



## HIGH SCHOOL | UNIT 1

### Being Financially Responsible

# Title

## Worth It?

### LEARNING OBJECTIVE(S)

Students will:

- **Reflect** on personal spending decisions and priorities.
- **Identify** typical expenses across the school year.
- **Develop** tips for making smarter spending decisions.

### Topic

Spending Wisely

### Overview

*How can I make smart decisions when spending my money?* In this lesson, students explore what influences their spending—both for big purchases and everyday habits—and how to make smarter financial decisions. After participating in an interactive activity that encourages them to reflect on personal spending choices, students work in small groups to brainstorm expenses that occur throughout the school year. They then identify common costs, overlooked expenses, and things that often cost more than expected. Finally, each group creates practical “Smart Spending Tips” to help peers plan ahead and avoid impulse spending.

### Financial Literacy Theme

Informed financial decision-making

### 21st-Century Skill(s)

Collaboration, Communication, Critical Thinking

### Key Terms

Spending, purchase, opportunity cost, impulse purchase, comparison shopping, price, warranty, exchange

# Pathway to Financial Success

In Schools

## Connect

### How does this connect to the student?

Students make spending decisions every day—whether it’s grabbing a snack, shopping for an event, or upgrading a phone. These choices often feel automatic, influenced by convenience, friends, or trends. This activity helps students pause and reflect: What do I really want? What am I giving up when I choose one thing over another? By recognizing their own spending patterns and developing strategies with peers, students learn to take charge of their money instead of letting it control them.

### How does this connect to careers?

#### Consumer Behavior Analyst:

Nearly every purchase people make is tracked and analyzed by companies looking to better understand their customers. From what influences someone to buy a particular brand of shoes to how they respond to a discount code, businesses rely on insights about consumer behavior to make decisions. Professionals who study these patterns—like **consumer behavior analysts**—use data to explain why people spend the way they do and how businesses can meet their needs.

### How does this connect to technology?

Technology shapes how people spend—from mobile wallets and online shopping to apps that track spending or offer discounts. With just a few taps, it’s easy to make purchases without much thought. This activity encourages students to slow down and reflect on those decisions. It also introduces tech tools that support smart spending, like comparison apps, budget trackers, and deal-finders.

## Prepare

**Background:** **Spending** money is a regular part of daily life for high school students, whether it’s for something small like snacks or more significant purchases like a phone or concert ticket. In many cases, students don’t think about how much they spend or what they give up in order to make a purchase. This trade-off is known as the **opportunity cost**—what is given up when a choice is made. Students may also spend money impulsively, without planning or comparing their options. These **impulse purchases** often happen when a decision is made quickly, based on emotion, convenience, or peer influence.

In contrast, **comparison shopping** involves looking at different brands, stores, or deals before making a decision. This practice can help students find better prices, information on return and exchange policies, or features that match their needs. Additional considerations include the method in which the **price** is expressed and whether a **warranty** is a worthwhile expense.

The goal of this lesson is not to discourage students from spending but to help them think more critically about how, when, and why they spend. By reflecting on their spending habits and hearing from their peers, students can make more thoughtful financial choices that align with their needs and goals, both now and in the future.

## Materials

- **Worth It Signs**—one copy of each (OPTIONAL)
- Tape (OPTIONAL)
- **Money in the Moment Student Capture Sheet**—one copy per small group
- **Money in the Moment Sample Student Answers**—one copy for reference
- Whiteboard space or chart paper
- Markers
- [School-Related Spending \(2:30 min\)](#)

## Engage

- Tell students that this activity will challenge them to think about the financial decisions they make—both big and small—and consider what can influence those decisions.
- Designate one side of the room as “Definitely worth it” and the other side as “Not worth it.” Use the **Worth It Signs** to label each side (OPTIONAL). Let students know they will move to a point along the line depending on how they personally feel about each spending scenario.
- Read the following prompts one at a time and follow up with one or more of the provided questions while students are still standing in position:

### **Prompt 1: A new outfit for prom (or another school dance)**

- What other costs come along with an event like prom? How do these impact the amount you are willing to spend on an outfit?
- Are there less expensive alternatives? Would you consider borrowing an outfit that has been worn previously?
- Would you feel pressure to spend more if your friends were buying expensive outfits?
- How might this purchase affect your budget for the rest of the month/year?

### **Prompt 2: The newest phone, even though yours still works**

- How do you decide when to upgrade something like a phone?
- If you are offered a warranty when buying it, would you take it?
- Would you be more likely to get the phone if the cost was spread out over many months instead of paying the full amount upfront?

### **Prompt 3: \$500 for a front-row concert ticket to see your favorite artist**

- Is this a one-time memory or something you would do more than once a year?
- How might this decision affect your ability to afford something else?
- Would you be more or less likely to spend this money if you had to earn it all yourself?

### **Prompt 4: A \$300 pair of sneakers**

- What would you do before making this purchase? Would you shop around?
- Could you find these on sale? Where would you check?
- What would you do if they didn't fit? Could you return them?
- How important are things like brand, reviews, or return policies when making a large purchase?

### **Prompt 5: A new gaming system when you already have one**

- What would make this feel like a good use of your money?
- What else could you spend that money on instead?
- Are there features that really make a difference, or is it more about having the latest version?

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## Teach

- Explain to students that while big purchases like a phone or concert ticket can seem like major decisions, it's often the everyday and seasonal costs that add up most.
- Play the video [School-Related Spending \(2:30 min\)](#) to get students thinking about common student expenses and strategies to spend wisely.
- Divide the class into five groups and let them know that they will be brainstorming expenses high school students have—everything from once-a-year or seasonal expenses to those that happen repeatedly year-round.
- Ask each group to identify a notetaker. Distribute a **Money in the Moment Capture Sheet** to the person identified in each group.
- They will list expenses in five categories: fall, winter, spring, summer, and year-round. Encourage students to think broadly and include a variety of costs, including school-related purchases (like activity fees or sports gear), personal spending (like clothes or snacks), and social costs (like event tickets or outings with friends). Challenge students to consider expenses that might apply to certain students but not others. For example, prom might be limited to juniors and seniors, and only seniors would have costs associated with applying to college. Students with vehicles are likely to have more transportation-related costs. Younger students might benefit from thinking about the costs of older friends or siblings.
- Once students have listed expenses in each category, direct them to do the following:
  - Put a star next to spending items that students might forget to plan for.
  - Add a dollar sign next to those that tend to be surprisingly expensive.
- Ask five volunteers to write group responses on the board or on chart paper. Designate five areas of the board (or chart papers) and label them: Fall, Winter, Spring, Summer, and Year-Round.
- Call on each group in turn to share at least one expense for each category. Direct volunteers to record student responses in the corresponding area. Encourage groups to build on each other's ideas and only share expenses that haven't been named. Continue calling on groups until all unique costs have been shared. See the **Money in the Moment Sample Student Answers** for additional expenses students may not have considered.
- Each group should be assigned one of the categories to focus on: Fall, Winter, Spring, Summer, or Year-Round.
- Instruct each group to review the brainstormed ideas for their assigned category and then develop a list of "Smart Spending Tips" for that category. These tips should help other students make better financial choices at that time of year. Groups should aim to create 2–3 tips based on real-life student experiences.
- Invite each group to share their tips with the class.
- Ask students if they are familiar with any apps or other tools that could help them make well-informed spending decisions. Point out that there are apps that help people compare prices, find discount codes and sales, and offer unbiased product reviews, but caution students to make sure that any tools they use are trustworthy.
- Remind students that smart spending isn't about avoiding fun or never buying anything—it's about making thoughtful decisions so they can feel good about their spending decisions and confidently look ahead to future ones.
- Before students leave, ask them to respond to one or more of the following prompts:
  - Name something you learned today that could help you make a more informed spending decision in the future.
  - What's one spending habit you might want to change or pay more attention to after today's activity?
  - Share an expense you hadn't thought about before today. How might you plan for it now?

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## Extend

- **Presentation:** Challenge students to find a creative way to share their smart spending tips with others, such as with a bulletin board, social media posts, or a “Spend Smarter” guide.
- **Research:** Direct students to choose one item they’re thinking about buying (e.g., headphones, clothes, video game, makeup) and conduct a real-life comparison of two to three options. Ask them to report with their top pick and explain: What features mattered? What trade-offs did they make?
- **Technology:** Ask students to research apps and online tools that help consumers make more informed spending decisions, such as those that help with comparison shopping, finding sales or discounts, etc. If they use them, students can report on ease of use, helpful features, and whether they’d recommend them to other students.
- **Family:** Invite students to interview a parent, guardian, or older sibling about a time they made a smart (or not-so-smart) spending decision as a teen. Ask students to summarize what they learned and how it might affect their own choices.

## Standards Correlation

The following standards are addressed in this module.

- [National Standards for Personal Financial Education](#) from the Council for Economic Education and Jump\$tart Coalition for Personal Financial Literacy
  - II. Spending 12-2 Consumer decisions are influenced by the price of products or services, the price of alternatives, the consumer’s budget and preferences, and potential impact on the environment, society, and economy.
  - II. Spending 12-3 When purchasing a good that is expected to be used for a long time, consumers consider the product’s durability, maintenance costs, and various product features.
  - II. Spending 12-4 Consumers may be influenced by how prices of goods and services are advertised, and whether prices are fixed or negotiable.
  - II. Spending 12-5 Consumers incur costs and realize benefits when searching for information related to the purchase of goods and services.
- [National Standards for Business Education](#) from the National Business Education Association
  - Personal Finance I.1.3 Apply opportunity costs and trade-offs to personal decisions.
  - Personal Finance V.1.3 Apply comparison shopping practices.
  - Personal Finance V.1.4 Identify alternative sources for purchases (e.g., e-malls, website, retail stores, and catalogs).
  - Personal Finance V.1.8 Use reliable consumer resources to collect information for making buying decisions about durable and nondurable goods.

# Definitely Worth It

# Not Worth It

# Money in the Moment

**Directions:** Brainstorm the expenses high school students might have in each season. Think about events, activities, and other factors that might influence spending. Try to list at least six different expenses for each season. When your lists are done, put a star (★) next to spending students might forget to plan for and a dollar sign (\$) next to those that often cost more than expected.

Fall	Winter	Spring	Summer	All Year



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Fall	Winter	Spring	Summer	All Year
Back-to-school supplies ★ New clothes/shoes \$ Homecoming tickets ★ Sports fees or gear \$ Club dues or fundraiser donations School photos ★ Tech upgrades for school (headphones, calculator, etc.) \$ Locker decorations or organizers School parking pass ★ Spirit wear or school merch	Holiday gifts ★ \$ Warm clothes/jacket \$ Secret Santa or group gift swaps ★ Winter formal attire \$ School dances or movie nights Holiday donation requests ★ Ice skating or seasonal outings ★ Holiday party contributions (food, supplies) ★ Lost gloves/hats replacements ★ Extra heating or rideshare costs \$ College application fees	Prom tickets and outfit ★ \$ Senior graduation fees \$ AP exam fees ★ End-of-year class trip \$ College deposit fees ★ \$ Teacher appreciation gifts ★ Yearbooks \$ Sports banquet or team celebration ★ Spring clothes or shoes Class ring	Vacations or trips ★ \$ Summer camp or programs Concerts or festivals \$ Spending time with friends (food, activities) Summer job clothes or gear ★ Gas for longer drives \$ Graduation parties (hosting or attending) ★ Snacks and meals on-the-go \$ Recreational gear (pool floats, sports gear, etc.) ★	Fast food/snacks \$ Streaming subscriptions ★ Gas or transportation \$ Clothing/shoes Personal care (hair, nails, etc.) \$ School supply restocks ★ App or game purchases ★ Club or activity fees ★ Impulse buys at checkout ★ Coffee or specialty drinks \$