

Trash Time Travelers



Objective

To teach students how lifestyles change over time and how these changes alter the production and management of waste.



Activity Description

Students will interview adults, either at home or in the community, to find out what people considered trash years ago and how that trash was handled.



Materials Needed

- One copy of the *Rubbish Reporter* worksheet per student
- Brightly colored markers (one per student)
- One ball of string or twine
- One hole-punch
- One roll of masking tape



Key Vocabulary Words

Landfill
Recycle
Reuse
Combustion

(this list will vary for each student's interview)



Duration

2 hours over two class periods



Skills Used

Communication
Research



Activity

Step 1: Photocopy and distribute the *Rubbish Reporter* worksheets to each student. Conduct an introductory discussion touching on the following topics (refer to the Teacher Fact Sheet titled *Solid Waste* on pg. 41 for background information):

- Discuss what the common components of our trash are today—list them on the board.
- Ask students to think about how this list might differ from the trash list of a settler in colonial times, a farmer during the Great Depression, or a grandparent who lived through World War II.
- Discuss how trash is disposed of today and ask students how they think people of other time periods disposed of trash.

Step 2: Inform students that they are now “Rubbish Reporters.” Their assignment is to write a story about how different lifestyles in different historical periods affected the generation and handling of trash.

Step 3: Have students take the *Rubbish Reporter* worksheet home and use it to interview at least two elderly family or community members. Give students 2 or 3 days to complete this assignment.

Step 4: Have students bring in their completed *Rubbish Reporter* worksheets and pick one of their interviewees to focus on. As an in-class assignment, have the students use their completed worksheets to write a short paragraph or “article” about what their interviewee thought of “trash,” how they disposed of trash, and how those ideas and practices might differ from ours today. Instruct students to mark



language
arts



social
studies



Journal Activity

Ask students to pretend that they are each of the following characters: a pilgrim living in the 1500s, a professional (business person) living in the city today, and a grizzly bear living today in Yellowstone National Park. Have students write about what kinds of trash they generate as each of these characters. Ask them which character they think is most wasteful and why.

(in the left-hand corner of the page) the year (or years) that their interviewee remembered or referred to during the interview.

Step 5: Go around the room and have each student stand up and read his or her article out loud to the class. Discuss the issues, such as time period, geographical location, trash disposal, and recycling, that are raised in each article.

Step 6: After discussing each article, have the students determine its one aspect of trash disposal or management that is most unique. (For example, someone may have saved all metal for recycling during WW II or burned his/her own trash on a farm each day, etc.) Have the student write this one aspect with a colored marker at the top of his/her article.

Step 7: Collect all of the articles and spread them out on the floor. Have the students help you organize them in a time line according to the years marked in the upper left-hand corner of the pages.

Step 8: Using the hole-punch, put holes in the tops of each article and connect them using the string. Hang your "Trash Time line" somewhere in the classroom or school.



Assessment

1. Collect all of the students' *Rubbish Reporter* worksheets and articles and evaluate them for completeness, comprehension, and content.
2. Ask students to offer an explanation of why trash and its management differs for each generation. Ask them to predict what trash will be like in the future and what people will do with trash 100 years from now.
3. Have students list four ways in which trash management in the past differs from trash management today.



Enrichment

1. If there are one or two very interesting or unique trash stories that students bring in, ask those interviewees to come in and speak to the class more extensively about their recollections. Have students prepare questions in advance to ask the guest speaker.
2. Using the different time periods or locations that surface during the students' interviews, pick one or two for an in-depth history and social studies lesson. Have students explore the setting of the time period, learn about the political and social events of that time, and investigate how these might have affected trash and its disposal.

The Rubbish Reporter

Name: _____

General Assignment: Ask your interviewee to pick a time in his/her past that is easy to recall in detail. Ask the interviewee to remember what he/she considered trash at that time (what was thrown out), how that trash was disposed of, where it was disposed of, and how all of these characteristics compare with today's ideas about trash and methods for handling trash.

Rubbish Reporter's name:

Interviewee's name:

What time period(s) does your interview cover?

What geographical location?



Interview Questions

1. What time period are you going to talk about? How old were you then? What was your occupation (if you were old enough)?

2. What were the most important political and social events during the time period you are remembering?

3. What did you consider trash when you were younger? What kinds of things did you throw out?

4. How was your trash handled? Was it picked up, sent to a landfill, burned? Who provided this service?

Student Handout

Interview Questions (continued)

5. Did you reuse or repair items? What kinds of items did you reuse? Did you recycle? What did you recycle? What were recyclables made into or used for?

6. Name some products that you use today that were not available to you then.

7. What were many of your products (such as toys, food containers, or appliances) made of during this time period? Did you have a lot of plastic products? Glass? Metal? How were they packaged?

8. What was your attitude toward trash then? Has it changed now?

Rubbish Reporter: Can you think of any more questions to ask?

9. Do you think we are more wasteful as a society today?

