



ELEMENTARY CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Waste Not

OBJECTIVE

After analyzing the food waste that their class produces, students will design and implement a plan to reduce, reuse, or recycle their waste.

OVERARCHING QUESTION

How can we reduce food waste in our school?

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

- On average, Americans throw away almost **1 pound of food** each day.
- This amount of food would be enough to feed **2 billion people** for an entire year.
- About **one-fifth of America's landfills** are filled with food waste.¹

Food waste also has a negative effect on the environment. Growing, processing, transporting, and selling food produces greenhouse gases. Greenhouse gases trap heat around the Earth and cause our planet's temperature to rise.² In addition, food needs fresh water, energy, and land to grow—and when we waste food, we waste these valuable resources. It's therefore important to try our best to waste as little food as possible!

COLLABORATE AND BRAINSTORM

Plan to observe the food waste that your class throws out during snack time and lunch. To prepare for these observations, work in small teams or as a full class to decide exactly how you will describe the waste. For instance: Will you count each item that is thrown out? Will you draw a picture of what it looks like? Or do you have a way to weigh the waste? The Food Waste Chart may help you organize your daily observations.

Once you have a plan, collect data for one week. Then review your results and discuss:

- What patterns do you notice?
- What types of food are wasted the most? The least?
- Could any of this waste be saved, used later, or reused in another way?
- How could we prevent some or most of this waste?

DESIGN AND CREATE

Work in small groups to select one idea that you think would be most helpful in reducing, reusing, or recycling your class's food waste. For instance:

- Would reminders help students reduce the amount of food they bring to school?
- Could some foods be safely reused during the next snack time?
- Could a class compost bin be created to recycle natural food waste?

Did you know that natural food waste, such as fruits, veggies, dairy, grains, eggshells, and even some paper napkins, can be composted? Composting speeds up how quickly food items decompose and turns them into a rich soil that can be used to grow crops, plants, and trees. Learn more [here](#).

Make a list of the steps you'll need to follow to accomplish your idea. Then get started!

MAKE IT BETTER

Complete another round of the Food Waste Chart once your plan has been in place for a few weeks. Compare the new chart to your original observations to see if your efforts are making a difference. If they are, think about small changes you could make to have even more of an impact. If you don't see a difference, don't be afraid to make bigger changes!

KEEP IT GOING

Once you have a plan that works in your classroom, brainstorm how to expand it to make a difference on a larger scale. How could you extend your work to more classrooms—or even your entire school?

K-2 CONSIDERATIONS

Set up your Food Waste Chart as a class and work together to track the waste your class creates. Then encourage small groups to brainstorm solutions and vote on which one to implement as a class.

STANDARDS

Next Generation Science Standards

ETS1.B: Developing Possible Solutions

- Research on a problem should be carried out before beginning to design a solution. Testing a solution involves investigating how well it performs under a range of likely conditions.

Sources

1. "Americans Waste About A Pound of Food A Day, USDA Study Finds." Forbes. forbes.com/sites/christinatroitino/2018/04/23/americans-waste-about-a-pound-of-food-a-day-usda-study-finds/#24cec8b74ec3.
2. "Join the U.S. Food Waste Challenge!" USDA. usda.gov/oce/foodwaste/webinars/K-12/Tips_Resources_for_Schools.pdf.

FOOD WASTE CHART



Food Category	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
<hr/> Dairy Examples: Milk, yogurt, cheese sticks...					
<hr/> Examples:					
<hr/> Examples:					
<hr/> Examples:					
<hr/> Examples:					