

Consumer Choices and Consequences: Understanding the 3 R's (Reducing, Recycling, Reusing)

Standards Addressed

Environmental Education Standards:

- B. Knowledge of Environmental Processes and Systems:
B.4.8, B.4.9, and B.4.10.
- D. Daily Lives: D.4.1, D.4.2, and D.4.3.
- E. Personal and Civic Responsibility: E.4.1 and E.4.2.

Key Concepts/ Content

- ✳ To understand how students, as consumers and decisionmakers, impact the marketplace with their need for goods and services.
- ✳ To understand students needs may change over time and may impact both the environmental quality and the availability of natural resources.

Teacher Background

You may obtain information about recycling in Wisconsin using the information listed in the Resource and Reference section of this activity.

Before you begin this unit, it will be helpful if you ask the following environmental issues questions about various products:

- Do we need it?
- Is it renewable?
- Is it recyclable?
- Is it durable?
- How much energy was needed to make it?
- What is the total environmental impact?
- Did we look at all available options?
- Is precycling a consideration with this purchase?

(Precycling means reducing waste *before* you buy.)

Detailed background information can be gleaned from reviewing the video, *Circle of Life*.

Getting Ready

Option 1

Consider sharing the video listed above with your students. Then have students brainstorm and discuss ways that they can make a difference. The book, *50 Simple Things You Can Do To Save The Earth*, can be used to help guide the students' discussion.

Option 2

Ask the students to do research on paper recycling in Wisconsin.

Materials Needed

Option 1

✿ A variety of different types of packaging

Optional materials:

✿ *Circle of Life* video (see resource list).

✿ *50 Simple Things You Can Do To Save The Earth* (see resource list)

Option 2

✿ Garbage bags, one for each student

Procedures

Option 1

1. Ask students to bring examples from home to share:
 - Recycled material
 - Biodegradable material
 - Recyclable material
 - Renewable resource
2. Review key terms with students: renewable, durable, recyclable, precycling, biodegradable. After reviewing the key words, have students sort or categorize the materials that they have brought to share, using the categories listed above.
3. Ask the students questions about the various categories and then divide the students into groups, assigning each group a category. Ask the students to make observations about each category and present their observations about each category to the class.

4. Focus your final discussion on the products that did not fit into any category; what must be done with those products?

Option 2

1. Ask the students to begin collecting their own used paper. You may want them to do this for a couple weeks.
2. Give each a garbage bag to store the paper in.
3. Ask them to keep a journal or list explaining why the paper was thrown into the garbage bag.
4. You may even want to ask the students to decorate their own bag.
5. At the end of the collection time, ask the students to begin orally listing why they threw out their own paper.
6. Are there any patterns that exist in their throwing paper away?
7. Ask each student to journal about what each can do to “conserve” the use of paper.

Extension:

Direct students to plan an “ecological picnic” using a minimum of disposable items. Go on the picnic. Afterwards have students sort and recycle as much of the picnic garbage as possible. (This activity is adapted from *The California State Environmental Education Guide*. It reinforces the idea that students can make personal choices about their actions. In this case they will be making choices that will minimize the amount of waste generated by a class picnic. After the picnic students will collect the garbage that remains and recycle or compost what they can.)

**Evidence of
Student
Understanding**

Choose one of the following assessment tasks:

Option 1

Display different types of “packaging” on a front table. Have students sort the items using the following categories: 1) Made of recycled material; 2) Biodegradable; 3) Recyclable; 4) Renewable Resource. Students should explain their rationale or reasoning after sorting the items.

Ask each student to create a “Personal Code of Consumer Ethics.” The code should take into consideration daily consumer actions that are harmful to the environment and those that are beneficial. The students should consciously create the code based on actions they believe are beneficial, or at least not harmful, to elements of the environment. We will always have some impact. We can make choices about the kinds of impacts we make, their effectiveness, etc.

(Adapted from *Project Wild* “Enviro-Ethics” website: <http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/kidstuff.html>).

Option 2

Ask each student to self-evaluate his or her own need to conserve paper. Have them then develop a self-rating scale each will use to monitor their paper conservation. Ask each then to write about what they have learned about themselves from this project.

**References/
Resources**

📖 *Project Learning Tree: Environmental Education Activity Guide* (Pre K-8), Project Learning Tree, 111 19th Street NW, Washington, DC 20036.

📖 Video: *Circle of Life*, Temperate Forest Foundation, 14780 S.W. Osprey Drive, Suite 355, Beaverton, OR 97007.

📖 *50 Simple Things You Can Do to Save the Earth*
The Earthworks Group, Berkeley, CA, 1989.
(Ordering Information: Earthworks Press, Box 25,
1400 Shattuck Avenue, Berkley, CA 94709).