

Rethink · Reduce · Reuse
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Be a Garbage Gumshoe: Investigate Your Garbage

Grade level – 3-6

Subjects – Math, social studies

Teaching time

- Week 1 – 45 min.
- Week 2 – 30 min.

Skills – Gathering, interpreting, and applying data

Materials

- ten empty paper bags
- rubber gloves
- weight scale (optional)
- copies of investigation activity sheet (see back)

Objectives

Students will become aware of what they put into the waste stream by conducting a garbage and recyclables audit. They will be encouraged to improve their recycling habits.

Procedure

First week

1. Students will set up two containers: one for garbage and one for recycling. (To make measuring the contents easy and uniform, students can place paper grocery bags in the garbage and recycling containers.) At the end of each day, students will estimate the volume (bags are 1/2 full, 1/4 full, 3/4 full, etc.) or measure the weight (using a scale) of both the recycling and garbage and record the figures on the investigation sheet.
2. Students will check their containers for contamination. Record on the chart the total number of items that were incorrectly placed in the recycling container and the total number of items that were incorrectly placed in the garbage.
3. At the end of the week, tally the total volume or weight of recyclables and garbage and the number of incorrectly placed items.
 - How much of each did the students generate?
 - What can be done to decrease the amount of garbage?
 - What can be done to create less waste in the first place?
 - What can be done to decrease the number of incorrectly placed items?

Second week

4. Repeat the process described for week 1. Tally all results on the appropriate part of the chart.
 - How did week 2 compare to week 1? Explain the differences.
 - Discuss again what could be done to create less waste.
5. Encourage students to conduct waste audits at home. Pass out copies of the “Be a Garbage Gumshoe” chart for them to use at home.

Pre- and post-activity questions

- How can you and your family change habits to reduce the amount you throw away?
- What types of products should we buy if we want to cut down on waste?



King County

Department of
Natural Resources and Parks
Solid Waste Division

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Investigation Sheet

Project FIRST WEEK

DATES	Amount of recyclables		Amount of garbage		Number of incorrect items
	volume	weight	volume	weight	
Monday	bags	lbs.	bags	lbs.	
Tuesday	bags	lbs.	bags	lbs.	
Wednesday	bags	lbs.	bags	lbs.	
Thursday	bags	lbs.	bags	lbs.	
Friday	bags	lbs.	bags	lbs.	
TOTALS	bags	lbs.	bags	lbs.	

SECOND WEEK

DATES	Amount of recyclables		Amount of garbage		Number of incorrect items
	volume	weight	volume	weight	
Monday	bags	lbs.	bags	lbs.	
Tuesday	bags	lbs.	bags	lbs.	
Wednesday	bags	lbs.	bags	lbs.	
Thursday	bags	lbs.	bags	lbs.	
Friday	bags	lbs.	bags	lbs.	
TOTALS	bags	lbs.	bags	lbs.	

Directions – Each day, record the amount of garbage and recyclables. At the end of the week, add everything up. Compare the results of this week to those of a second week. See if you succeeded in reducing the amount of garbage. Also do this at home.



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