

# Weigh Your Waste!



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## Grades

3-12

## Objectives

To increase student's awareness of the amount of waste they generate and the implication of that waste.

## Method

Students will collect, weigh, record, and analyze the amount of trash they generate in the course of a week.

## Materials

One trash bag, one twist tie garbage bag fastener for each student, one 3x5 inch note card per student, one plastic tarp, one set of gloves per student, one scale, one copy of My Trash Journal (included) for each student, clear tape

## Vocabulary

Waste, per capita

## Procedure

1. Photocopy and distribute copies of the My Trash Journal worksheet to each student.
2. Distribute one garbage bag, one twist tie, and one note card to each student. Tell students to take the trash bag to classes for 1 week (5 days), using it to collect all of the "dry" garbage they throw away at school. Instruct students to include all of their used containers, paper waste, and packaging, but not to include food waste and any other type of "wet" trash that might decompose or be unsanitary. For safety reasons, instruct students not to collect glass items either.

3. Have the students put their names on the note cards and tape them to the twist ties (or use a hole-punch). Then have students use the twist ties to close their garbage bags. Explain that at the end of each day, students will bring their garbage bags back to the classroom and store them overnight in a designated spot (show them the location). The name tags will allow them to pick out their trash bag the next morning.
4. At the end of the week, ask the students to predict how much their individual piles weigh. Ask them to predict how much the total pile of garbage for the whole class would weigh. Write some of these predictions on the board.
5. Bring in a tarp and spread it on the floor. Have each student spread the contents of his or her personal trash bag on the tarp. Have the students put on gloves and sort their individual piles of garbage into as many categories as possible: plastics, aluminum, paper, steel, and mixed materials (those that fit into more than one category). Have them record the contents of their garbage piles using the My Trash Journal worksheet.
6. Have students weigh their individual pile of garbage and put this number on the chalkboard. Determine the average weight of trash generated per student per day. Compare these weights to the student's predictions.
7. Write the national average of waste generation on the board: 4.3 per person per day.

Ask the students to determine the following:

- How much waste did the class generate on average? Is this higher or lower than the national average?
- If each person in your community (population \_\_\_\_\_ throws away \_\_\_ lbs. (use the students average calculated above) of garbage each day, how many total pounds of garbage are thrown away each day in your community?

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## continued

- 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, for example, an average 4 door compact car weighs about a ton.)
8. Ask the students why they think they generate so much trash. Is it more or less than they anticipated?
  9. Ask the students if they were surprised at how much trash they generated. Where does all of this waste go every day? Why should we care how much we throw away?
  10. Ask the students to look at their waste generation charts and think of ways they could have reduced the amount of garbage generated this week. (Could any items have been recycled or reused? What about using less in the first place? For example, bring a reusable cloth lunch bag every day instead of a paper lunch bag.)