



DRESSED FOR THE OCCASION PACKAGING ACTIVITY

Summary: Students will understand the reasons why some packaging is essential, that nature has its own form of packaging, and that some packaging is non-essential, driven by marketing interests.

Length: Variable – from 30 minutes to several days of analysis.

Source: Adapted from the Solid Waste Management Education Kit, prepared by Metropolitan Toronto Works Department's Solid Waste Environmental Assessment Plan

Grade 3

Background:

The packaging component of garbage in North America has increased 80% since the 1960's, and is currently responsible for 50% of the volume of our municipal solid waste. This phenomenal increase warrants a critical analysis of the reasons behind this change, and the impacts on waste production in our society.

Materials: Some examples of packaging to bring in include the following:

1. Nature's packaging – banana; orange; coconut; peanut; egg
2. Necessary packaging – milk carton; sugar bag; (to hold liquids and powders) razor blade covers (safety); canned fruit (preservation); egg carton (protection from breakage); package of medical gloves (protection to keep sterility and quality intact)
3. Other packaging – "new and improved" fabric softener jug (contents unchanged, but container new for marketing purposes); lunchables (convenience packaging); cereal boxes with token toys.

Procedure:

Write "Nature's Packaging" on the board and ask the students if they know what it means. Discuss and list the answers that are offered.

Peel a banana and ask students if they would buy bananas without the peel.

Would they buy an egg without its packaging?

Divide the class into groups and give each group several items from the three categories above. For each item, have the students discuss the following:

- what the packages are made of and where they came from (trees, oil, etc.)
- what will happen to the packages (composted, reused, recycled, landfilled)
- whether nature's packaging could be substituted for another type of product

Discussion:

Gather the class together again and list the responses to the activity on the board.

Discuss the following points:

- which products need the protection of packaging?
- why do producers use packaging? (protect public health, prevent theft, provide advertising, convenience, etc)
- which packaging is recyclable? For those packages that will end up in landfill, is there an alternative product with recyclable packaging?
- how can you tell which paper packaging has been made from recycled materials? (recycling emblem, grey paperboard)
- is any of the packaging unnecessary or excessive?
- which products can be sold in bulk?
- what are the advantages to larger quantity products? (eg. A 100 mL tube of toothpaste requires 50% more packaging per millilitre than the 200 mL size.)
- which natural resources were used to make the packaging?
- could the package have been made to be more conservative of resources or energy?
- could this product be purchased in less wasteful packaging?

Closure:

Remind students that their individual consumer and disposal choices have an impact on waste production or waste reduction. Through their consumer and lifestyle choices, they will help determine the direction that waste management takes in the future.