



What's a Cycle?*

Activity P.z

GRADE LEVELS: K - 3

OBJECTIVE:

Students will apply their knowledge of cycles to understanding the process of recycling.

MATERIALS:

What's A Cycle worksheets (included)

VOCABULARY:

cycle, recycle, solid waste, compost

BACKGROUND:

A cycle is a series of events that continues forever. Recycling imitates nature's cycles by giving new life to materials that might otherwise be disposed of as trash. Recycling means to break items down, reprocess them and return them to a new use. Many things that are thrown away can be recycled. Recycling benefits all of us by reducing the amount of garbage or solid waste, conserving energy and resources, creating jobs and reducing pollution.

The symbol for recycling is a series of arrows that forms a continuous loop. This loop represents the cycle that takes place when materials are recycled.

Some wastes such as food and yard trash can be composted, that is, allowed to decompose and turn into mulch or humus that can enrich the soil. Composting is a natural form of recycling. Composting breaks down yard wastes, reprocesses these wastes into mulch, and the mulch is returned to the soil.

PROCEDURE:

1. Write the word "cycle" on the board. Ask students what they think the term means. Develop a definition on the board.
2. Explain to students that cycles are a part of life. A cycle is a series of events that can last forever. A cycle may go through changes, yet change eventually arrives back to where they cycle began. Share with the class the cycle of a tree.

A tree grows from a seed, produces new seeds which, in turn, produce new trees. Cycles ensure that life can go through many changes, yet maintain its stability. The new tree is patterned after the old.

3. Explain to students that there are many cycles around us. Ask students if they can think of any cycles. (Days of the week or months of the year) Write the following cycles on the board and ask students to discuss:
4. Explain that cycles are also important to our everyday lives. Divide the class into small groups of three to five students and ask them to discuss and draw a cycle of their typical school day. Discuss what would happen if every day were completely different, that is without repeating a pattern. (You wouldn't build on the past, wouldn't know what to expect.)
5. Write the word "recycle" on the board. Ask students what they think the term means. (To make

into something to use again.) Develop a definition on the board. Explain that many cycles depend on people to make them happen. To recycle something means to give the object a new beginning by changing it into something that can be used again.

6. Share the activity sheets, What's a Cycle, with the class. You may use as handouts or laminate them to be used over and over again.

Explain that paper cannot be planted to make a new tree, but it can be recycled to make new paper and paper products. While this is not a true cycle of nature, it is a human-made cycle that 1) restores new life to useful objects, 2) conserves our resources (trees, energy), and 3) reduces pollution caused by discarding old items and manufacturing new items.

*Source: Action for a cleaner tomorrow: A South Carolina Environmental Curriculum