



Where Does Your Money Go First?

A quick topic-starter for introducing wants, needs, and the role of context in financial decisions.

BEST FOR

Grades 8–12 | Intro financial literacy | Wants vs. needs

TIME NEEDED

15–20 minutes

MATERIALS / COPIES NEEDED

Display the starter list; student notebook/paper or optional student copy

LEARNING FOCUS

Classify expenses using reasons, then build a working description of wants and needs

LEAD PROMPT

When you have money you can choose how to spend, which expenses are wants, which are needs, and which depend on the situation?

STARTER LIST — WHERE STUDENTS OFTEN SPEND MONEY FIRST

- Food and snacks with friends
- Clothing and shoes
- Entertainment (movies, gaming, concerts)
- Phone upgrades or tech purchases
- Transportation for social activities
- Hobbies and personal interests

Teacher Instructions

1. Display the starter list without defining wants or needs first. Ask students to classify each item as Want, Need, or Depends.
2. Have students choose two classifications and briefly explain the reasoning behind them. Then compare with a partner or small group.
3. Use disagreements as the discussion. Ask what circumstance, purpose, amount, or available alternative might change the classification.
4. Build a class description of “want” and “need” from the students’ reasoning before offering the teacher synthesis below.

Student Task

For each item, choose **Want, Need, or Depends**. Then: (1) justify two of your choices, and (2) choose one item whose classification could change if the circumstances changed. Describe what would have to change.

Wrap-Up / Debrief

- What made an expense a need rather than a want?
- Which items created the most disagreement? What information would settle the disagreement?
- Can the same type of expense be both a want and a need? What determines the difference?

POSSIBLE CLASS DESCRIPTION

A **need** is reasonably necessary for basic well-being, safety, essential responsibilities, or daily functioning. A **want** adds enjoyment, preference, convenience, status, or an upgrade beyond what is necessary. Context matters: the same category can shift depending on purpose, circumstances, cost, and available alternatives.

OPTIONAL EXTENSION

Choose one item from the list. Change one detail so that a reasonable person could classify it differently. Explain what changed and why.

GFF / FDIF™ CONNECTION

Students make a judgment before receiving a definition, then use discussion and changing evidence to refine their reasoning — a core FDIF™ decision-making move.