



Where Should It Go? Recycle?

Compost? Incinerate? Landfill?*

Activity P.d

GRADE LEVELS: K - 3

OBJECTIVE: To understand that solutions to garbage disposal problems are varied and complex.

MATERIALS:

- 5 cardboard boxes or small garbage cans
- markers
- a bag of clean garbage (choose items that will fit into all categories below)
- handout: Where Does This Trash Belong?

VOCABULARY: incinerate, compost, landfill, recycle

BACKGROUND:

Our solid waste problem is very complex. To solve this problem, each community must look at all the possible solutions and make a comprehensive solid waste plan. These plans may include reduction, recycling, composting, incineration, and landfilling. No single method will solve the problem, so each community has to decide which alternatives best meet the local needs.

We are all garbage producers and therefore part of the problem. We must also all be part of the solution.

PROCEDURE:

In this activity, we want to make students think about where garbage can go. At present it may all go to a landfill or incinerator, or some may be recycled or composted.

1. Take 5 boxes and ask the students to label them:

- reduce (or avoid)
- recycle
- compost
- incinerate
- landfill

Place boxes at one end of the room

2. Take a bag of clean garbage and dump it out on the floor at the opposite end of the room.

3. Set up two teams and let them sort the garbage by taking one item at a time and placing it in a container.

4. After the students have sorted the garbage, go through the bins and ask why items were placed in certain boxes. Some items may appropriately fit into more than one box. The answers are not always

clear, depending on options available in your community.

5. This can be done on paper also by drawing lines between the item and the container on the hand-out called Where Does This Trash Belong?

6. Discuss the following questions:

- Can all items be recycled?

No, some items are made from many different materials that are hard to separate.

- Can everything be burned if we have an incinerator?

No, some items will not burn, and some are valuable resources that could be fixed, reused, or recycled.

- If we have an incinerator, will we still need a landfill?

Yes, the ash from incinerators must be sent to a landfill, and there are also some hazardous items (like batteries) that should be landfilled rather than burned.

FOLLOW-UP:

Discuss the idea of waste reduction (What items are not needed in the first place? Could we have used durable products rather than disposable ones? Could we have purchased products with less packaging?)

* Source: Cornell Waste Management Institute Trash Goes to School