

Waste-free lunch

Learning Objectives

- Look at the benefits of recycling and introduce the different recycling processes.
- Introduce the concepts of reducing, reusing, recycling and sending waste to landfill.
- Identify materials that can be recycled.
- Understand the importance of reducing food and packaging waste.
- Develop an awareness of healthy foods and identify ways to incorporate healthy eating into school lunches.

Curriculum Links

English, Maths, Science, Design and Technology, Citizenship

Sustainable Schools Doorways

Doorway 4 Purchasing and Waste



A. Preparation

1. In groups, explore the journey of waste when it is thrown away compared to when it is recycled or composted. Discuss the advantages of items that can be reused, recycled or composted compared to landfill or incineration. Visit the 'Facts' section on www.recyclenow.com to find out about waste and the recycling process.
2. Gather examples of lunch waste from the class on a typical school day. Look at the leftovers and discuss what can be reused, recycled, composted and what needs to be thrown away.
3. As a class investigate how you can reduce food and packaging waste. Are there reusable or recyclable packaging alternatives? Could you choose food with less packaging or smaller/more appropriate portions?
4. Write a list of recommendations on how to prepare a waste-free lunch and give examples of items you could pack.
5. Decide on a date for the waste-free lunch, send a letter home to parents ideally giving two weeks notice and tell them how to participate in the activity (see downloadable sample letter). You may like to include the list of recommendations/examples prepared by the students.

B. The lunch

1. The waste-free lunch can be held as a class or school-wide event with either individuals or classes competing against each other.
2. On the day, students should sit in the normal dining area. Give them time to enjoy their lunch, then allocate points for different types of leftover waste: Reusable waste = 0 points, recyclable = 1 point, compostable = 1 point, waste that needs to be thrown away = 2 points. The student or class with the lowest score wins!
3. Alternatively rate student's lunch leftovers with a traffic light system, handing out red, yellow or green stickers, depending on how waste-free their lunch is.
4. Attentive students should be able to achieve a zero-waste lunch.
5. Compare the results to the amount of waste produced from lunch on a typical school day.

Ways to adopt and extend the activity

- This activity can be adapted for use at any time of year for seasonal events such as Christmas parties or summer picnics, indoors, outdoors, on a large or small scale and with a wide range of age-groups.
- Incentivise the activity by offering prizes or house points.
- Get students to draft the letter to their parents, or even better, invite the parents to join in with the lunch.
- Waste-free lunches tend to be healthy and inexpensive. Use this activity as a platform to discuss:
 - how packaging choices affect product prices;
 - nutrition; and
 - related environmental issues (seasonal produce, food miles and animal welfare).

Top tip

Why not reward pupils for their efforts by handing out silver, gold or green stickers, depending on how 'waste-free' their lunch was.