

Trading up: one woman's quest to swap a hairpin for a house

Level: Intermediate

1 Warmer

a. Predict the article by reading the title and the subtitle.

- What do you think this article will be about?

2 Reading the article carefully

a. Now, read the article and see if your predictions were right. Is there anything in this article that you agree or disagree with strongly? Why?

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Demi Skipper would like a new house, but she's not buying one. Instead, she's planning a strategy of trades – and millions are following her journey.

Zoe Wood

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- 1 While many of us were still finding newness in Zoom calls in May 2021, Demi Skipper decided she was going to get a house. But not using money. Instead, she was going to trade items. Later in the same year, she was the owner of one of only a few Chipotle celebrity cards in the world, and hoped to reach a house by the end of summer.
- 2 It started in the living room of her rented house in San Francisco. She watched a Ted Talk by Kyle MacDonald. MacDonald was a 26-year-old jobless Canadian who traded 14 times to get from a red paperclip to a farmhouse in Saskatchewan, Canada, in 2006. Some of the trades in between included a fish-shaped pen, a camping stove, a trip, a year's rent in Arizona, and a role in a Hollywood film.
- 3 Skipper welcomed the challenge. "I can't buy anything. I can't use any money. And I can't trade anyone I know," she excitedly explained over a 7am video call. She was used to early mornings because she was working 6am to 2.30pm for BuzzFeed. She first posted an image of the hairpin, explaining her goal, and traded it for new earrings from a woman on Facebook. Many people were excited to participate. "I get probably 1,000 messages a day on Instagram."
- 4 She traded the earrings for four margarita glasses, which she traded for a vacuum cleaner, which traded for an old snowboard. The snowboard went for an Apple TV. She then exchanged it for a pair of Bose headphones, before trading these for an old Apple MacBook. A MacBook from a hair pin: it was an important moment. Thousands of people were watching her project, named Trade Me. She was nervous about the next trade because she had to ship the computer and trust the other person would send her a camera as promised.
- 5 The camera went for her first pair of rare valuable sneakers. She then went on to trade two more pairs of sneakers, and finally traded them for a new iPhone 11 Max. A family of Trade Me fans offered her a red minivan for the iPhone. It was the most surprising trade, and the most difficult. The couple drove the van 29 hours from Minnesota to San Francisco with their two kids. It then broke down and Skipper posted this on her TikTok. The family soon got a lot of hate on the internet, including a lot of Islamophobia. "The worst parts of the internet came out," she said.
- 6 She couldn't spend money to fix the minivan, so she swapped it for an electric skateboard, which went for the latest MacBook. She traded that for an electric bike food cart, followed by a Mini Cooper. The next trade was a mistake: A diamond necklace that she thought was worth \$20,000, but that would only be bought for \$2,000. She traded down for an exercise bike. Next was an old car (a Mustang), then another one (a Jeep), a tiny cabin, a Honda CRV and then three tractors.
- 7 Today's world is all about money, but cash itself is not worth anything. As a society, we've agreed on a story of what money is worth. We spend most of our time earning or spending it, but that's only been for the last 5,000 years. Before that, we would trade things and services. Skipper hopes more people will start to trade. Thousands of TikTokers are now tagging her project in their own goals. "Honestly, I love that it's a bit of an F U to capitalism," she said.

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3 Participating in a debate

a. A few students at your school who are fans of Trade Me have proposed that instead of using cash, students trade at school. Follow the steps below to participate in a class debate on the issue.

1. What is the overall idea of the text? Circle the correct sentence.
 - a) Demi Skipper has become famous for her new goal: she started with a hairpin and is trying to get a house by trading items.
 - b) Demi Skipper and Kyle MacDonald are working together to trade items for a house; it isn't easy, but they are getting there.
 - c) Demi Skipper is trying to convince others to stop buying things and to trade instead: she now has a Chipotle celebrity card that will sell for a lot of money

b. Work in a small group. Brainstorm ideas for and against the idea of trading things instead of using cash. Write them down below.

For trading / Against cash

For cash / Against trading



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- c. Now your teacher will give you further instructions. Take time to prepare your main arguments and counterarguments. Decide who is going to present each point. Also note down handy phrases that you can use.

Handy Phrases for Participating in Debates

Giving your opinion

In our opinion...

We strongly believe that...

There's no doubt that...

This is why... / For this reason...

Because...

Agreeing and countering

We couldn't agree with you more.

That's a good point.

Yes, in a way, but...

You could be right, but...

Yes, but remember that...

That may be so, but...

That would be great, except that...

Disagreeing

I'm not sure about that.

We disagree.

I'm afraid we can't agree.

We don't think that's the case.

Clarifying

What we mean is...

What I'm trying to say is...

Let me put it another way...

What I meant was...

4 Optional homework

- a. Use a voice memo to record a summary of the main points.

Think back at all the arguments and points made during the debate. Which ones were the strongest? Has your point of view changed? Summarise your opinion and explain your point of view in a 1-minute voice recording.