

Zero-Waste Winter Holiday Party! (Grades K-5)

Overview

Students will learn the benefits of reuse by making winter decorations with reused items and learn about alternatives to disposable goods, gifts and packaging during the holidays.

Objectives

In this lesson, students will:

- Discuss types of materials that get used during holiday parties
- Brainstorm some alternatives to these materials
- Create a snowflake garland from reused printer paper and white plastic grocery bags
- Brainstorm other ways to reduce waste during the holidays

Time

45 + minutes

Materials

- What are Natural Resources? Fact Sheet
- White office paper used on one side
- White plastic grocery bags
- Scissors
- Stapler
- Clear tape
- String, yarn or twine
- Paper clips
- Glitter and glue (optional)

Background

Winter holidays are a fun time of year! Friends and family get together to celebrate different traditions, share festive meals, and exchange gifts. Unfortunately, the packaging and wrapping paper that usually comes with gifts, decorations, and other disposable holiday items often end up in the garbage. In fact, it is estimated that between Thanksgiving and the New Year, Americans throw away 25% more trash than during the rest of the year. That means that an extra million tons of waste are generated nationwide every week! It also means that natural resources- those things we take from nature like trees, metal, and petroleum – are wasted.

An easy way to help protect nature and reduce garbage during the holiday season is to reuse things! That means using something over again before recycling, composting, or throwing it away and fixing a broken item instead of buying it again new. Reusing is a great way to extend the life of things we buy and save natural resources!

There are many ways to reusing during winter holidays. If every American family wrapped just three presents in reused materials, it would save enough paper to cover 45,000 football fields. Another way to protect nature by using less stuff is by being creative and making decorations from reused materials.



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Teacher Preparation

- Ask class to collect white plastic grocery bags and magazines from home
- Pass out “*What are Natural Resources?*” Fact Sheet and have students take turns reading aloud.

Pre-Activity Questions

Ask students:

1. What are natural resources? (*Natural resources come from nature and are used or turned into things we want and need.*)
2. Can you name one thing in this room, in your home or at the store that doesn't come from something found in nature? (*Impossible to do. Everything we use originally came from something found in nature. Oil produces energy, plastics and chemicals; trees make paper, wood items and rayon clothing; rocks and minerals make cement and metals; plants make food and fabrics, etc.*)
3. What happens to nature when we remove natural resources? (*It gets damaged or destroyed and animals and other living things that live in those natural areas often lose their homes and their ability to survive.*)
4. Since everything we use comes from something found in nature, can we protect nature and animals by using less stuff? (*Yes.*)
5. Imagine you are planning a party for the winter holidays for all of your friends and family. What kinds of things would you want to have at the party? (*Food, drinks, presents, decorations etc.*)
6. What kinds of dishes will you serve the food on? (*Reusable*)
7. What does it mean if something is disposable? (*It means we throw it away after using it once.*) What does it mean if something is reusable? (*It means we can use it again and again.*)
8. When your guests finish eating and have food left on their plates, what should you do with it? (*Compost*)
9. What are some examples of gifts you can give to your friends and family that will reduce waste? (*Re-gifting, new items that aren't over-packaged, handmade crafts from reused materials, gift cards, “green” items like reusable hot-drink containers, lunch skins or tote bags, etc.*)
10. What are some ways you can wrap gifts that will help reduce waste? (*Re-use wrapping paper or gift bags, use newspaper, decorate printer paper with original drawings, etc.*)
11. If you receive a wrapped gift at your party, what should you do with the wrapping paper? (*Save for re-use, or recycle*)
12. What will you do for decorations at your party? (*Reuse old decorations, make new ones from reused materials*)

Activity

1. Tell students they are going to be making a snowflake garland decoration for their classroom out of reused materials.
2. First, make a snowflake:
 - a. Fold paper into fan using ½ inch folds. Crease at the middle and staple.
 - b. Fold in half and cut out shapes (smaller as you get closer to the staple)
 - c. Unfold fan to create a circle and secure at the edges with tape



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- d. If desired, fan can be decorated with glue and glitter
3. Second, make a plastic pompom:
 - a. Lay the plastic bag flat and cut off the handles
 - b. Cut bag down either side and across the bottom to create two square plastic sheets
 - c. Divide the sheets into 6"x8" rectangles by cutting across the middle (creating two long strips) and cutting these strips in half
 - d. On the long edges of each rectangle, cut ¼"-wide tassels towards the center (almost but not all the way across). You can do more than one at a time by layering the rectangles on top of each other
 - e. Separate the plastic rectangles so the tassels aren't stuck together, then gather together and secure at the middle using one of the bag's plastic handles. Fluff the tassels so the pompom takes on the shape of a ball
4. Hang the string around the classroom where you want to display the garland and make sure it is secure at every few feet
5. Use paper clips (poked through a plastic tassel or using one of the snowflake's cut-outs) to hang the snowflakes and pompoms from the string in an alternating pattern (if garland is up high, an adult may want to perform this step)
6. If there is extra time, students can fill in any gaps by making half-size snowflakes or pompoms (For snowflakes, cut the printer paper in half, making 4 ¼" x 11" strips, before repeating the directions above; for pompoms, cut the rectangles in half one more time, making 3" x 4" rectangles, before repeating the directions above)

Discussion Questions

1. How does re-using help protect nature? *(It means we don't have to make new things out of resources that come from nature.)*
2. What does reducing our use of something mean? *(use less of it)*
3. What are some other items we can reduce or use less of during the holidays and how? *(Use less plastic bags by shopping with cloth bags, use less wrapping paper by wrapping gifts in scarves, fabrics or newspaper, only put ribbon and bows on big items, use reusable forks, plates, spoons and cups instead of disposable ones, make decorations from used items instead of buying them.)*
4. Is it better for nature if we reduce the amount of things we use or if we use as much as we want and reuse those things? *(It's always better to first reduce the amount of things we use, and then reuse those things. Since everything comes from nature, using less stuff is always the best way to protect nature.)*



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