

Waste-Less Lunch (Grades K-12)

Overview

Students will analyze their lunches and learn how to conserve natural resources by packing a “waste-less” lunch.

Objectives

In this lesson, students will:

- Survey their lunch packaging and leftover food waste.
- Determine the natural resources from which their waste is made.
- Discuss environmental impacts of resource extraction.
- Find ways to conserve natural resources by reducing, reusing, recycling and composting.

Time

30-45 minutes for lesson

Materials

- Waste-Less Lunch Sheet (1 per student)
- Natural Resources Fact Sheet
- Lunch discards from cafeteria or home lunches (*Note: make sure you have enough lunch materials gathered to develop a good sample for sorting*)
- Four bags or buckets labeled: compost, recycle, reuse, landfill

Background

Planet Earth is an amazing place that is home to billions of people, animals and plants. *Natural resources* like water, sunlight, trees, oil and minerals come from nature and are used or made into the things we need to survive. While some natural resources like the sun and the wind can be used with little effect or damage to the environment, extracting other natural resources, like trees and oil can have negative impacts on the earth. Animal habitats can be destroyed or severely changed when we clear forest areas for oil drilling or logging. Rivers, streams and watershed can become polluted, and our air becomes dirty from using certain natural resources like oil. While it is impossible not to use natural resources for like on Earth as we know it, it is possible to be smart about the resources we do use in order to make less of a negative impact on the environment.

When we pack lunches for school, we make choices that help protect the environment. By using more reusable items and less throwaway products and packaging, we can help protect animal habitats. We can also choose products and packaging that can be recycled or composted in order to send less waste to the landfill, and conserve our natural resources. For instance, instead of buying “lunch-able” type products that contain a lot of plastic waste that ends up in the garbage, we can pack our lunches in reusable containers. We can also bring cloth napkins to school instead of using paper napkins, and we can use cloth lunch bags instead of paper bags. Drinks can be stored in a thermos and reusable mugs or cups can be used instead of disposable ones.



When we do our best to conserve natural resources by reducing the amount of things we use, reusing those things we have, and recycling and composting our waste, we help protect the natural world and all living things that depend on a healthy environment.

Teacher Preparation

Make copies of and pass out the “*What are Natural Resources?*” fact sheet.

Activity

1. Read background information and “*What are Natural Resources?*” Fact sheet.
2. Set up bags or buckets in the classroom with signs that read: Reuse, Recycle, Compost and Landfill.
3. Before lunch, ask your students to bring everything left over from their lunch back to the classroom. Hand out used bags if needed. Students should include all uneaten food and packaging materials. Nothing should be thrown away or recycled until the *Waste-Less Lunch* sheet is filled out.
4. After lunch, take a sample lunch, which will be used to discuss the leftover contents with students. The sample should include some sort of container (typically a disposable paper bag or cardboard tray), food scraps, plastic bottle or packaging, paper napkins, aluminum can, and plastic utensils.
5. Pass out “*What are Natural Resources?*” fact sheets and have students read alone or aloud as a group.
6. Tell students they are going to examine their everyday lunches and learn more about natural resources
7. Ask students what natural resources are. (*Natural resources come from nature and are used or made into the things we need to survive.*)
8. Hold up a paper napkin, bag or cardboard tray and ask what natural resource was used to make that paper item? (*Trees*)
9. Ask students where trees are found and why trees are important to the health of the planet. (*Trees are found in forests, and trees make oxygen, help keep the planet cool by preventing global warming, and provide habitat to over half of the world’s animals.*)
10. Hold up a plastic bottle, utensil or wrapping and ask from which natural resource plastic comes from? (*oil or petroleum*)
11. Ask students if they know where oil comes from? (*It comes from fossils buried deep underneath the ground in places like the rainforest, the Middle East and the ocean floor.*)
12. Discuss some consequences that oil drilling has on the environment. (*Oil spills pollute the land and water; animal habitat is cleared or destroyed for drilling machinery and pipelines; burning oil creates air pollution*)
13. Hold up an aluminum can and ask which natural resource was used to make the can. (*a mineral called bauxite*)
14. Name one place bauxite is found and what effects does bauxite mining have on the environment? Name some animals that might be affected by this mining. (*Bauxite is mined from the rainforests, which destroys the natural habitat of the jaguar, toucan and spider monkey.*)
15. Hold up a scrap of food like a banana peel or apple core and ask which natural resources were needed to make this food. (*Soil, sun, air and water*).
16. Ask students if it is possible to live on Earth and not use natural resources. (*no*)



17. Ask students if it is possible to conserve natural resources and not waste them. *(yes)*
18. Introduce the concept of Reduce, Reuse and Recycle. First we try to reduce the amount of something we use. Then we try to reuse that item again. Lastly, we want to see if we are able to recycle or compost it. Sending it to the landfill as trash is a last resort.
19. Hold up paper napkin or paper bag. Remind students that paper comes from trees and ask what they can do to help save trees and forests. *(Reduce the amount of paper napkins they use. Bring cloth napkins to school and reuse them over again. Compost all used paper napkins. Paper bags can be reused before they are composted or recycled; cloth bags or lunch pails can be used instead of paper bags.)*
20. Hold up the plastic bottle utensil or wrapping. Remind students that plastic is made from oil and ask them what they can do to use less oil. *(Try to use less plastic. Bring drinks in a thermos or use a glass bottle. Drink out of a mug, glass or hard reusable plastic. Don't take plastic utensils unless needed. Bring reusable utensils to school. Eat ice cream in a cone, not cup. Choose products that don't have excessive packaging.)*
21. Hold up the aluminum can. Remind students that aluminum is made from bauxite, which is a mineral that gets dug up from the rainforest. Knowing this, ask what they can do to help save the rainforests? *(Use less aluminum. Drink out of reusable mugs or glasses. Use a thermos. Wrap food in a reusable plastic or glass containers instead of foil. Recycle all cans.)*
22. Hold up the food scrap. Remind students that some food comes from natural resources like plants. Explain that food is "organic matter," meaning it was once a living thing and can be composted. Composting is nature's way of recycling organic matter back into soil so it can grow more food.
23. Hand out Waste-Less Lunch Sheets and tell students they are to go through each item left over from lunch and fill out the sheet. They must include what type of material it is: reusable, recyclable, compostable, or trash the must go into the landfill. ***(Note: for younger grades, you can skip this or do it on the board with each student sharing their input.)***
24. When they are done filling out their chart, each student should take each item and place it in the appropriate bucket.
25. Graph the total number of items per bucket on the board and times the totals by five to show a week's worth of items that is reused, recycled, composted or sent to the landfill. ***(Note: Students should do the math and graph by themselves.)***
26. Ask students to analyze the graph findings and name three ways they can help waste less at lunch. Ask them to try to do these things they suggested. On a selected day the following week, do another Waste-Less Lunch sheet and compare the results.

