

Rethink Activity

Directions  
Collect some trash and recyclables that are typical items in your classroom or school lunchroom. Make a chart like the one below. Hold up each item and ask students to come up with ideas to enter under each heading. Examples are demonstrated below.

Challenge  
Ask students to try out one or more of the ideas they come up with in the next week. Keep track and tally the results.

Item	Rethink	Reduce	Reuse	Recycle	Compost	Trash
Extra paper napkin	Don't take extra. Take only what you need.	Use a cloth napkin instead.	Save it for another day.	Never	Compost used napkins.	Throw it away only if composting is not available.
Squeezable yogurt tube	What other packages does yogurt come in? Consider recyclable plastic cups instead.	Buy a large container of yogurt and pack a serving in a reusable container.	Yogurt tubes are not reusable.	Choose yogurt cups that can be cleaned and recycled.	Never	Throw empty yogurt tube in the trash.
Gift wrap	Choose a reusable gift bag.	Think about giving an experience such as a trip to the movies instead of stuff.	Use newspaper or grocery store advertisements, or decorate a paper bag.	Recycle any paper gift wrap.	Compost tissue paper.	Throw away plastic or foil gift wrap.

Expert-level question  
Ask students how rethinking our choices and reducing waste also reduces the impacts of climate change. When we buy and use less stuff, we use fewer resources which means fewer greenhouse gases are produced in the manufacture, transport, and use of a product.

Ready to take action and get assistance?

- Find more classroom activity ideas on reducing, reusing, recycling, and composting on the King County website: [your.kingcounty.gov/solidwaste/elementaryschool/index.asp](http://your.kingcounty.gov/solidwaste/elementaryschool/index.asp).
- Get resources and hands-on assistance from the King County Green Schools Program in setting up or improving your school's waste reduction, recycling, and resource conservation programs: [your.kingcounty.gov/solidwaste/greenschools/index.asp](http://your.kingcounty.gov/solidwaste/greenschools/index.asp).

For more information on these and other programs, or to request this material in alternative formats, contact the King County Solid Waste Division:  
206-477-4466 | TTY Relay: 711  
[your.kingcounty.gov/solidwaste/education/index.asp](http://your.kingcounty.gov/solidwaste/education/index.asp)



Curiosity Quest: Protecting 'R' Planet



Assembly Discussion Guide

About the assembly

King County's Curiosity Quest assembly program teaches students how waste reduction, recycling and composting help the earth's land, water and air. The assembly also teaches how waste reduction plays a role in reducing the factors that lead to climate change. Students learn concrete ways to keep waste out of the landfill and make everyday choices at school and at home that have the least impact on the planet. Through lively characters and interactive skits, the assembly encourages students to be curious problem solvers and practice:

- Reducing the amount of garbage we make.
- Reusing everyday items.
- Recycling and composting materials when we are done with them.

King County schools are making great strides in becoming green. We hope that this assembly program will encourage schools to continue their reuse, recycling, and composting efforts and help the county toward its goal of keeping valuable materials out of the landfill.

Learning standards

The assembly addresses several state science and Common Core standards. For example, students use listening and observation skills to understand environmental issues. They learn the science concepts behind the protection of the Earth's resources.

Discussion questions and activities

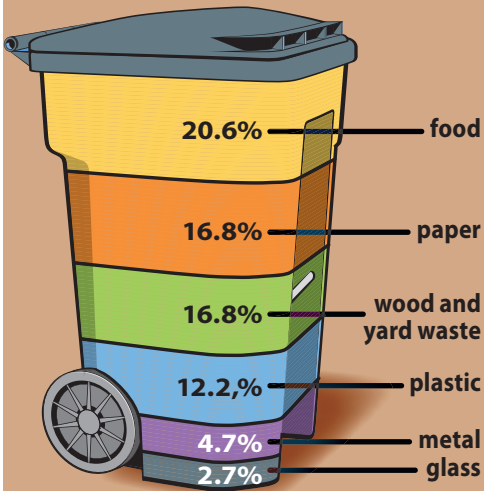
Teachers may wish to introduce some of the concepts in this guide prior to the assembly so students can recognize them during the show. This guide can also be used after the assembly to reinforce concepts and extend learning.





# Garbage in King County

Percentages of items thrown away that could be recycled or composted



## Discussion prompts

### Why do we throw things away?

Because we no longer need them or they're no longer usable.

**What types of things shouldn't be thrown away?** Anything that can be reused, recycled, or composted.

**Study the graphic.** Discuss ways that we can reduce the amount of materials we send to the landfill.

## Fact

We send 4.6 million pounds of waste to the Cedar Hills Regional Landfill each day. That amount would fill 188 school buses. More than 60 percent of those materials could have been reused, recycled, or composted.

# Rethink

## Discussion prompts

**What does it mean to rethink a choice?** To think twice about it: Do I need it? Can I reuse it? What should I do with it when I'm done with it?

**What are some examples of rethinking**

- **what you buy?** Borrow something you only need to use once. Buy durable products instead of disposable.
- **what you throw away?** Can it be reused, recycled, composted, or donated?
- **what you recycle?** Can it be reused or donated? Could you have chosen something reusable instead?

**What is one way your school can rethink?**



Briarwood Elementary School (Issaquah School District) encouraged students to bring their lunch in durable and recyclable containers for waste-free-lunch Wednesdays. School announcements and Green Team skits promoted the weekly event. The school lunchroom generated less than one pound of trash at one of these events.

# Reduce

## Discussion prompts

**What does it mean to reduce waste?** To use less of something in the first place so less garbage is created.

**How do you think using less stuff helps the environment?** It saves natural resources and cuts down on greenhouse gases.

**What are some easy ways to reduce waste?** Pack a waste-free lunch by using reusable containers instead of plastic baggies or snacks with disposable packages. Avoid products with excess packaging.

**Name one way you already or plan to reduce waste.**



Stillwater Elementary (Riverview School District) student and parent volunteers installed a school garden to grow healthy fruits and vegetables. Greens from the garden soon replaced bagged lettuce in school lunches!

# Reuse

## Discussion prompts

**Name some things that we reuse every day.**

**What are some things that we throw away that we could reuse instead?** Examples could include plastic bags, envelopes, bubble wrap, and plastic utensils, plates, and containers.

**What are some things that we recycle that we could reuse?** Examples include magazines, paper used on one side, paper bags, and boxes.

**What things could we choose that are reusable rather than disposable?**



North Bend Elementary School (Snoqualmie Valley School District) created reusable party kits for each classroom. Each kit includes durable plates, bowls, silverware, cups, and napkins.

# Recycle

## Discussion prompts

**What can we recycle?** Paper, cardboard, empty plastic bottles, cups and tubs, and aluminum cans.



**What doesn't belong in the recycle bin?** Paper towels, tissues, food waste, snack wrappers, pencils, plastic bags.

**Why do we recycle things?** Making a used product into something new rather than throwing it away saves natural resources.

**Watch this video** on what happens to the recyclables after they leave the curb: <http://bit.ly/2b1Y8m6>

## Fact

Making a can from recycled aluminum uses 95 percent less energy than making it from newly mined aluminum.

After East Ridge Elementary (Northshore School District) began a new lunch time program to recycle empty milk cartons, aluminum cans, and plastic bottles and provided each classroom with information on packing a waste-free lunch, the school increased its recycling rate from 25 percent to 40 percent.

# Compost

## Discussion prompts

**Why do we put food scraps and grass and plant clippings in a separate bin from the trash?** These are valuable resources that can be used again as compost rather than sit in the landfill forever.

**Watch how collected materials** are turned into garden-ready compost on the Cedar Grove YouTube Channel. <http://bit.ly/2aY42IE>

**Why is it important to only put food, plants, and non-coated paper in the compost or yard waste bin?** Materials that don't quickly decompose contaminate the compost.

**What should never go in the compost?** Straws, plastic, coated paper, stickers on fruit skins and rinds, and bathroom tissues are examples.

## Fact

Those little stickers on produce don't decompose and are difficult to remove from compost.

The fifth-grade recycling team at Westwood Elementary School (Enumclaw School District) helps properly sort lunchroom waste, encourages the use of a share table, and helps younger students select only the kinds and amounts of food they are likely to eat. As a result, the school keeps an average of 60 food items out of the garbage each day.

# Recycle-or-Compost Sort Activity

Make sure your students know how to correctly sort their recyclables, compostable items, and trash. Collect enough items from classroom or lunchroom waste so students can work in groups. Ask them first to sort the items into recyclables and trash. Check piles and review any errors with the students. Then ask them to look at what is in the trash pile and separate any items that belong in the compost bin. Review again, correcting any errors.

## Expert-level question

Ask the students to come up with ways to rethink the use of any of the thrown-away items. For example, what can be used instead of a juice pouch or plastic bottle? A thermos or other reusable container.

## Examples of what might be found in sorted piles



**Recyclables** – paper, cans, clean plastic cups and bottles



**Trash** – plastic utensils, straws, snack wrappers, chip bags, tissues, Styrofoam



**Compost** – food scraps, non-coated, food-soiled paper, paper napkins, paper towels

# SHARE TABLE

