To Squish or Not: Everyday Decisions That Make a Difference

Waste Reduction Lesson Plan

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Using the book

Hey, Little Ant, by Phillip and Hannah Hoose

Grade Level: K-5
Time: 40 minutes
Subject area: reading, social studies, health

Teaching Objectives:
1. Students will understand that their decisions impact the amount of waste generated for disposal.
2. Students will understand that everyone creates waste and consumes resources. They will consider how much waste they generate and how much they need to consume to survive and have a good quality of life.
3. Students will understand the meaning of reusable (durable) and disposable. They will be able to identify disposable and durable items and sort them into the appropriate categories.
4. Students will consider abundance and wise use of resources.

Materials:
- Book, Hey, Little Ant, by Phillip and Hannah Hoose
- Red ant puppet (optional)
- Sample materials including but not limited to:
  - Plastic bag, reusable cloth bag
  - Bottled water, reusable water bottle
  - Paper towels, sponge, dish cloth
  - Styrofoam cup, reusable (travel) coffee mug
  - Wrapping paper, gift bag/box
- Game materials:
  - Box/bag filled with samples of disposable and reusable consumer products
    Examples: paper plates, plastic plates, towels, paper napkins, to-go cups, plastic sandwich boxes and bags, “disposable” rags and sponges, plastic and metal spoons, wrapping paper and gift bags, paper bag and lunch box/reusable bag.
  - Reusable Hopscotch cloth or chalk to draw a board on sidewalk (see picture above)
    Tape may be used to outline a board on the floor
  - Picture of ants printed on shipping label
  - Two containers: one representing disposable (Styrofoam cooler), one representing reusable (regular cooler)

Vocabulary:
Consumer (someone who buys and uses goods and services)  Consume (to use up)
Disposable (designed to be thrown away after use)  Durable (able to stand wear and heavy use)
Frugal (not wasteful, use resources wisely)  Landfill (a clay and plastic lined pit were garbage is disposed)
Reduce (make or become less in amount or size)  Reusable (to be used many times)
Waste generator (someone who produces waste)
Procedure:

1. **Read *Hey, Little Ant* by Phillip and Hannah Hoose:** The book ends, “Should the ant get squished? Should the ant go free? It’s up to the kid, not up to me. We’ll leave the kid with the raised-up shoe. What do you think the kid should do?” Discuss decision-making process…do you squish the ant or not? The answer depends on the situation, if the ant is on a kitchen counter-squish, if outside—it goes free. We all make many decisions each day. Many decisions we make are small. Ask students who picked out their clothes this morning? Why did you pick that shirt/pants? As you get older some decisions may become more important…what school will you attend, whom you will marry, how many kids will you have, what job offer to accept. Larger decisions can be life changing but small choices accumulate and can have a large impact on our life and society.

2. **Define waste generation and consumerism:** Everyone is a waste generator—we all make waste/garbage; everyone is a consumer and as a consumer we all use “things” to survive. Discuss these concepts using examples familiar to students. Then discuss: How much do you throw away? How much do you consume? Can we change our behavior and reduce the amount we consume or throw away?

3. **Discuss sample materials:** Stress that students must make a decision or choice to change their behavior.
   a. Plastic bag vs. cloth bag: Over 600 billion plastic bags are produced worldwide annually. Each American family receives on average 6 bags/day. We can throw bags away, recycle them (costs 5x more to recycle bags than to make—NOT a sustainable answer), or reuse them several times before throwing them away. A cloth bag can be reused many times, laundered and used again.
   b. Paper towels vs. cloth: Paper towels are used once and thrown away—they are disposable. Using reusable sponges/cloths reduces the amount of material going into the landfill AND saves money because they cost less.
   c. Bottled water vs. water bottle: In the U. S. over 600 million bottles of water are consumed annually. Studies have shown that tap water tastes the same and is as clean as bottled water. Bottled water costs between 25¢ and $1.29/bottle. Using a reusable water bottle cost < 1¢ to fill. Bottles are either recycled or thrown away.

Tailor discussion to match sample materials you have collected. Have students share examples of reuse they practice at home or suggestions of changes they could make.

4. **Play Hopscotch Game:** Set up a hopscotch game using a pre-made board (see picture above) or draw a hopscotch board with chalk or use tape. Place ant label in several of the game squares. Students **may choose** to “step on the ant” or “hop over the ant.” Place box/bag of collected materials at the end of the game board. Students pick out a material and decide if it is reusable or disposable. If reusable it is placed in the durable cooler, if disposable in the Styrofoam cooler. Encourage students to explain their sorting choice. Students may repeat the game as time permits. {Note: Younger students may not have developed motor skills to hop on one foot. Encourage them to use both feet or to “walk” the board} There are only a few products that are never reused i.e. Tissues, paper towels, Styrofoam service wear. Families can be very creative with reuse of products at home, so have students explain if material is placed in an unexpected category.

5. **Conclusion:** Using ant puppet, ask students, “If this was the ONLY toy you had or were ever to receive would you take good care of it?” Discuss. Then ask, “What if you had 100 ant puppets just like this one. Would you take care of them as well as if you had only one?” Discuss. Humans tend to be wasteful when there is a perceived abundance of a resource. Frugal is the wise use of resources. Have student discuss ways they can use their resources wisely.

**Assessment:** The Hopscotch game assesses the students understanding of the concepts of durable and disposable. Immediate feedback from teacher and classmate helps to clarify these concepts.
To Landfill

For Reuse

Never to be seen again

To be used over and over