

SLASH TRASH!
Reducing, Reusing and Recycling Our Way to Zero Waste
(Grades 3-12)

Overview

This lesson raises awareness about the problems associated with waste disposal and helps students discover how to reduce, reuse and recycle instead of throwing items in the trash.

Objective

In this lesson, students will:

- Learn new strategies for implementing the 3R's at home
- Trace and measure the results of their waste reduction actions and see the difference they can make on their waste stream at home

Time

30 minutes of background/discussion

10-15 minutes of follow-up discussion each week

Materials

- Slash Trash Report Cards
- MRO posters
- 5 Steps to a Zero Waste Lunch Info Sheet
- Examples of the 3R's

Background Information

What is the problem with trash? Traditional waste disposal methods, landfilling and incineration can cause environmental problems such as air and water pollution. As wastes “decompose” in a landfill, methane gas is released, contributing to the greenhouse effect and global warming. If the amount of trash generated by our society continues to rise, future generations will be faced with greater environmental problems as a result.

How can we solve the trash problem?

1. **Reduce** – We can cut down on the amount of trash requiring disposal by not creating it in the first place. Ways to reduce waste include avoiding disposable and over-packaged products, buying reusable products, and getting off “junk mail” lists. Home composting can keep nearly half of our household waste out of the traditional disposal system. Items that can be composted include fruit and vegetable scraps, leaves, grass clippings, weeds, garden debris, and non-recyclable paper products (paper towels, napkins, plates, coffee filters, tea bags, tissue, and waxed paper).
2. **Reuse**- We can cut down on the amount of trash requiring disposal by reusing items instead of throwing them away. Examples of reuse include donating unneeded clothing or household items to charities or swap shows, repairing broken items, and reusing items like shopping bags, boxes, containers and aluminum foil.
3. **Recycle** – Many items that cannot be reduced or reused can be recycled, a process that converts them into new products. Newspaper, white paper and cardboard can be recycled into new paper products. Glass, metal and plastic items can be recycled into new containers and the raw materials needed to build a variety of other



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products, like steel bridges and cars. Organic waste from restaurants, grocery stores and food processing plants can be recycled into compost. The list of materials being recycled continues to grow as new businesses are developed to use waste materials in place of virgin materials in the manufacturing process. It is important to close the recycling loop by buying products made with recycled materials.

Teacher Preparation

Slash Trash Report – By participating in this activity, students will have an opportunity to see the results of their waste reduction efforts at home.

- Make copies of the Slash Trash Report card for each student. Ask them to use the report to keep track of the number of bags disposed and the waste reduction methods used in their homes for each week for a month. Encourage students to help their families reduce the amount of trash thrown away. Provide an opportunity for students to share waste reduction ideas and activities with each other
- Provide each student with an MRO recycling poster, the 5 Steps to a Zero Waste Lunch Info Sheet and the Dirt on Composting Informational Booklet - to help with waste reduction at home. (All of these can also be found on the CVSWMD website – www.cvswwmd.org)
- At the end of the month, collect the cards and review the results with the students. Help them calculate how much waste they reduced individually and as a class. Empower them with the knowledge that their actions achieved measurable results and that they can make a difference. Encourage them to continue the waste reduction activities they started during the month and to develop new ones as well.

Activity

Discuss the problem of trash with the students. Explain the concepts of reducing, reusing and recycling. Ask them for examples of items that commonly get thrown in the trash and that could be reduced, reused or recycled instead. Show them such examples.

“Slash Trash Report” Step By Step Instructions

1. Before starting to trash their trash, students begin writing down the number of bags their family usually disposes each week on the first line of the form (before Week 1). This provides a “baseline” number that will be used to measure differences seen after new recycling and composting activities are used.
2. Week 1: Students encourage their families to reduce, reuse, compost and recycle. They circle each activity used in their home that week. At the end of the week, they record the number of bags disposed in the blank “trash bag” in the left column.
3. Weeks 2 through 4: Students try to reduce the amount of trash disposed by adding new recycling, composting or other waste reduction activities. If an activity is not listed, students may write the activity in the “other” category. They continue to record the number of bags disposed for each week.
4. At the end of the 4th week, students who used new waste reduction activities during the month should be able to observe a reduction in the amount of trash disposed. The number of bags at Week 4 should be smaller than the baseline number filled in on the first line. Some students’ forms may show a decrease in the amount of trash



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disposed on Weeks 1, 2, 3 and 4. Some students may already actively recycle and compost at home and may see little change in their disposal rate. As a measure of current success, a typical family of four that recycles and composts can keep their trash down to one bag per week. To reduce more, other waste reduction activities such as purchasing in bulk can be added.

5. To figure the amount of trash reduced on a weekly basis, subtract the number of bags disposed in a given week from the baseline number. This is how much trash the students and their families eliminated that week by reducing, reusing and recycling. Encourage your students to continue the waste reduction activities they used during the month so that the environmental benefits of their actions will continue.

To tally the total amount of trash slashed by each student during the month, subtract the number of bags reported at Week 1 from the baseline number of bags. Enter this number in the “Bags Eliminated” column. Repeat this process for Weeks 2, 3, and 4. Add up the number of bags eliminated each week to determine the total number of bags or trash eliminated that month. This is the impact the student and their family made during the month by recycling, composting and using waste reduction activities.

To tally the amount of trash slashed by the class as a group, add the number of bags slashed by each student. This is how much trash your class eliminated by reducing, reusing and recycling!

