

Ecological Picnic



Objective

To show students that choices they make about products and packaging can have an impact on the amount of waste they generate.



Activity Description

Plan a picnic with students that produces as little waste as possible.



Materials Needed

- Lunch
- Durable or reusable plates, silverware, cups, napkins, etc.
- Recyclables container
- Garbage container
- Food waste container, if your school composts
- Large scale



Activity

Day 1

Step 1: Select a location to hold your ecological picnic, preferably outdoors with an indoor alternative in case of inclement weather. Find three containers the children can use to separate their recyclables, trash, and food scraps after they have finished their picnic lunch. Check with your cafeteria manager to see if your class can use nondisposable silverware, cups, and plates and if arrangements can be made to provide bag lunches for students who forget or are unable to bring a lunch from home.



Key Vocabulary Words

Source reduction
Durable
Nondurable



Duration

Day 1: 1 hour
Day 2: 1 hour, 30 minutes



Skills Used

Communication
Computation
Observation/classification



math



science



social studies

Step 2: Explain to students that you will be taking them on an ecological picnic where they will learn how to create less garbage, recycle more, and compost their leftover food items. Introduce the concepts of durable and disposable items and source reduction to the class (refer to the Teacher Fact Sheet titled *Source Reduction* on page 133 for background information). Note how students will put these concepts into practice during the picnic.

Step 3: With students, compile a list of items on the blackboard that people usually bring to a picnic (e.g., paper plates, plastic utensils, paper napkins, chips, drinks, sandwiches). Working through the list on the blackboard, discuss items that can replace the disposable items. Examples might include cloth napkins



Journal Activity

Ask students if they saw any litter where they had their picnic. Ask them how it made them feel to see litter. How could it affect the plants, animals, and other people that use the space?

instead of paper napkins or washable plastic plates instead of paper plates. Explain the benefits of buying in bulk by describing how one large bag of popcorn, for example, leaves less garbage than many smaller bags. You can also discuss picnic games and activities and their impact on the environment. Note that tossing a frisbee or flying kites doesn't create any waste, but having a water balloon fight does.

Step 4: Send a note home with the children explaining how to prepare for the picnic. The note should explain that your class is having an ecological picnic and is trying to limit the amount of garbage left over. Encourage students to discuss what they've learned about source reduction

with their parents and to help make preparations by placing food in reusable containers or including as little packaging as possible. Parents can also be invited to volunteer for the picnic. You can conduct the picnic in two ways:

- A) Children can bring their own lunch.
- B) Children can bring "potluck" items. This may require more time and effort from the parents to provide and transport the items. In class, have the children draw up a list of the things they need and have each of them select something to bring. If your cafeteria is unable to provide silverware, cups, and plates, these will need to be provided by students. In the note to the parents, list the item the student has chosen to bring.

Day 2

Step 1: Before the picnic, explain to the students that they will be weighing the amounts of recyclables, trash, and food scraps left over from the picnic. Ask them to guess approximately how many pounds of material they think will be left over in each of the containers after the picnic. Draw the Eco-Picnic Table shown below on the blackboard and enter their guesses in the first

Eco-Picnic Table

	Recyclables	Food Scraps	Trash	Total Guess
Guess				
Actual Weight (with container)				
Subtract Weight of Empty Container				
Total of Each				

row. Show students which container you want them to use for recyclables, trash, and food scraps and then weigh each of the empty containers on the large scale. Record these numbers on the Eco-Picnic Table. Encourage the students to pick up any litter they find at the picnic site.

Step 2: Go to the picnic site and have the picnic.

Step 3: After lunch, discuss the types of garbage that are left over, as well as the garbage prevented because of the choices students made. Have the students look at the leftover garbage and come up with ways they could have reduced it further.

Step 4: Return to the classroom with the containers. Weigh the three containers to determine the amount of material that must be disposed of, recycled, or composted. How close was the students' original guess? Multiplied by 7 days, how much waste would your classroom dispose of in 1 week? How much would it recycle? How much could be composted? Ask your students to discuss, generally speaking, what would happen if the whole school (or even America as a whole) practiced source reduction as they did for the picnic.



Assessment

1. Ask students why people use disposable items even if they know they make more garbage.
2. Ask students to provide an example of a disposable item that they or their family use regularly. Are there other alternatives that could create less waste? Would they or their family be willing to switch products or change their lifestyles to produce less waste and have less of an impact on the environment?

3. Ask students to think of other ways, beyond a picnic, that they can practice source reduction. Examples might include using cloth napkins and wipes instead of paper towels, buying juice in large bottles or concentrate rather than separate single-serving bottles, using their imagination for games rather than toys, or taking cloth bags when shopping.



Enrichment

1. You could consider conducting this activity by measuring the recyclables, trash, and compostables from a regular day's lunch compared to the ecological picnic lunch.
2. Collect the food scraps left over from the picnic and put them in a vermicomposting bin or compost pile. (Refer to the composting activities section and the Teacher Fact Sheet titled *Composting* on page 109 for more information.)
3. Make fun lunch bags out of an old pair of jeans or shorts. Cut off the legs, sew the bottom closed just under the pockets, and tie thick ribbon through the belt loops for handles. Help students decorate their bags with objects such as buttons, small toys, scrap cloth and ribbon, and fabric paints.