

# Sorting It All Out

## Goals:

- ♻️ To make children aware of the problem of overflowing landfills.
- ♻️ To introduce the practices of reusing and recycling as a means to help reduce the amount of waste we generate.
- ♻️ To help children learn to sort various “trash” items by matching them to recycling labels.

## Background:

The solid waste issue is a problem facing all of us today and we must solve it for the sake of future generations. We simply need to cut down on the amount of trash that is entering the solid waste stream. Two ways

we can do this are to *recycle* and/or *reuse* unwanted materials. Recycling is easy. Even young children can learn to separate recyclables from trash and place them in the proper containers. Reusing is a way to help children develop creative skills. Recycling and reusing will help reduce the waste we produce and help our *natural resources* last longer. We all can help!

When teaching conceptual ideas such as recycling and reusing to young children, it is best to start with a concrete experience. These activities are ways to introduce some of the ideas and vocabulary words that will be used throughout the **Wee Recyclers Activity Guide**. Refer to the “Glossary” and “Introduction” for more teaching background

## The Overflow Problem

### Materials:

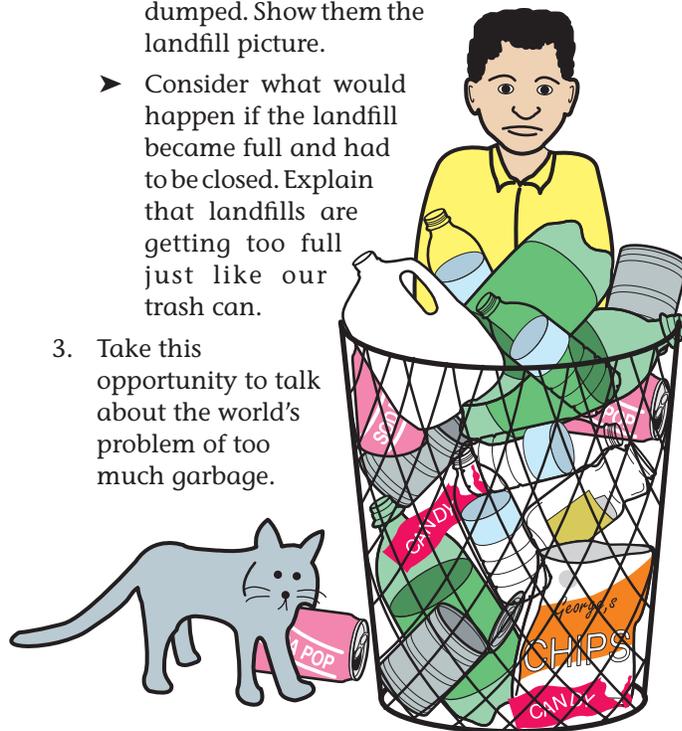
- ♻️ Full trash can from the classroom
- ♻️ Newspapers to cover the floor
- ♻️ Landfill picture \*

\* Found in **Wee Recyclers Online Resources**, <http://dnr.wi.gov/eek/teacher/weerecyclers.htm>

### Procedure:

1. A day or two before starting the recycling unit, stop emptying the trash can in your room. Allow the can to begin to overflow and become messy. The children should notice the mess and come to you because it is a problem.
2. Sit down with your children to discuss the problem of “what to do with our trash.” Ask them what they think should be done with the overflowing trash can. Listen to all of their ideas and consider each suggestion. Help them to understand the larger problem.
  - If a child suggests getting another trash can or a larger can, talk about what will happen if the second can is full. How many cans of trash can the classroom hold? Will the trash begin to smell bad or attract insects?

- If a child suggests taking it outside for the garbage collectors to pick up (some children may know that local garbage is picked up by a garbage truck), talk about where the garbage truck takes the garbage. Ask if anyone has been to a landfill and ask them to describe it. Have the children imagine a large hole in which everyone’s garbage is dumped. Show them the landfill picture.
  - Consider what would happen if the landfill became full and had to be closed. Explain that landfills are getting too full just like our trash can.
3. Take this opportunity to talk about the world’s problem of too much garbage.



## What's In Our Trash?

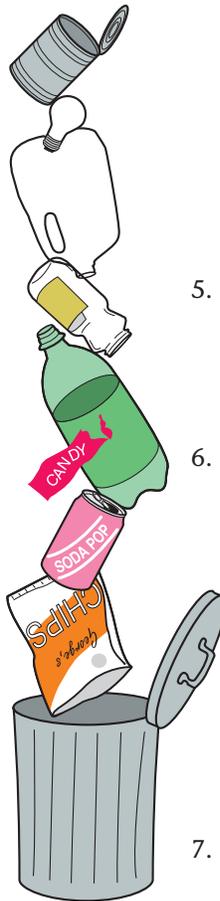
### Materials:

Full trash can from the classroom  
Newspapers to cover the floor  
Rubber, non-latex gloves  
A large container for reusable items  
"Reuse" label\*

\* Found in **Wee Recyclers Online Resources**,  
<http://dnr.wi.gov/eek/teacher/weerecyclers.htm>

### Procedure:

1. Gather the children around the trash can. Praise your children for doing a good job of cleaning up and throwing things away.
2. Ask: What is "trash?" Trash is anything that is thrown away because we do not need or want it anymore. Ask: Who makes the trash here? Point out that all of us are responsible for making trash.
3. Cover an area of the floor with newspaper and empty the trash can onto the paper. Ask: Do any of you see something you threw away?
4. Have each child pick up and identify one item of trash. Ask: Do you think that what you are holding could possibly be used again for something else?



Encourage your children to think practically and creatively. Consider all responses. If the children decide something can be reused, let them put the item in the box labeled "Reuse." If they decide it cannot be reused, let them put it back into the trash can.

5. Sort through the rest of the trash on the floor and decide together what items can be put in the "Reuse" box and what things should be put into the trash can.
6. Take this opportunity to explain to the children that they can make less trash by reusing things. To reuse means to use something again that may have otherwise been thrown out. They can practice reusing by coloring or writing on both sides of the paper instead of just one side, or by using a paper or plastic bag more than once before throwing it away or recycling it. Scraps of string, yarn, paper or material still might have use in an art project.
7. Do an art project using materials from the "Reuse" box.

## Recycle Match

### Materials:

Containers for collecting and sorting trash (bags or boxes)  
Recycling labels\*  
"Recycle – It's Easy" poster\*  
Recycle Symbol page\*  
Examples of each recyclable item: milk jug, two-liter bottle, newspaper, clear glass, green glass, brown glass, aluminum can, tin can, cell phone

\* Found in **Wee Recyclers Online Resources**,  
<http://dnr.wi.gov/eek/teacher/weerecyclers.htm>

### Preparation:

- Recycle Determine which items are recyclable in your community and how to prepare them. Indicate which items are recyclable on the "Recycle – It's Easy" poster and use it as a reference and teaching guide.



Place the various recycling labels on the containers. You may consider these your permanent collection containers that will be used in the Wee Recycling Center.



Assemble the recyclable items and have them visible as you talk about recycling.

### Procedure:

1. Ask your children if anyone knows what the word "recycle" means. Does it sound like any other words they know? To recycle means to collect and remake an item into the same thing or something else. For example, old newspapers can be used to make new newspapers; old glass jars can be used to make new glass jars; metal cans can be made into new metal cans; and some plastic bottles can be made into new plastic things.



2. Show your children the Recycling Symbol page. Ask: Does anyone know what this picture means? Talk about the shape and the arrows. Explain to your children that when they see this symbol, it means that something can be recycled or that it has been made from recycled material. In order for something to be recycled, we must save it and take it to a place called a “recycling center” where it is stored until it can be made into something new.
3. Show the children the recyclable items. Let them hold and feel the items. Talk about what each item is made of and what it was possibly used for.
4. Show the children the boxes with the recycling labels. Explain to the children that we will sort the recyclable things into these different boxes so they can be recycled. Let each child match a recyclable item to the recycling label and then place the item in the box. Practice until everyone has taken a couple of turns.
5. Hang the “Recycle – It’s Easy” poster near the boxes. Explain to the children that this poster is a reminder of which things can be recycled. Give an example of how the pictures on the poster match the pictures on the boxes.



## Count on Plastic

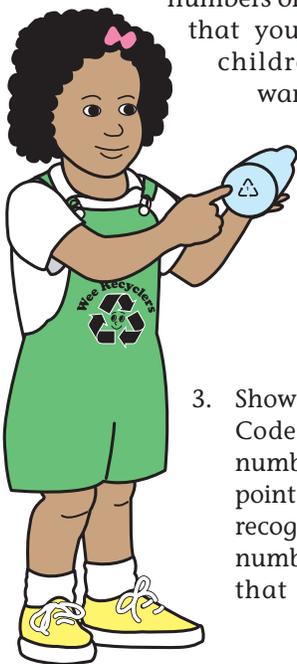
### Materials:

Plastic containers with code numbers on the bottom  
“The Plastic Code”\*

\* Found in **Wee Recyclers Online Resources**,  
<http://dnr.wi.gov/eek/teacher/weerecyclers.htm>

### Procedure:

1. Collect a variety of plastic containers with code numbers on the bottom. Select numbers that you want to review or teach children. For example, if you want to focus on the numbers one and two, then only select containers with these numbers.
2. Explain to the children that we are going to use plastic containers to help us review/learn some numbers.
3. Show your children “The Plastic Code.” Help them identify the numbers on the front side as you point to them. Ask them if they recognize the shape around the numbers. Explain to the children that they can also find these



numbers on the bottom of some plastic containers.

4. Give each child a plastic container and tell them to look on the bottom. Ask: Do you see a recycling symbol? Do you see a number? Do you know which number it is? Help children to figure out the number on the bottom of the container.
5. Ask the children to trade containers with another child. Point to one of the numbers on the code page and ask, “How many of you have this number on the bottom of your container? Who can tell me what number it is?” Continue in this way until all the numbers have been covered. Help your children and continue to give them encouragement. Trade bottles as many times as you feel appropriate.
6. When children seem to recognize the different numbers, explain that the numbers are used to identify different kinds of plastics. Explain that some, but not all, plastics can be recycled. Most plastic containers with a one and two can be recycled now, and hopefully, someday all plastics will be recyclable.
7. Continue using the containers to develop number and counting skills. For example, have the children determine the number on their container and then group themselves according to their number. Or ask the children to line-up in numerical order according to the number on their container. Be creative and come up with your own games.

# Recycle Review

## Materials:

Containers for collecting and sorting trash (bags or boxes)

Recycling labels\*

“Recycle – It’s Easy” poster\*

A trash can

Magnet

Newspapers to cover the floor

An assortment of clean and safe trash items from the following categories:

Recyclable	Reusable	Trash
Milk jug	Paper bag	Bottle caps (metal and plastic)
Newspaper & Magazine	Yarn scraps	Dirty paper plate
Glass (clear, green and brown)	Old crayons	Candy wrappers
Plastic water bottle	Plate (ceramic)	Empty toothpaste bottle
Junk Mail, phone book, old homework/artwork.	Margarine tub	Empty chip bag
Aluminum can	Spoon	Paper towels
Steel can	Cardboard box	Facial tissue
Two-liter bottle	Reusable water bottle	

(Choose items children may recognize and can identify. Additional or different items may also be used. You may want to include multiples of the recyclables.)

\* Found in **Wee Recyclers Online Resources**, <http://dnr.wi.gov/eek/teacher/weerecyclers.htm>

## Preparation:

 Determine which items are recyclable in your community and how to prepare them (rinse, remove caps and lids, etc.). Indicate which items are recyclable on the “Recycle – It’s Easy” poster and use it as a reference and teaching guide.

 Place the “Reuse,” “Trash” and various recycling labels on the collection containers. You may want to consider these as your permanent collection containers to be used in your Wee Recycling Center.

 Collect examples of the items listed above, making sure they are clean and dry. Put the items in the trash can. Assemble the containers in a semi-circle around newspapers on the floor.

## Procedure:

1. Assemble your children in front of the collection containers. Bring in your very full can of trash and say to the children, “Geez, I sure do have a big problem! I

had all of this trash sitting at home and now I don’t know what to do with it. Do you think you can help me figure out if some of it can be reused or recycled? I just don’t know what to do.”

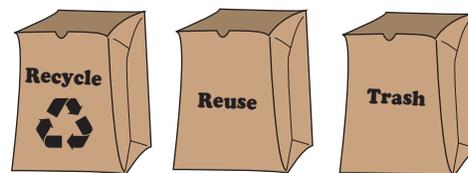
2. Dump the can of trash onto the newspaper covered floor. From this point on, simply ask questions and let the children tell you how to recycle. Ask: What are these boxes for? What do these recycling labels mean? Should all of these things be in the trash? Can some of these things be reused or recycled? Let children take turns sharing explanations.

3. Select a few items. Play “dumb” and let the children help you decide the appropriate container to put it in. Ask some of the following questions:

-  What is this or what was it used for?
-  What material is it made of?
-  What color is it? (if colored glass is to be sorted)
-  Does a magnet stick to it?
-  Can you match the item with any of the pictures on the labels or on the poster?
-  Could this be used again? If so, for the same thing or something different?

When the appropriate container is determined, place the item inside. If an item can not be reused or recycled, place it back into the trash can.

4. As children catch on to the procedure, have each of them select an item and place it in the correct container. Ask them why they chose that container. Be flexible and make the activity fun.
5. When the pile is completely sorted, thank the children for helping you with your trash-overflow problem. Point out how little trash is actually left in the trash can to throw out.
6. Emphasize that the items in the recycle containers should not be thrown in the trash anymore, but should be rinsed out, sorted and saved. Then they can be taken to the recycling center where they will be stored until they can be used to make new things again.
7. Explain to the children that recycling is good because it reduces the amount of trash we have to throw away. Reusing things is good, too, because it saves us from having to buy new things and reduces the amount of trash we have to throw away. We should reuse things as many times as possible and not be wasteful. From now on, we must remember to reuse and recycle!



---

## Going Beyond

♻️ If your facility has a compost pile, add another category, “Compost” and include items in the pile that go into the compost pile. Examples include: food scraps like vegetable trimmings, tea bags, coffee grounds and eggshells (plastic or wooden food

will serve as a good example without the odor or mess), grass clippings, weeds, leaves and sticks. For composting instructions, visit EEK! Environmental Education for Kids web site, [www.dnr.wi.gov/eeek](http://www.dnr.wi.gov/eeek) and keyword search: recipes for composting.

---

## I Can Recycle

### Materials:

“I Can Recycle” book (take-home)\*

Stapler

Crayons

Small samples or pictures of recyclable items

\* Found in **Wee Recyclers Online Resources**, <http://dnr.wi.gov/eeek/teacher/weerecyclers.htm>

### Procedure:

1. Print out the two “I Can Recycle” master pages found in the **Wee Recyclers Online Resources** for each child. Fold each page into fourths and then staple the two folded sheets together along the middle fold.
2. Let each child decide how to fill in the blank on each page. Help them write in their request.
3. Collect small pictures (from magazines, coupons, newspapers) or small samples (pieces of cardboard or newspaper) of recyclable items. Let the children choose which picture to place on each page. Help them cut out and glue the picture into the book. The children can read their books to you and then take them home to read to a family member.

### Going Beyond:

♻️ Set up the Wee Recycling Center and show it to your children.

♻️ Start your own recycling program. Designate a recycling day (once a week or month) when children can bring in clean items from home to add to the recycling containers. For safety reasons, prohibit children from bringing in glass items. You may have children help flatten cans and plastic bottles (if applicable in your community). Save money that is collected to help pay for new playground equipment or a field trip. On collection day, have children help you take recycling containers out to the curb.

