

The 4R's: Reduce, Reuse, Recycle and Rebuy

Provided by Youth Environmental Program,
part of the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection

Objective

To encourage students to become stewards of the environment and learn to reduce the amount of trash sent to landfills.

Grade Level	K-5
Duration	30-45 minutes
Group Size	Any
Setting	Indoor or Outdoor

Vocabulary

Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Trash, Landfill, Environment

Materials

- Photo of a landfill
- Trash bag that weighs 4.5 pounds, which includes "clean" trash and items that can be recycled. Examples include soda bottles, cereal boxes, pop cans, food wrappers, worn-out clothing, and papers
- Reusable items like a soup can turned into a pencil holder, an old shirt sewn into a bag, or a calendar page turned into a bookmark
- Items made from recycled materials, such as paper

Introduction

Opening questions:

- Does anyone know what "**recycle**" means?
- Does anyone **reuse** items?
- Does anyone know where **trash** goes once the garbage truck hauls it away?
Explain that most of it goes to a **landfill**, or dump, where it is buried.
- Who loves to go outside to play?

Tell the group: Today we are going to learn how we can take care of the **environment**. The environment is everything around us: the trees, the grass, the bugs, all living and non-living things – including water and air. So, we want to make sure that when you go outside to play, you can enjoy clean air, soil, and water.

Warm-up



Step 1

Start by explaining the definition of trash and a landfill:

Trash- materials that we no longer want or need. Some call it solid waste, rubbish, or garbage.

Landfill- A place where trash is placed into the land. The trash is dumped into a large hole and then covered. Some of the trash will break down, but most will not.

Step 2

Place your bag of trash on a table and tell the class that each one of us makes 4.5 pounds of trash every single day. Count how many kids are in the class and then tell them that today, all of us together will make X amount of trash. (20 people x 4.5 pounds = 90 pounds of trash.)

Start going through the trash and telling the students (or asking them) what items could be recycled or reused. Some ideas to place in your trash bag include an old t-shirt, cardboard, newspaper, office paper, junk email, laundry detergent bottle, and soda can.

Activity

(K-1, just review Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle

Step 1: Reduce

Ask the students:

- If they write on both sides of notebook paper
- If they use reusable containers
- Hold up a single-use plastic bottle, ask if using these is a good way to reduce waste

Step 2: Reuse

Ask students for examples of reusing an item. Then, discuss donating clothing or giving hand-me-downs. Some items may be a bit worn but can be repaired.

Example: Painting an old chair.

Step 3: Recycle

Americans recycle nearly 30% of their trash, which reduces solid waste, energy, and money. To recycle is to send items to a factory to be made into new products or containers. A plastic bottle could be made into another plastic bottle or a sleeping bag. Show the class examples of items made from recycled materials like paper, pencils, etc.

Step 4: Rebuy (second grade and up)

Explain that this step puts the "cycle" in recycle and closes the loop. Encourage students to look for products made from recycled materials. By buying these products we are encouraging companies to use more recycled goods.

Show food boxes or other items that are labeled as "made from recycled materials."

Ideas to Engage Students

- Ask a few students to come to the front and help you hold items from your trash bag .
- When giving examples of items that have been recycled, pass the items around so students can touch and see them.
- When saying the R's, have the kids clap along or get out of their chair and hop along.

Closing

Review the R's. Depending on the grade, you will review three or four. Ask the students to think about what they will start doing to help keep our environment clean. This could be discussed out loud as a class, you could pair the students to discuss their ideas, or you could use this question as a writing prompt.

Additional Activities

Recycle Relay Race

Place students into teams where they compete to sort trash by type of materials. Have containers labeled "trash," "cardboard," "paper," "aluminum," and "plastic." Give each team a bag of trash and a litter-getter. One by one, each student should pick a piece of "trash" out of the trash bag and sort correctly in a relay-race fashion.

"Minute to Win It" Litter Cleanup

Place a variety of cans, bottles, and other "litter" onto the floor (or go outside if you have an outdoor learning area). Put students into teams and have them work together to pick up all the litter while being timed. The team that picks up the most trash in the allotted time (one minute) wins.

Additional Resources

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency | Reducing Waste
<https://www.epa.gov/recycle/reducing-waste-what-you-can-do#Tips%20for%20Students%20and%20Schools>

PepsiCo Recycling Program For Kids | www.pepsicorecycling.com



Learn more about the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection's Youth Environmental Program or to schedule a presentation visit our website:
<https://dep.wv.gov/environmental-advocate/YEP/Pages/default.aspx>