

## Title: **Composting in the Classroom**

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**Description:** Students will learn about the composting cycle and will discern between items that are recyclable and compostable. This lesson assumes that students are already knowledgeable about local recycling programs.

### **Objectives:**

- Students will learn...
  - How to sort materials for the compost bin, the recycling bin, and the trash can.
  - That food scraps decompose into soil, which can then be used in the school garden.
  - Which foods can be put in the compost bin and which foods belong in the garbage.

### **Materials needed:**

- Recycling bin (make sure you know your local regulations!)
- Clean compost bin
- Garbage can
- Poster board
- Markers, crayons, and/or paint
- A variety of food scraps, recyclable materials, and [clean] garbage.
- “Compost Stew” by Mary McKenna Siddals

### **Directions:**

- 1) Discuss the “how and why” of composting. Consider discussing some or all of the following questions: Why do we compost? Which students compost at home? What do they do with their compost? What is decomposition? How does the decomposition cycle work? What local animals help in this cycle? How does composting help our school garden? What does biodegradable mean? What do we need to consider when composting outside (i.e. bears, etc.) Remember to make this discussion age-appropriate and consider breaking the discussion down over multiple days.
- 2) Read “Compost Stew” aloud to students.
- 3) Discuss common items that can and cannot be composted. What can and cannot be recycled? Keep it simple.
- 4) Follow the “I do, We do, You do” model.
  - a. Demonstrate sorting the various materials into the compost bin, recycling bin, and trash bin (i.e. plastic bottle lids go in garbage, bottle goes in recycling. Scrap paper goes in recycling, but construction paper goes in garbage. Banana peels go in compost, but sandwich meat goes in garbage). Focus especially on what can and cannot go in the compost bin.
  - b. Do a “whole group” demonstration asking students to help you figure out what goes in which receptacle.
  - c. Break students into small groups and have each group sort some of the remaining materials.

- 5) Make pictorial signs for each receptacle. Using clear pictures and words, these signs should indicate what items go in each container. Hang each sign above the appropriate container in the classroom.
- 6) Explore with students your outside compost pile/tumbler, your recycling room, and your outside garbage containers.
- 7) Remind students about “compost guidelines” as needed throughout the school year and repeat project as needed.

Possible Extensions:

- Journal entries – have student write or draw about different ways they can help the earth.
- Have older students weigh the daily or weekly compost bins and/or recycling bins to analyze the amount of materials being “saved” from the landfill.
- Take a field trip to your local recycling center or landfill.
- Have students teach their teachers the right way to compost. Host a family night in which students teach their parents/guardians.
- Have students investigate the local “creepy crawlies” that aid in the decomposition cycle.
- Investigate soil pH and have students discover which mixture of green vs. brown material make the healthiest soil.