



Waste Disposal Costs*

Activity P.k/E.v.

GRADE LEVELS: K-6

OBJECTIVE: To give children an appreciation of waste disposal costs.

MATERIALS:

Scale

Bag of clean garbage

VOCABULARY: pound, ton, cost, tipping fees

PROCEDURE:

Bring in a scale and a bag of clean garbage containing an assortment of glass and plastic bottles, cans, cartons, and paper waste. Call on a volunteer to weigh the bag of garbage and then weigh him or herself. Write the two numbers on the board.

Tell children that the average person in the United States throws away 4 pounds of garbage each day. Based on this statistic, ask children to answer the following questions:

How many days' worth of garbage was contained in the bag we just weighed?

How many days would it take you to throw away an amount of garbage equal to your own weight?

If each person in your community (pop. _____) throws away 4 pounds of garbage each day:

How many pounds does this equal in 1 day?

How many tons is this?

To help children grasp the concept of a ton (2,000 pounds), you might want to ask them how many tons some familiar objects weigh (an average 4-door compact automobile weighs about 1 ton).

Have the children try to imagine where all this refuse is being put every day of every year in every community.

You can also go further and get population statistics for your state and the entire United States, and multiply these numbers by 4 pounds. Remind children that much of this garbage is made up of resources that could be put to good use.

Tell children that it costs money to dispose of all of this waste. Have children imagine that it costs your community about \$30 for each ton of refuse that is disposed of in a landfill or burned in a waste combustor (or use the amounts for tipping fees). Ask the following questions:

How much would waste disposal or combustion cost in your community each day?

How much would it cost per year?

Where does this money come from?

To give children a better appreciation of this sum of money, ask them the price of a cassette tape or compact disk of a popular group. (For younger children, you might ask how much they get for an allowance or how much it costs to buy lunch at school.)

Approximately how many cassettes or CDs could you buy with the money your community spends on landfill or combustion in 1 day? In 1 year?

You might want to have children calculate how much money could be saved if each person in the community reduced the amount he or she threw away each day by 1 pound.

* Source: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency: Let's Reduce and Recycle: Curriculum for Solid Waste Awareness