

Litter-Less Lunch

Target Grade Level:
Grade 3

SOLs:
Science: 3.1

Materials Needed:
A selection of lunch items (e.g., sandwich, crackers, cheese, fruits, cookies, drinks, etc.)

Note: include examples of both reusable and one-time-use wrappings and containers

A nutrition poster (optional)

Paper and pencils

Summary

Students will question and discuss packaging food items and design a litter-less lunch.

Objectives

Investigate and understand how much packaging--trash-- and possible litter could be in a lunch.

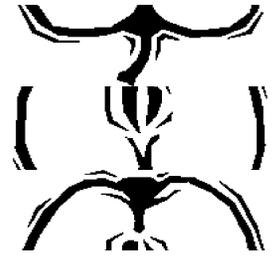
Background

Millions of school-aged children across the country carry packed lunches to school. Depending on how the lunch is packed and what is packed in the lunch, there is almost always some trash produced. There are some ways to reduce the amount of trash (waste items that will be discarded) in a lunch. The first and easiest change to make to pack foods that the child will eat. If you know that your child will not eat the crust of the sandwich, you might want to pack a “crustless” sandwich and compost the bread crusts at home. Another thing is to look at the containers that you pack the lunch in-- will your child return containers or will they be lost at school or on the bus? If you can count on getting the containers back, it is worth the investment to purchase some plastic tubs and a lunch box. If the child has a tendency to lose things, then you may want to try to re-use some margarine tubs or other “recycled” containers.

While all of our food needs some sort of packaging, we can reduce the amount of packaging needed by buying larger containers and dividing the product into smaller reusable containers. For example if a child eats raisins for lunch, instead of buying the smaller one serving boxes of raisins you can buy the larger box of raisins and divide them into serving sized portions. Not only will you be saving packaging, you will also save money. If “everyone” at school eats the new pre-packages lunches that can be bought in the grocery store deli, you may want to make some of your own using crackers, meats, cheeses and re-usable containers. And finally, many food items can be composted; aluminum cans and some plastic containers can be recycled.

Procedure

1. Ask students what they will have (or have had) for lunch that day. Make a list of the items on the board or an overhead. Have students analyze the waste materials left after eating each of the items. Don't forget the “natural packaging” (e.g., banana peels) and the leftovers (e.g., apple cores and crusts of sandwiches).
2. Discuss packaging methods by asking for and including students' thoughts. Starter questions might include: Why might food need to be “packaged”? What are the advantages and disadvantages of the different kinds of packaging? Can the packaging or containers be reused? Ask students if they ever see any of these items on the floor, tables, or chairs. Establish an understanding about how and when these items become litter.
3. Divide the class into several small teams. Have each team “pack a lunch.” (This might be accomplished by students listing, drawing, or collecting visuals of “lunch materials.”) Explain that each team should also list all item that would be left and thrown away after their lunch is eaten.
4. Allow each group the opportunity to come forward and share their lunch and findings. Note the lack of trash being generated. Ask about and commend groups as they explain how they would prevent their trash from becoming litter! Determine which team had the least amount of trash! Then ask which teams left any litter? None!!



Variation for older students:

Assign a differently focused lunch to each group. The lunches might include “the Tastiest,” “the Healthiest,” “the Most Packaging,” and “the Least Packaging.” Additional categories can be considered, or assign more than one group to each category. The groups should record their lunches as above and share with the rest of the class. Promote awareness of the lack of trash being generated and discuss how to keep any trash from becoming litter!

Optional Teacher Follow-up:

The whole class can participate in a “Litter-Less Lunch Day.” On the designated day each student should carry their lunches to school. As lunch time is finishing, each team should count and record one point for each item that will be thrown away after they are done eating (food scraps become trash). Each team’s record should include the total sum of its members’ trash. It should also be noted: “5 points will be added to any team’s total if there is any trash remaining where it is not supposed to be (litter!)” The team with the least amount of points gets to take a bow!

