

### **Social Class Symbols** (shared by Kimberly Coffman; created by Michelle B. Kunz)

This site provides three interactive activities/games that exemplify social class in America. This activity is a fun way to either introduce or wrap up a lecture in a consumer behavior class on social class/status.

If used as an introduction to the unit, the Chintz or Shag game is a short, five-minute or less activity that the class as a whole (if not too large) can contribute suggestions, and then see which items chosen to furnish a home indicate social class in America. The results can be used to support the class discussion/lecture on social class and status. If used at the end of the unit, it is a nice, fun activity that again can be used to review clues and symbols related to social class.

#### Learning Goals

In this activity students will:

- Identify personal items relative to social class and status
- Analyze components of personal belongings which relate to social class
- Discuss the variability and complexity of social class and status symbols

#### Context for Use

This activity is a fun way to get students engaged in a consumer behavior class discussion of social class and status. It does not take more than 2-3 minutes to complete the Chintz or Shag game, but often my students can spend 10-15 minutes discussing, comparing, and often request "replays" to see what different answers will give in the final analysis.

I typically use this for an introduction to my lecture/discussion on social class and status. However, depending upon individual teaching style, and size of class, it could also be used to summarize a discussion on the topic as well. I have found my students (typically juniors) find it a fun and engaging activity, while it gives me some excellent examples of what symbols may be used by consumers to indicate membership in a social class/group.

#### Description and Teaching Materials

The site has three different games and activities related to social class. The Chintz and Shag game is a quick activity that asks the player to select household furnishings and accessories. Upon completion of these choices, the results are analyzed according to the social class(es) related to each choice. The game uses examples of household décor items, such as hardwood versus a Persian rug, or the presence/absence of a TV as indicators/symbols related to social class.

The site requires Shockwave/Flash Player to run, so be sure your classroom/instructional computer has the software loaded. In addition, if you have bandwidth issues, it may take a while to load, so when I teach in a classroom with limited bandwidth, I pre-load the game before class.

The home site, *People Like Us*, is a companion to the PBS documentary special, and as such includes video clips, additional material, interviews, and storyline information. I find these resources helpful in discussing lifestyle related to consumer behavior and decision-making processes.

## References:

- Center for New American Media. (2001). People like us: Social class in America. Retrieved from <http://www.cnam.com/people-like-us/index.html>.
- Munz, M.B. (n.d.) Social class symbols: In-class activity game. MERLOT. Retrieved from <https://www.merlot.org/merlot/viewMaterial.htm?id=483209>.