

Locker Leftovers



Objective

To help students realize the amount of trash they produce and help them recognize the difference between trash, recycled products, and reusable materials.



Activity Description

Students from one class or one grade will collect items while cleaning out lockers and desks and sort them into recyclables, reusables, and trash.



Materials Needed

Large trash bags or containers
Scale



Key Vocabulary Words

Recycling
Reuse



Duration

2 hours



Skills Used

Computation
Observation/classification



Activity

Step 1. Before winter break, spring break, and/or at the end of the school year, have students clean out their lockers and/or desks and place the contents into large bags or containers. Have them pay close attention to items that can be reused or recycled. Before beginning the clean-out, give some examples of items that are trash and items that can be reused or recycled. For example, old papers and notebooks can be recycled. Pens and other writing implements that are in working order can be reused. Bottles and cans are recyclable, and books can be donated to a local charity. Generally, food items should be thrown away, unless they are compostable or the packaging (e.g., bottle, can, cardboard) can be recycled.

Step 2. After their lockers are empty, have students take the trash bags to a large sorting area, such as the school gym. Have the students sort through the bags/containers for reusable and/or recyclable items, discarding trash (students can work in shifts if space is limited or if the volume to be sorted is very large). Before sorting, count the number of trash bags. When finished sorting, count the number of bags actually being disposed of. Students can also quantify recyclables by weighing or counting them.



Assessment

1. Ask students how they have gone about cleaning out their lockers in the past. What was different this time?



Enrichment

1. Extend the activity to your school's library or storage rooms and donate books and other materials to local organizations. (It's best to line up an organization willing to accept the reusables before beginning a clean out project.) **Note: Chemical storage areas should not be part of this activity. Only personnel trained in chemical hazards should take on this task.**
2. Expand this activity to include more classes, more grades, or the whole school. A 7th-8th grade class can coordinate the effort. They can collect and sort items for their own classroom to develop a baseline for estimating volunteers, bags/containers, and volumes of trash and recyclables.
3. If recyclables can be returned for deposits in your area, use this activity to raise funds for your school's band, science or environmental club or other activities.

