

How Much Garbage Do You Generate?

Before students can begin to understand the need for waste reduction, it is necessary first to understand the magnitude of the waste problem. Throwing away a single gum wrapper or banana peel doesn't seem very important, until we see the cumulative impact of everyone's combined trash over a period of time. The impact of waste generated at school and at home is one of the most personal ways to understand buying and throwing away habits. This activity will allow students to calculate garbage generation as well as realize reduce, reuse and recycle possibilities.

Activity

For one day, give each student a plastic bag to wear around their waist (or to carry) to collect the garbage they produce – at school and at home. Nothing gets thrown away in the garbage can during the designated period of activity! This activity can be extended to a week if desired.

At the start of the next day's class:

- Weigh the garbage collected by individual students to get a classroom total (divide by number of students to get a per person average).
- Empty bags on the floor (on plastic tarp or newspaper) for all to view.
- Engage in conversation based on the findings in the bags.
- Could the waste have been reduced (not made in the first place)?
- What can be reused, repaired or donated?
- What materials can be recycled?
- What materials can be composted?
- Separate items and materials that can be reused or recycled. (gloves recommended for person sorting materials)
- Once materials have been sorted, put just "garbage" into a bag.
- Weigh the bag of garbage before disposing.
- Weigh the materials that can be reused, recycled or composted.
- How many pounds did this activity divert from the landfill?

Total weight of garbage: _____ lbs.

Average weight per person _____ lbs.

Total weight of "other" materials: _____ lbs.

Weight diverted from landfill: _____ lbs.