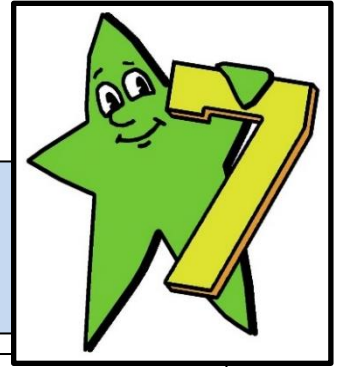


Trimming Holiday Waste



eco-cycle

Snapshot

Winter holiday activities produce more waste than during any other time of year. Creatively reducing holiday waste is both fun and helpful to the environment.

<https://bit.ly/eco-cycle-zero-waste-schools-guide>

Objective: Students will be able to name one way that holiday-specific waste harms the environment and three ideas for reducing waste during the holiday season.

Age Groups: K-5th grade

Setting: Classroom

Project Duration:

- Preparation: 2 hours
- Classroom Activity: 90 minutes

Materials: See next page.

Why This Project Matters:

Americans generate millions of additional pounds of household waste between Thanksgiving and New Year's Day (25% more than the rest of the year). Holiday celebrations often feature many disposable food-ware items, such as plastic or paper plates, cups, napkins, and utensils. Other common holiday items, like wrapping paper, ribbons, plastic decorations, and brightly colored or foil-lined envelopes, are not recyclable. It all adds up to a lot of trash. Organic wastes, such as holiday trees, wreaths, food, and paper, generate methane gas as they decompose in the absence of oxygen while buried in landfills. Methane contributes to our warming climate.

Project Summary:

From wrapping presents in old calendar pages to choosing reusable decorations, trimming holiday waste is fun and easy. Student groups will first identify common contributors to holiday waste (disposables, wrapping paper, etc.) then brainstorm ideas for reducing these types of waste. They will conclude the project by making their own recyclable wrapping paper and/or creatively wrapping a gift by reusing old items.

Implementation:

Preparation:

1. Gather examples of disposable items and their reusable counterparts (paper/durable plates, paper/reusable lunch bags, paper towels/sponge etc.).
2. Gather examples of disposable holiday items (wrapping paper, cards, garland, etc.)
3. Gather examples of reusable boxes, gift bags, bows, and décor.
4. Create an example of a hand-decorated gift box/bag that reuses items that otherwise would have been trashed.
5. Create an example of a hand-made coupon (e.g., "Redeem for the household chore of your choice" or "Good for 1 picnic in the park").



6. Collect old maps, magazines, and calendars with kid-friendly pictures.
7. Contact local newspaper publishers to see if they have “end rolls”. These are the remainders of newsprint rolls that are no longer usable by the printer.
8. Acquire rubber stamps and stamp pads (search thrift stores and garage sales before buying new) (optional).
9. Create fun, winter-themed, nondenominational-shaped stencils from paperboard boxes. These will be used for decorating the wrapping paper.

Lesson and activity:

1. Begin by asking students: “What are the three R’s?”
(Reduce, Reuse, Recycle)
2. Discuss what each word means.
3. “How do they help the environment?”
4. “What are natural resources?”
5. Explain that we use natural resources every day because every item we have is made from a natural resource (wood and paper from trees, glass from sand, plastic from petroleum, metal from ore/rock). Harvesting natural resources contributes to air, water, and soil pollution. It can also have negative impacts on animal habitat. All of our natural resources are limited.
6. Ask students where they think items go when they get thrown away. Show the landfill diagram. (See printable page below.)
7. Show examples of disposable items and their reusable counterparts (paper plate/durable plate, paper lunch bag/cloth lunch bag, etc.). Ask students which item from each pair would be the better choice to reduce trash and protect natural resources. Discuss why.
8. Discuss types of disposable items that are often used and thrown away during the holiday season. Show examples of wrapping paper, cards, ribbon, paper or plastic cups, plastic utensils, etc.
9. Introduce the term *pre-cycling*. To pre-cycle means to think before you buy to avoid creating waste, or to shop with the Earth in mind. Choosing items that can be reused or recycled instead of ones that are landfill-bound, choosing non-toxic items, and choosing items without excessive packaging are all effective ways to save natural resources.



Materials:

- Paper plate
- Paper cup
- Plastic utensil
- Paper napkin
- Paper lunch bag
- Durable plate
- Durable cup
- Metal utensil
- Cloth napkin
- Reusable lunch bag/box
- Wrapping paper
- Holiday garland
- Holiday card
- Toys with and without packaging
- Reusable boxes, bows, bags, décor
- Scarf/fabric
- Old maps
- Reused large blank paper (newspaper end-rolls, if possible)
- Paperboard boxes (cereal, crackers, etc.)
- Old calendars and magazines
- Scissors
- Glue
- Markers or crayons
- Stamps and stamp pads (optional)

10. Display and discuss the *Seven Principles of Pre-cycling* (see printable page below) and brainstorm examples of each. For younger groups, preview the list ahead of time and prepare tangible examples of each to display during the lesson.
11. Display and discuss the *Waste-Reducing Ideas for the Holidays* (see printable page below). Show examples from the list (reusable boxes, bows, decorations, etc.) as they are introduced.
12. Brainstorm creative ways to wrap gifts with reusable/recyclable materials (boxes decorated with magazine pictures, fabrics used as gift wrap, small gifts wrapped in calendar pictures, greeting cards made into gift tags, etc.). Show the prepared examples of these ideas.
13. Discuss ways to make gifts rather than buying something new and show examples (homemade coupons, artwork, crafts, etc.).
14. Have the students make their wrapping paper and/or wrap a gift with reused items:
 - Cut large rectangles from end rolls or from other unwanted paper or fabric.
 - Have students decorate the blank paper or fabric with crayons, markers, stencils made from old paperboard boxes, stamps, and pages from calendars and magazines.
 - Encourage students to use this wrapping paper or fabric to wrap a gift for someone. Remind them that the paper can be recycled after the gift is opened. Discuss ways the fabric can be reused.
15. Send a digital or hard copy of *Waste-Reducing Ideas for the Holidays* to family members at home.

Extensions:

- Facilitate a coupon-making activity by having students make homemade coupons out of paperboard from empty cereal/cracker boxes to give as gifts to friends or family members.



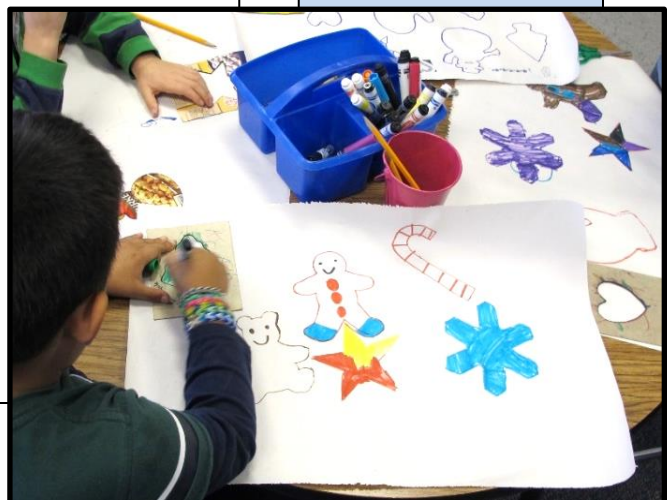
- Have students share their favorite holiday waste-reducing ideas through announcements, hallway posters, or during the school's holiday program.

Assessment:

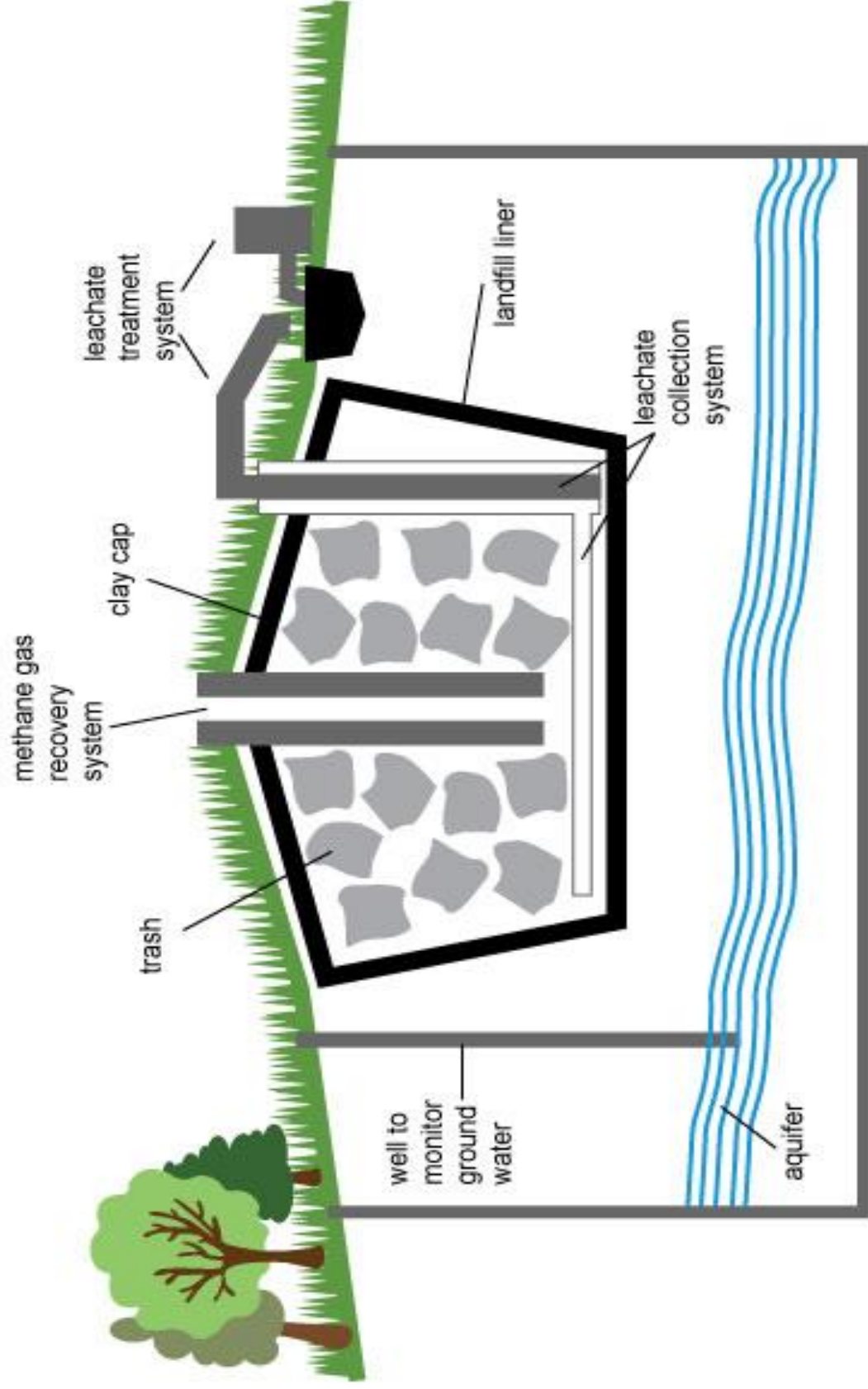
Have students write a letter to a friend, family member, Frosty the Snowman or other winter or holiday character, telling them why holiday waste is a problem. Ask them to include three ways they learned to reduce waste around the holidays.

Related Activities:

Getting Artsy with Reuse – Chapter 8
 Creative Crayon Recycling – Chapter 20



Modern landfill



Source: Adapted from National Energy Education Development Project (public domain)

Seven Principles of Pre-cycling: (Shopping with the Earth in Mind)

1. Avoid buying disposables.
2. Reuse items instead of throwing them away.
3. Buy products and packages made from recycled materials.
4. Look for products in recyclable containers.
5. Avoid products with excessive packaging.
6. Buy in bulk (big containers).
7. Look for products that are less toxic.

Waste-Reducing Ideas for the Holidays

- Choose durable tableware over disposables when hosting parties.
- Find and/or make reusable decorations.
- Take your own bags to the store when buying gifts and supplies.
- Wrap gifts in creative ways by reusing things you already have:
 - Saved wrapping paper and bows
 - Old greeting cards
 - Durable gift bags
 - Shoe boxes, packaging boxes, etc.
 - Comics, magazines, or book pages
 - Scarves, bandanas, other fabrics
 - Outdated calendars and maps
- Use wrapping paper and cards made from post-consumer recycled-content paper.
- Buy gifts that have minimal/no packaging.
- Give gift certificates to movies, restaurants, or help needed by the recipient.
- Give gifts that teach about the environment.
- Reuse an artificial tree, get a live tree that can be planted, or mulch/compost a cut tree after use.

