specials in 1994. On these and on his *20/20* opinion segment called “Give Me a Break,” he deals skeptically with topics ranging from pop culture to politics to censorship to widely believed but unfounded fears. Stossel has received many honors for his work, including 19 Emmy Awards.



Preview Questions

Ask these questions prior to viewing Nasty Behavior #10: Those Nasty Litterbugs

1. Is it legal to dump trash and worn-out furniture on public land? Is it legal to dump your trash in other people’s dumpsters and trash cans?
2. Have you ever known anyone who got into trouble for discarding trash illegally? What happened?
3. Would you call littering “nasty behavior”? Why or why not?

Ask these questions prior to viewing Nasty Behavior #9: Extra Cell Phone Charges

4. Have you ever looked closely at a cell phone bill? If so, what other kinds of fees did it include besides the ones that the cell phone company charged?

Ask these questions prior to viewing Nasty Behavior #8: Noise Pollution

5. How do you feel about the following:
 - a) people who have loud cell phone conversations in public;
 - b) car alarms;
 - c) noisy recreational vehicles such as jet skis, snowmobiles, and off-road motorbikes.
6. What does “noise pollution” mean?
7. Do you know anyone who has been stopped by the police for making too much noise? What happened?

Ask these questions prior to viewing Myth #7: Gasoline Prices

8. Do you remember how much gas cost per gallon when you were a small child? How much do you think gas prices have gone up in the past few years?
9. What does “adjusted for inflation” mean?
10. Is the following statement true or false? Gas prices are higher today than they have ever been in the past.

***Ask these questions prior to viewing Myth #6:
“Pork Barrel” Spending in Congress***

11. What is “pork barrel” spending?
12. Should taxpayers in California, Texas, Florida, Kansas, and Maine (for example) have to pay for multi-million-dollar building projects in Alaska? Why or why not?

Ask these questions prior to viewing Nasty Behavior #5: Farm Subsidies

13. What is a “family farm”? What other kinds of farms exist in the U.S.? What is “agribusiness”?
14. What do the words “subsidy” and “subsidize” mean?
15. As far as you know, is welfare a helpful, necessary program or a costly, unnecessary one?

***Ask these questions prior to viewing Myth #4:
“Outsourcing” US Jobs***

16. What does it mean to “outsource” U.S. jobs?
17. Do you think outsourcing is a valid business practice? Does it harm American workers? Explain your opinions and tell how you learned what you know about outsourcing.

***Ask these questions prior to viewing Myth #3:
Hypocrisy and the School Voucher Controversy***

18. What are “school vouchers”? Are they available to U.S. parents today?
19. If you could switch from a private to a public school, or vice versa, would you? Why or why not?
20. Do you think most politicians send their children to public schools or private ones? What makes you think so?

***Ask these questions prior to viewing Myth #2:
Suburban Sprawl***

21. What does the word “sprawl” mean? What do “urban” and “suburban” mean? Define the terms “suburban sprawl” and “housing tract” or “housing development.”
22. Do you like the way most suburban housing developments look? Why or why not?
23. Would you rather live in a city center or in a suburb? Explain your reasons.

***Ask these questions prior to viewing Myth #1:
Sharing Is Caring—Isn’t It?***

24. Is sharing always a good thing to do? Explain why you think so.
25. Generally speaking, which are cleaner and tidier—public restrooms in parks, or restaurant restrooms? Why do you think this might be so?



Postviewing Questions

Ask these questions after viewing Nasty Behavior #10: Those Nasty Litterbugs

1. What reasons do you think the people in the video had for dumping their trash on public land?
2. Do you think that the litterbugs shown in this segment deserved harsher or lighter punishments than those they received? Explain.
3. If you were a public official, what kinds of laws would you pass that might help to prevent illegal garbage dumping?

Ask these questions after viewing Nasty Behavior #9: Extra Cell Phone Charges

4. Do you think that governments have a right to tax cell phone users? Why or why not?
5. What do you think governments might do with the cell phone taxes they collect?

Ask these questions after viewing Nasty Behavior #8: Noise Pollution

6. In order to treat others with respect, what do you think cell phone users should and shouldn't do in public? Do you think that cell phone use should be banned in certain places? Where and why?
7. Do you think that car alarms are effective? What makes you think so? What quieter methods might owners use to protect their vehicles?
8. Some people want to ban noisy vehicles such as jet skis and snowmobiles from public parks. What do you think about this issue? Give reasons for your opinion.
9. If a noisy nightclub opened next door to your home, how do you think you would feel about it? How would your family members feel? Why?

Ask these questions after viewing Myth #7: Gasoline Prices

10. Before you watched this segment, did you believe that gas prices today are higher than ever? Did John Stossel's arguments change your mind? Stossel states that "when you adjust for inflation," gas prices are still fairly low. What does this mean?
11. Stossel compares gas prices to convenience store prices for bottled water and gourmet ice cream. Do you think that these comparisons help to prove his point? Why or why not?

Ask these questions after viewing Myth #6: "Pork Barrel" Spending in Congress

12. Suppose that a California congressperson wanted 200 million federal tax dollars to help repair San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge (which serves thousands of drivers every day and charges a \$5-per-vehicle toll). Would this be a more valid use for federal tax money than building a bridge from Ketchikan, Alaska to its island airport? Explain why you think so.
13. Should federal tax money be spent on any state projects that are not absolutely necessary and provide little benefit to taxpayers from other states? Why or why not?

Ask these questions after viewing Nasty Behavior #5: Farm Subsidies

14. Do you agree or disagree with John Stossel's opinion on farm subsidies? What else might you need to find out before expressing an opinion on this topic?
15. Why might some farm products be subsidized while others aren't? (For instance, cotton is subsidized and peaches aren't.)

***Ask these questions after viewing Myth #4:
“Outsourcing” US Jobs***

16. Do you know any adults whose jobs have been outsourced to workers in other countries? What happened? Did those adults eventually find new jobs, or are they still unemployed?
17. Suppose that someone in your family has worked for the same company for many years. Imagine that suddenly, the company lays off your family member, along with many other workers, and gives their jobs to lower-paid workers in another country. How do you think you would feel about this?
18. Did John Stossel’s arguments in favor of outsourcing convince you that it is actually good for U.S. workers? Explain your response.

***Ask these questions after viewing Myth #3:
Hypocrisy and the School Voucher Controversy***

19. Explain what a school voucher system would do.
20. Why are many people reluctant to implement a school voucher system in the United States?
21. Do you agree or disagree with John Stossel when he calls politicians such as former President Clinton hypocritical when it comes to the school voucher controversy?
22. Where do you stand on the school voucher issue? Explain your reasons.

***Ask these questions after viewing Myth #2:
Suburban Sprawl***

23. Do you agree or disagree with author James Kunstler when he calls suburban housing developments ugly? Do you think that living in the suburbs makes some residents unhappy? Explain your response.
24. Which is more important—enabling most people to have backyards, or preserving open space around cities? Give reasons for your opinion.

***Ask these questions after viewing Myth #1: Sharing
Is Caring—Isn’t It?***

25. What is privatization? Did John Stossel’s arguments in favor of privatization convince you that it works better than sharing public property does? Explain your opinion on this topic.



Suggested Activities

1. Prior to viewing *Lies, Myths, and Nasty Behavior*, distribute copies of the Response Chart at the end of this Guide. Have students fill in the chart as they watch the program. Then invite them to share and discuss their opinions, feelings, and questions about the issues that John Stossel raises. Help students distinguish verifiable facts from opinions that Stossel and his interviewees present. If some students disagree with conclusions that the *20/20* reporter draws, encourage them to explain why. Ask them to do library and Internet research to back up their views.
2. Read aloud the following statements from the program, one by one. Ask students to tell who makes the statement, and what the speaker means by it.
 - “It drives me crazy ‘cause this is a beautiful place, and these are class-four and -five rapids. And it’s just gorgeous.” (Nasty Behavior #8)
 - “The illegal dumpers, they’re here constantly—almost every day.” (Nasty Behavior #10)
 - “They were charging every resident who used wireless services in the city of Baltimore \$3.50. They said, ‘Hey, this is a good thing. Let’s double it.’” (Nasty Behavior #9)
 - “You gotta expect it. You live in the city—deal with it!” (Myth #7)
 - “They don’t even put the price on the sign anymore—it just says, ‘If you have to ask, you can’t afford it.’” (Myth #7)
 - “I think our existing ferry system is just dandy—and it doesn’t cost \$200 million.” (Nasty Behavior #6)
 - “If I can’t grow my six-thousand acres of cotton because the subsidy’s gone, where am I gonna go with that acreage? Do I just idle it?” (Nasty Behavior #5)
 - “Just because of cheap labor, we’re destroying our middle class. That is just stupid. Being stupid is un-American.” (Myth #4)
 - “It doesn’t cheat Americans out of jobs. If I hadn’t hired the people in India, I would have had to lay people off.” (Myth #4)
 - “This country cannot even clothe itself. Ninety-six percent of our apparel is imported.” (Myth #4)
 - “We had to make the decision just for our daughter.” (Myth #3)
 - “Something needs to be done now. You cannot take my tax dollars and tell me you’re not going to help me help my children.” (Myth #3)
 - “I’m unalterably opposed to a voucher system to give people public money to take to private schools.” (Myth #3)
 - “I like that I have a nice piece of property, and I have privacy.” (Myth #2)
 - “Well, you can’t have everything [such as backyards].” (Myth #2)
 - “When something belongs to everyone, it belongs to no one. No one owns it. There’s no incentive to take care of it. It gets abused and degraded.” (Myth #1)
 - “If it’s ours, we will care more about it.” (Myth #1)
3. Have students list unfamiliar and/or specialized terms that John Stossel and his interviewees use on the program. Then have students use a dictionary to create “word families” based on the words they collected (see the examples below). Have students define each word and use it in a strong context sentence.
 - (Those Nasty Litterbugs, Nasty Behavior #10) surveillance: survey, surveyor, surveyed; disposal: dispose, disposed, possess, possession
 - (Extra Cell Phone Charges, Nasty Behavior #9) technology: technique, technological, technical, technician, tech (short for technician)
 - (Noise Pollution, Nasty Behavior #8) intrusions: intrude, intruder, intrusive, extrude, extruder
 - (Gasoline Prices, Myth #7) gas: gasoline, gaseous, natural gas, gas guzzler; inflation: inflate, inflated, inflationary, deflate, deflated
 - (“Pork Barrel” Spending in Congress, Myth #6) populated: population, populate, repopulate, popular, popularity, unpopular
 - (Farm Subsidies, Nasty Behavior #5) subsidies: subsidy, subsidize, subsidiary, subsidiaries; welfare: well, fare, faring, farewell, wellbeing
 - (“Outsourcing” U.S. Jobs, Myth #4) outsourcing: outsource, outsourcer, out, outfit, outlaw, source, resource, resourceful, natural resources
 - (Hypocrisy and the School Voucher Controversy, Myth #3) vouchers: vouch, vouching, vouched, to vouch for someone, vouchsafe; hypocrisy: hypocrite, hypocritical, criticize, criticism

- (Suburban Sprawl, Myth #2) suburban sprawl: suburb, suburbanite, urban, urbane, sprawling, sprawled
- (Sharing Is Caring—Isn't It?, Myth #1) privatization: private, privacy, privatize, private property, semiprivate, Army private

4. Have students collect and read current and archived newspaper and magazine articles on the topics John Stossel brings up in *Myths, Lies and Nasty Behavior*. Also encourage them to read editorials and organization press releases that express various points of view on these issues. Then students can form groups and report on the topics in the following ways:

- Present factual information, trying to be as objective as possible.
- Hold debates and discussions on the issues.
- Create bulletin board displays that include graphic aids, pictures downloaded from the Internet, and short student essays showing both sides of the issues.

Activities to accompany Nasty Behavior #10: Those Nasty Litterbugs

- Have students do Internet research to find out what the penalties are for illegal garbage dumping in your state or community. They might do further research to compare these penalties to those in other states. Students can report their findings to the class in short oral presentations. Encourage them to determine whether they think the punishment fits the crime.
- Students can hold a debate on the following statement: Under certain circumstances, garbage dumping should be allowed on public lands. Have students form small “pro” and “con” teams. For debating guidelines, you might visit the website Debate Central at <http://debate.uvm.edu/default.html>. Before students debate, team members should collect facts to support their side of the argument.
- Have students research landfills. They can draw a diagram that shows a landfill's parts and describes each part's function. Students can find a detailed article on this topic on the website HowStuffWorks.com. <http://people.howstuffworks.com/landfill6.htm>
- Have students find answers to the following question: How successful are recycling programs in the United States today? Are they accomplishing their goals? To find answers,

students might visit websites sponsored by environmental advocacy groups such as the National Resources Defense Council nrdc.org or the Sierra Club sierraclub.org. The following books may provide answers, too:

- *Garbage and Other Pollution: How Do We Live with All the Trash* by Virginia Peterson (editor) and Mark A. Siegel (Gale Group, 1998)
- *Garbage and Waste* by Charles P. Cozic, Bruno Leone, Brenda Stalcup, and Scott Barbour (editors) (Gale Group, 1997)

Ask students to brainstorm a list of changes that might make recycling programs more effective.

Activities to accompany Nasty Behavior #9: Extra Cell Phone Charges

- Have students interview local officials or do Internet research to find out what kinds of local taxes people pay in your community. These might include sales taxes, taxes on businesses, luxury or “sin” taxes, gas taxes, and taxes that help pay for local schools. Each student can report back to the group on a different kind of tax. Be sure that students also research what projects these tax monies were spent on. After each report, students can vote on whether or not the tax seems fair, reasonable, and worthwhile.
- Students might ask permission to examine the cell phone bills of in-state and out-of-state family members. Have them draw graphs or other visual aids that show how cell phone taxes in various states compare.



Activities to accompany Nasty Behavior #8: Noise Pollution

11. For a week or a few days, students might keep a noise journal to keep track of noise pollution levels in their neighborhoods. Tell them to note down any noises that are loud enough to notice, e.g., sirens, car alarms, cars or motorcycles with loud engines, loud car radios, nearby trains, and loud cell phone conversations. They should describe each noise, tell what time it occurred, and assign it a number from 1 to 10. Tell them to assign a 1 to a barely noticeable sound, and a 10 to the loudest or most obnoxious sound imaginable.
12. Ask students to write a short essay or humorous poem on the following topic: Loud noises and how people feel about them. Questions to consider include: Why do some people actually like loud sounds such as car radios turned up full blast, while other people are “noise phobic?” Why do you think different people are different in this regard? Why do most people dislike noises that others make, yet feel OK about sounds that they themselves create? Generally speaking, do you think that kids enjoy noise more than adults do? Why might this be?

Activity to accompany Myth #7: Gasoline Prices

13. Have students conduct a survey to determine whether most people believe that gas prices today are higher than ever before. Before they conduct their survey, students should write a hypothesis that predicts what their research will reveal. Then they can survey grandparents, parents, schoolmates, and friends of various ages. Have students write a few paragraphs to sum up their survey results. Ask them to include graphic aid(s) in their summary.



Activities to accompany Myth #6: “Pork Barrel” Spending in Congress

14. Have students search the Internet for recent articles, press releases, and editorials on “big government,” “government bloat,” and “pork barrel legislation.” They can print out the articles and scan them for portions that link various representatives of Congress to seemingly unneeded programs that benefit only single states or communities. They might also read portions of “Unorthodox Lawmaking: New Legislative Processes in the U. S. Congress” by Barbara Sinclair (*Congressional Quarterly*, 2000). After students complete their research, lead a discussion on the following questions: What are the reasons behind pork barrel legislation? If you were in Congress, would you vote to eliminate this kind of lawmaking? Why or why not?

Activity to accompany Nasty Behavior #5: Farm Subsidies

15. Have students research farm subsidies. Possible resources include:
 - *American Agriculture in the Twentieth Century: How It Flourished and What It Cost* by Bruce L. Gardner (Harvard University Press, 2002)
 - “Report on Public Attitudes Regarding Farm Subsidies” http://www.pipa.org/OnlineReports/Economics/FarmPress_01_04.pdf
 - Environmental Working Group’s Farm Subsidy Database <http://www.ewg.org/farm/findings.php>

Then have students discuss the following questions: Why did the U.S. government start paying subsidies or “price supports” to farmers? Have these subsidies actually stopped family farmers from losing their farms? Whom do farm subsidies help most, family farmers or agribusinesses? Should the U.S. government stop subsidizing farming, as John Stossel believes?

Activities to accompany Myth #4: “Outsourcing” US Jobs

16. Have students conduct a survey based on the following questions: In your opinion, is outsourcing a good thing or a bad one? Which is the most important reason for your opinion? With their survey, have students include a short, neutral description of outsourcing. For the second survey question, they should write a list of possible reasons. For example:
- Outsourcing is a good thing—it helps U.S. businesses flourish.
 - It is a bad thing—it causes U.S. workers to lose jobs that they have held for many years.
 - It is a good thing—it forces laid-off workers to retrain for more interesting work.
 - It is a bad thing—it causes whole industries (such as the garment industry) to leave U.S. soil, perhaps forever.

Before they conduct their survey, students should write a hypothesis that predicts what their research will reveal. Have students write a few paragraphs to sum up their survey results.

17. Ask a workers’ union representative to speak to your class concerning his or her union’s position on outsourcing and other issues. Students might ask questions such as the following:
- Is your union opposed to outsourcing? If so, please explain why.
 - What could the U.S. government do to discourage business owners from outsourcing jobs?
 - When a worker is laid off due to outsourcing or some other cause, what can the union do to help, if anything?

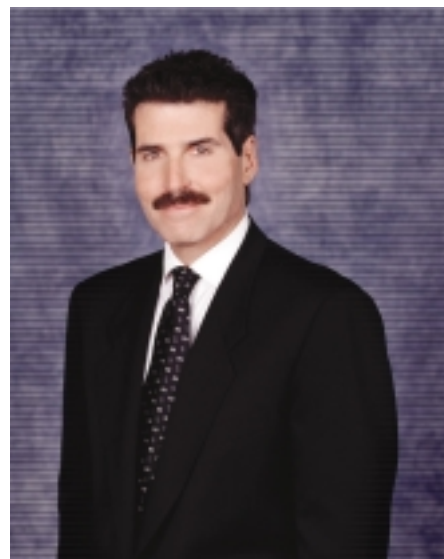
Activities to accompany Myth #3: Hypocrisy and the School Voucher Controversy

18. Have students conduct a survey based on the following question: Should the U.S. government institute a school voucher system? With their survey, have students include a short, neutral description of school vouchers. Before they conduct their survey, students should write a hypothesis that predicts what their research will reveal. Have students write a few paragraphs to sum up their survey results.

19. Some people who oppose school vouchers believe that such a system would use federal taxes to support parochial (religious) schools. Have students research the issue of separation between churches and the U.S. government. Books on this topic include *Proclaim Liberty Throughout All the Land: A History of Church and State in America* by Edwin S. Gaustad (Oxford University Press, 2003). Students can write persuasive essays supporting one side or the other of the school voucher issue and/or the church and state one.

Activities to accompany Myth #2: Suburban Sprawl

20. Have interested students read one of James Kunstler’s books, such as *Geography of Nowhere: The Rise and Decline of America’s Man-Made Landscape* (Free Press, 1994) or *Suburban Nation: The Rise of Sprawl and the Decline of the American Dream* (North Point Press, 2001). They can hold a book talk in which they summarize the information they learned and discuss their opinions and feelings about the issues that Kunstler presents. Ask students to read aloud passages from the book that they feel are especially important or invalid, and/or parts that they think are well or poorly expressed.
21. Have students recall that James Kunstler describes suburbs as “mutilated and defective... uniformly low-grade, miserably designed environments that make people feel bad.” Ask students how the 20/20 reporter counters Kunstler’s description. Encourage students to share their own reactions to suburbs and other kinds of neighborhoods. They can write a personal narrative that tells whom they agree with—Stossel or Kunstler—and why.



Activities to accompany Myth #1: Sharing Is Caring—Isn't It?

22. If there are any privatized public services in your community, have students write neutral-sounding survey questions and interview users concerning their degree of satisfaction with these services. Students might also ask interviewees how the new systems compare with the way things were when the government ran the programs. Students can make charts or graphs that show their survey results.
23. Have students imagine that a private company took over an aspect of your school such as running the cafeteria or teaching the art and music classes. Ask students to think about improvements and problems that this might cause, and write an essay about the pros and cons. Remind them to consider issues such as reactions from parents and workers' unions, as well as the need of private companies to make a profit.
24. Challenge students who oppose privatization of public property to illustrate the merits of shared property. Students might design and implement an experiment similar to the one that teacher *Tori Haidinger* conducted in her high school classroom—of course, this experiment should prove the opposite point!

Internet

If you have access to the Internet, here are some sources of information on some of the issues presented:

Transcript of John Stossel's Myths, Lies and Nasty Behavior

<http://abcnews.go.com/2020/story?id=448934&page=1>

Congress for the New Urbanism

<http://cnu.org>

Smart Growth Online

<http://smartgrowth.org>

These two sites provide information on the “smart growth” movement to which author *James Kunstler* belongs.

Taxpayers for Common Sense, “a non-partisan budget watchdog”

<http://www.taxpayer.net>

Includes current news on “pork” projects such as Ketchikan, Alaska’s Gravina Bridge.

Environmental Protection Agency

<http://www.epa.gov>

The EPA’s website includes a Kids’ Club and a section for teachers. Students can use the website’s search function to find information on a variety of topics related to environmental pollution and the EPA’s activities.



Activity #1: Response Chart

As you watch *Myths, Lies, and Nasty Behavior*, use the second column of the chart to record your reactions to the information John Stossel reports, as well as the opinions and conclusions that he and others express. Also jot down any questions that come into your mind as you view the show.

<i>"Myth, Lie," or Example of "Nasty Behavior"</i>	<i>Your Own Opinions, Feelings, and Questions</i>
#10 Those Nasty Litterbugs	
#9 Extra Cell Phone Charges	
#8 Noise Pollution	
#7 Gasoline Prices	
#6 "Pork Barrel" Spending in Congress	
#5 Farm Subsidies	
#4 "Outsourcing" U.S. Jobs	
#3 Hypocrisy and the School Voucher Controversy	
#2 Suburban Sprawl	
#1 Sharing Is Caring—Isn't It?	