



Classroom Activities, Resources, and Lesson Plans

Regarding School Recycling & Food Waste Reduction

While the act of recycling and composting may be required by law, learning about why we should conserve resources is also important. There are many ways to learn how materials are reused and recycled, from the biology of composting to the fun of making paper to how to repair something.

This page offers some classroom activities, resources, and lesson plans focused on school recycling and food waste reduction that we enjoy using or have been recommended to us. These materials are designed to engage students, inform educators, and support school staff in building more sustainable practices. Whether you're starting a new recycling program or strengthening an existing one, these materials can support your efforts to build a greener school community.

- ◆ Did you know every town in Connecticut is required to have a 'go to' Recycling Coordinator? Find your Local Municipal Recycling Coordinator [here](#), they may have resources to share, or be able to provide you a tour of a municipal transfer station (if your town has one).

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Classroom Activities / Lesson Plans

- ◆ [Big and Small Activities to Bring Recycling into the Classroom](#): (We are Teachers): This webpage identifies 41 activities to bring recycling into the classroom, and before you know it, recycling will be second nature to your students.
- ◆ [Waste Hero | Lesson plans on Recycling Fundamentals, Creating Zero Waste, and Building the Circular Economy](#) - *Waste Hero Education*, aiming to educate 1 million people by 2030 on recycling, zero waste, and the circular economy, provides 19 free lesson plans (each including a PowerPoint lesson, activity, and worksheet), fit for grades PK-12!

→ For more info and resources, visit [Waste Hero: National Education Association](#)

- ◆ [20 Recycling Writing Prompts to Inspire Student Writers](#): (Recycle Rally)| Bring recycling into the language arts classroom with these clever recycling writing prompts for students! Print the PDFs for free pages already incorporating the recycling writing prompts. Use them for daily journal entries or to inspire longer essays.
- ◆ [World Wildlife Fund: K-12 lesson plans, activities, and classroom materials](#), teaching students the environmental impact of school food waste.
- ◆ [Food Waste Trivia for Schools and Others](#) (CT DEEP) - PowerPoint created by the CT DEEP for Connecticut schools. Use for a classroom, assembly, or as part of a presentation, or any other fun event, to challenge each other to learn more about food waste in the U.S.
- ◆ [Recycling Art Activities \(Waste Management\)](#) Fun exercises creating reusable art to emphasize the value of recycling and waste reduction. PDF includes instructions on creating cereal box folders, milk carton pen pots, and more!
- ◆ [Food Matters Action Kit](#) (Commission for Environmental Cooperation) - Activity guides and kits that engage students artistically, scientifically, and socially, in exploring food-related topics and supporting education on food resourcefulness
- ◆ [Where does my food waste go?](#) (University of Illinois Extension) - Activity and lesson on where food waste ends up, teaching students the food life cycle. Includes other activity sheets for students, a teacher's guide, and supply list.
- ◆ [Reducing Food Waste Activity Book \(EPA\)](#) Help Apple and her friends learn how to reduce food waste and help protect the environment with this 6-page activity book. Grades: 3-5.
- ◆ [Making Compost in a Plastic Water Bottle - \(PBS\)](#) - Step-by-step guide on how to make compost in a plastic bottle with students as a classroom project.
- ◆ [How to make a Plastic Bottle Birdfeeder: PBS](#) - Transform a recycled plastic bottle into a simple birdfeeder.
- ◆ [Do the Rot Thing: A Teacher's Guide to Compost Activities](#) (Vermont Food Cycle)
- ◆ [Big and Small Activities to Bring Recycling into the Classroom](#): (We are Teachers): This webpage identifies 41 activities to bring recycling into the classroom, and before you know it, recycling will be second nature to your students.
- ◆ [Food Waste Curriculum: The Nature of Teaching](#) (Purdue University Agricultural Extension) - K-12 lesson plans on food waste's impact on the environment *and* natural resources, as well as potential food waste solutions. Other resources include videos on food waste and ideas on how to prevent food waste in the home.

- ◆ [Free K-12 Lessons to Engage Students in Recycling and Waste Topics](#) (Recycle Rally): These K-12 waste and recycling lessons and engaging activities will encourage your students to participate in recycling daily by providing the baseline knowledge they need to take that step. They cover a range of topics such as waste sortation, zero waste, the 3 R's, waste management, and composting.
- ◆ [Population Education: Grade K-5](#) lessons teaching students how to collect and analyze their own food waste data and learn about food waste impacts. By weighing and recording their lunch waste every day for a week, students learn how conservation efforts can reduce the total amount of trash generated.
- ◆ **CT Envirothon: Waste to Resources Lesson PDFs** (2021-2022 Current Issue): [CT Envirothon](#) provides a wide range of Sustainable Materials Management 101 lessons, specific to Connecticut, where lessons discuss everything from waste diversion to organics recycling. See below for the lessons:
 - [Post 1 – Key Topic Intro: Sustainable Materials Management PDF](#)
 - [Post 2 – Landfills and Hazardous Waste PDF](#)
 - [Post 3 – Waste Reduction and Reuse PDF](#)
 - [Post 4 – Recycling and Waste Diversion](#)
 - [Post 5 – Organics – Reduce, Reuse, Recycle](#)
 - [Post 6 – Systems Thinking](#)
 - [Post 7 – Gas Cylinders](#)
 - [Post 8 – Careers in SMM](#)
- ◆ [National Agriculture in the Classroom Lessons](#): A free database full of relevant, standards-based lesson plans that use agriculture as a context for science, social studies, and nutrition education content for K-12 classrooms.
- ◆ [Teacher Lesson Plans & Student Activities \(SWACO\)](#) : This webpage provides lesson plans, educational activities, and worksheets designed to help students of all ages learn about waste reduction, recycling, and conservation in fun, engaging ways. The downloadable worksheets support hands-on learning both in the classroom and at home, reinforcing lifelong sustainable habits.
- ◆ [How to Build a Smarter Lunchroom \(pdf\)](#) - Smarter Lunchrooms Movement National Office (The Cornell Center for Behavioral Economics in Child Nutrition Programs) - Guide on how to create a lunchroom atmosphere that increases the amount of healthy food students eat and reduces food waste.
 - [Smarter Lunchrooms Movement Scorecard](#) The Smarter Lunchrooms Scorecard is manner to “score” your cafeteria using a list of 60 no-cost or low-cost strategies that can reduce food waste and increase selection and consumption of healthy school food.
 - For more info on the Smarter Lunchrooms Movement: [Smarter Lunchrooms Movement | SNAP-Ed](#)

- ◆ [School Composting: A Manual for Connecticut Schools \(pdf\)](#)- (Town of Mansfield, Connecticut, CT) - Guidance manual providing a model for initiating and implementing a school composting program.
- ◆ [Guide to Conducting Student Food Waste Audits: A Resource for Schools](#): (USDA, EPA): Guide on how to conduct student led food waste audits in schools.
- ◆ [Cafeteria Recycling & Organics Collection Set-Up Guide & Handbook](#): (NYC Organics Collection). Learn how to organize a cafeteria recycling program with this guide.
- ◆ [Recycling and Composting Signage](#): (The Green Team): Downloadable recycle signage to improve school recycling programs. Proper recycle signage is an important part of any waste reduction program! This webpage provides signs to accommodate all types of recycling needs, including DIY recycling sign ideas that students can create.
- ◆ [Learn how to implement a successful school recycling program](#) (SWACO): This page offers a toolkit of resources, templates, and best practices to help schools launch or improve their recycling programs. From planning guides to communication templates and signage, these materials are designed to make implementing a sustainable program easier and more effective.
- ◆ [SWACO Educational Power Point Presentations](#): Webpage offers ready-to-use PowerPoint presentations to educate custodial staff, school staff, and students on how to properly recycle and support a successful school recycling program. Share these slideshows with adults during staff meetings or professional development days. For students, you could share them on virtual announcements, at an assembly, or in the classroom.

Games & Contests

GAMES

- ◆ [Rhode Island School Recycling Project | Lunchroom Sorting Game](#)
- ◆ [Recycle Roundup: National Geographic](#) - National Geographic - Help clean up the park! Your job is to sort the stuff people throw away and put it in the proper bin. Is it recycling, compost, or trash? Includes facts about climate change and tips on how you can help protect the earth.
- ◆ [Litter Critters - Learn to Sort and Recycle \(IXL\)](#) - Help the Litter Critters recycle! Sort trash into four groups; recycling, compost, landfill, and electronics. Can you sort all the trash?
- ◆ [Recycle City](#): EPA – A game that explores “Recycle City”, to learn how its residents reduce waste, use less energy, and even save money by doing simple things at home, at work, and in their neighborhoods. (All ages)

CONTESTS

[HRRRA's Annual Billboard Recycling Contest](#) – open to HRRRA towns (for others, consider this a model perhaps to replicate).

[NEXTTREX Plastic Film Challenge](#) – challenge for schools to collect plastic bags and plastic film for recycling throughout their community. If the collect more than 1,000 pounds within a 12-month span, school is awarded a Trex Furniture Bench made from recycled plastic.

Videos

- ◆ [What Happens to Your Recycling After It's Collected? | NowThis](#) (5:46): Educates students on what happens to recycled materials by “visiting” a recycling plant in NYC.
- ◆ [Recycling for Kids | Recycling Plastic, Glass and Paper | Kids Academy](#) (4:42): Educate students on the basics of recycling, suitable for students ages 2-10.
- ◆ [How Recycling Works! | How to Help Our Earth | SciShow Kids](#) (4:09): Humans make a lot of garbage every day. Luckily, there are things we can do to reuse a lot of our garbage and keep the Earth healthy and clean! Join Jessi in this video and find out how.
- ◆ [School Cafeteria Food Scrap Composting: How does it work?](#) (2:26) (OCRRA)
- ◆ [Why does food waste matter? \(6:00, WWF Wild Classroom\)](#) - Classroom video that helps students understand why food waste is a problem.
- ◆ [Food is our Future](#) (2:05, Mindful Waste) Highlights the issue of school food waste, its impacts, and what can be done about it.
- ◆ [RecycleCT Opera Lyrics for Schools & Others.pdf](#) - Recycle CT – Opera lyrics for a play sung/acted out by children and/or adults to promote recycling. Sung to Carmen Suite.
 - RecycleCT Opera – part one
- ◆ [Thrift Shop song \(Mackelmore and Ryan Lewis featuring Wanz\)](#) – Clean Version
- ◆ [What's IN, What's OUT: CT Harmonizes Recycling Across the State](#) (CT DEEP)
- ◆ **Recycling is Magic** (City of Waterbury) – short video showing different items that are made with recycled-content, from recyclables you put in the recycling bin.
 - [Recycling is Magic – English version](#)
 - [Recycling is Magic - Spanish version](#)
 - [Recycling is Magic – Albanian version](#)

- ◆ [The Story of Stuff](#) (The Story of Stuff Project)
- ◆ [What Happens to My Recyclables](#) (Town of Mansfield)
- ◆ [Bridgeport's Park city Green participates in the nation's first mattress recycling program](#) (CT Public Podcasts)
- ◆ [Home Composting - Turning Spoils into Soil](#) (CT DEEP) - A 17-minute basic how-to video that teaches you: what makes compost happen what items you should and shouldn't compost how to build your own compost bin the "recipe" for great compost, and how to use your compost.
- ◆ [The Compost Story](#) (Kiss the Ground) – 6:46 minute video
- ◆ [Kitchen to Garden – Composting 101](#) (CT Compost Alliance)
- ◆ [Tangled Up!](#) (Baltimore County, MD) – 1:29 minute video about how plastic bags get tangled in equipment at Material Recovery Facilities (MRFs)
- ◆ RecycleCT's [YouTube page with video playlists](#)

Books / Music

- ◆ [Ray Cycle Comic Book \(pdf\)](#) (CT DEEP) Connecticut's original educational comic book to teach recycling through the eyes of superhero Ray Cycle. A bit retro, but still relevant.
- ◆ [RecycleCT Opera Lyrics for Schools & Others.pdf](#) - Recycle CT – Opera lyrics for a play sung/acted out by children and/or adults to promote recycling. Sung to the tune of Carmen Suite.
 - [RecycleCT Opera](#) – 30 second video
 - [RecycleCT Opera](#) – 15 second video
- ◆ Worms Eat My Garbage (2017, Mary Appelhof, Joanne Olszewski, Amy Stewart) Garbage Helps Our Garden Grow: A Compost Story (2010, Linda Glaser)

Professional Development

- ◆ [Professional Development](#) - on a wide variety of environmental topics for formal and informal educators, including topics on sustainable materials management, recycling and composting. Scheduled year round through the environmental center, these work

The Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection is the official state sponsor of: Project WILD, Aquatic WILD, and Project WET. CT DEEP is the co-sponsor of Project Learning Tree with the Connecticut Forest and Park Association. Workshops are arranged by contacting any of the state coordinators listed below.

- Project Learning Tree Coordinator, Kristen Bellantuono - kristen.bellantuono@ct.gov
 - Project WILD Coordinator, Susan Robinson - susan.d.robinson@ct.gov
 - Project WET Coordinator, Susan Quincy - susan.quincy@ct.gov
- ◆ [Connecticut Outdoor and Environmental Education Association](#) (COEEA) – membership organization that coordinates an annual conference, workshops, a mini-grant program and a listserv for its members. Often includes waste management topics such as recycling and composting.
- [CT Green LEAF Schools](#) – includes resources, grants, and professional development. You do not need to be a member of COEEA to be a Green LEAF School.
- ◆ [Zero Waste Schools Coalition](#) was formed to create a platform for schools in Connecticut and beyond to connect, learn and share ways to introduce or enhance programming to reduce waste in Connecticut schools.
- ◆ [Yellow Farmhouse](#) – has included food waste reduction, composting and worm composting.
- ◆ [Common Ground](#) – a high school with a farm and mid-scale composting program, offers workshops and tours.

Additional Resources

- ◆ **Housatonic Resources Recovery Authority (HRRA)** – [Recycling Education Resources](#), including presentations in HRRA communities, including schools, Recycling Guide Books, Printable Flyers, Resources for Teachers, Videos, Resources for Schools and a Kids Corner
- ◆ **Waste Free Greenwich** - [Zero Waste Schools Program in Greenwich Public Schools](#) and [Connecticut Schools Reuse Revolution](#).
- ◆ **Southeastern Connecticut Resource Recovery Authority (SCRRRA)** – [Educational Outreach](#), including a range of presentations offered for SCRRRA communities, including schools and an online [What Goes Where Sorting Game](#).
- ◆ **CT Compost Alliance** – [CT Compost Alliance](#) hosts tours and coordinates bi-ennial statewide compost conference.
- ◆ **RecycleCT** – [RecycleCT Foundation](#) provides a webpage with resources that can be downloaded and printed, the RecycleCT Wizard, a search tool that can be put on your school webpage, and *Recycle at Home*, a newsletter for Connecticut residents.
- ◆ [WM Recycling Elementary Curriculum Gr. K-5:](#) Provides students with interactive lessons that focus on building proper recycling habits with the Recycle Right Elementary Curriculum based on STEM standards. Includes lessons, activities and handouts tailored for children in grades K-5.

[Recycling Lessons Grades K-2](#)

[Recycling Lessons Grades 3-5](#)

[Recycling Lessons Grades 4-5](#)

- ◆ [School Posters, Guides, and Resources on Recycling WM:](#) Waste Management provides various types of posters and brochures that schools can utilize to visually portray what can and cannot be recycled in a school. Posters and guides are in PDF format.