



Great River Sweep

Earthy Ideas for Your Classroom and Home

- Conduct a litter survey of your neighborhood or school grounds.
- Examine the pros and cons of using returnable beverage containers. What states have "*bottle bills*" (beverage container deposit laws)? Contact one or more of these states for information about how the legislation was accomplished politically, how it has been implemented and what impacts it has had on recycling, litter, jobs, public opinion, energy use, etc. Contact New York legislators, businesses, agencies and organizations and ask for their viewpoints and reasons for supporting or opposing beverage container deposit laws in New York. What do you think about a state or federal bottle bill?
- Brainstorm ideas for how you can help reduce solid waste.
- Ask every student in your class to pick up a piece of litter on the way to school. What is litter? What items often end up as litter? Why? How much of what you collect could be recycled? How do you feel about litter? How do you feel about collecting it? Why do we have a litter problem? What is meant by the slogan, "Every litter bit hurts?" Is littering common in other countries? What is different about countries where littering is not common? What suggestions do students have for helping solve the litter problem?
- Note what people in your neighborhood throw out on trash day. Do you see items that could be reused or recycled (e.g. window frames, old appliances, chicken wire, plastic plant trays, grass clippings, leaves, glass bottles, wood scraps)? Why do you think these items are being discarded instead of given away, recycled, or reused? What might you do about this? (e.g., offer to take materials to or contact Goodwill, Salvation Army, recycling companies; hold a yard sale; find others who could use the materials, etc.).
- Collect and discuss examples of objects that can be reused in ways different from their original purpose.
- Find out what the solid waste management laws are in your community. What are they designed to do? What do you think of them? Do they work well? If not, do you have suggestions for how they could be better?
- Consider the fact that the United States has 6% of the world's population, but uses over 25% of the world's natural resources. What do you think about this?
- Conduct a survey of several fast food restaurants and record the types of packaging (e.g., polystyrene, paper, aluminum foil) they use for similar items (e.g. soda, plain hamburger, fish sandwich, french fries, coffee). Is the packaging necessary? What criteria are you using to make your judgment? If you were concerned about the impacts of solid waste on the

environment, which restaurant would you patronize? Could you influence the restaurant to change its packaging policies? How?

- Investigate what manufacturers are doing to reduce the amount of packaging for their products. Report findings to your class.
- Visit your local solid waste disposal service to learn how it disposes of your community's waste. Visit your local recycling center.
- Gather trash from school or home and design useful objects from it (musical instruments, toys, bird feeders, planters, door stops, etc.).
- Examine contents of the classroom trash can at the end of the day. Record each piece of trash as it's removed. Can you reconstruct the day's activities from the clues in the trash can? Are any of the items recyclable?
- Conduct a school or neighborhood yard sale to reuse unwanted objects. What do you think about the saying, "One person's trash is another's treasure?"
- Take a field trip to a nearby woods or old field. Look for evidence of nature's recycling processes. For example, find natural objects that are decomposing (e.g. dead plants and animals, animal droppings, feathers, fur, etc.) and what "decomposers" are assisting this process (e.g. fungi, insects, molds, etc.). Investigate what you find carefully, and discuss what you saw, smelled and felt. Why is decomposition such an important natural process?
- Find out about ways in which litter harms animals. Investigate the often fatal impacts of: discarded fishing line and plastic six-pack holders on water birds (they can get tangled); old soda or beer bottles on shrews and other small mammals (they enter a tilted, slippery bottle and can't get back out); flip-tops on fish (small fish can get stuck in the rings); and cigarette butts, tin cans and other litter on deer, raccoons and other mammals (they eat the litter or can cut their tongues on sharp edges). Humans also can be hurt. Have you ever cut your foot on broken glass or a discarded nail? Think of other ways that litter can harm people and other animals. How can such problems be prevented? Contact your state legislator for an update on New York laws that address these problems.
- Set up a recycling plan for your school, if it doesn't already have one. Determine what can be recycled, find sources for the recyclable materials, establish a procedure for recycling, elicit support from school organizations (e.g., service clubs could help coordinate the plan, technology education class could make or design recycling bins), discuss your plan with school administrators and present your proposal to the school board. Enact your recycling plan.

Adapted from: Recycling Study Guide, "Out of Sight, out of Mind-Part 1." Department of Natural Resources PUBL-IE-020 93REV. <http://www.dnr.state.wi.us>