

# LESSON 3: Classroom Exchange of Unwanted Items

## LESSON'S CONCEPT

"Some materials can be used over again." (*Benchmarks for Science Literacy*, page 188)

### PURPOSE

Students will demonstrate the importance of reducing solid waste by exchanging with their classmates those items they no longer want with items they can use.

### OVERVIEW

Students bring to class items (e.g., books, clean toys, laundered clothing) that they or their family members no longer want and exchange them for other items that they do want.

**Note:** As an alternate activity, a book-only exchange could be organized. (See "Examples of Letters to Parents from Teachers," a letter submitted by Anne Harris, at the end of this lesson.) Another option is to exchange classroom materials with one or more classes. The students select items no longer needed in the classroom and exchange them for other items not needed by another class.

**Note:** Although some specific instructions are provided, this lesson can be used as a project-based learning experience for your class. To do this, students would generate the ideas for this exchange of unwanted items and design a plan for implementation. Students should be responsible for implementing all parts of this event. After the event, they should discuss what went well and what they would do differently next time and why.

### CORRELATIONS TO CALIFORNIA'S CONTENT STANDARDS AND FRAMEWORKS AND TO BENCHMARKS FOR SCIENCE LITERACY

- Students demonstrate how items can be reused by organizing an exchange of unwanted items.
  - "Some materials can be used over again." (*Benchmarks for Science Literacy*, page 188)

- "Students must understand the basic economic problems confronting all societies." (page 17) "To participate effectively in society, students need to: Develop personal skills . . . group interaction skills . . . (and) social and political participation skills." (page 24) (*History–Social Science Framework*).
- "Students collect information about objects and events in their environment." (*Mathematics Content Standards for California Public Schools, Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve*, page 3)
- Students draw pictures of one or two items they have at home that they could reuse or give to someone else and describe the item's new use or identify the person they could give it to and explain why.
  - "Scientific progress is made by asking meaningful questions and conducting careful investigations. As a basis for understanding this concept . . . students will: draw pictures that portray some features of the thing being described." (*Science Content Standards, Grades K–12; Grade 1; Investigation and Experimentation, Standard 4a*)
- Students develop categories for the items brought in to be exchanged based on natural resources used.
  - "Students sort and classify objects." (*English–Language Arts Content Standards for California Public Schools, Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve*, page 2)

### SCIENTIFIC THINKING PROCESSES

observing, communicating

**TIME**

45–60 minutes to organize the exchange; 60 minutes for the exchange and follow-up

**VOCABULARY**

reuse

**PREPARATION**

- \_\_\_ 1. Read the “Background Information for the Teacher” at the end of this lesson.
- \_\_\_ 2. Design and send with students parent permission slips to allow students to bring to school specific items for the exchange. Make certain to establish clear guidelines concerning what is acceptable to bring to class (e.g., no toy guns, or toys that could cause injury, such as sling shots). Older students could write their own letter to their parent or guardian. See example below. Also, see the example of a letter from Anne Harris and Mr. Schut on page 79.

*Note:* You might want to have students bring items to class in advance of the exchange. Then if some students were not able to participate, you could come up with alternatives, such as bringing some extra items to class.

**MATERIALS**

- \_\_\_ A couple of used items that would be attractive to your students (e.g., a ball, book, pen)

*Optional*

- \_\_\_ A hat that could be used as an auctioneer’s hat

The additional materials that will be required will depend on the approach selected for this activity.

**PRE-ACTIVITY QUESTIONS**

- A. Stand in front of the class with a couple of used items that would be attractive to your students.
  - Announce that you are from Earth Savers’ Exchange and Premier Auctioneers.
  - Put on your auctioneer’s hat and start an enthusiastic round of bidding, pitching heavily on the value of these items.
  - Describe to the class how an auction works and explain the bidding process.
  - Tell them that you are hoping to have an exchange extravaganza in the classroom and you need their help.
- B. Ask students the following questions with all the bravado of an auctioneer still ringing in the air:
  - Can any of you remember a time when a friend or your older brother or sister gave you clothing or a toy or something else that was not new that you loved having?
    - What was it?
    - Have you ever thrown something away that maybe someone else could have used? (To make students more comfortable about sharing this information, give an example from your own life.) This lesson will allow you to exchange an item you no longer want or

(Use school’s letterhead.)

Dear Parent or Guardian,

Please read the following information with your child:

As part of our study of reusing and recycling items no longer needed, we are planning an exchange of items in our class. Please help your child select one or two items that he or she no longer needs or wants, but something that another child might want. Toys should be washed and items of clothing should be laundered. Please do not allow your child to bring any item which might cause injury to others (e.g., sling shots, archery set). The item or items for the exchange should be brought to school by \_\_\_\_\_ .  
If you have any questions, please call me at \_\_\_\_\_ .

Thank you,

need for an item that someone else will bring to class.

- How is throwing away things that could be reused considered “a waste”?
  - What are some things you no longer use or want that someone else could use?
  - What are some everyday events and organizations that facilitate the reuse of old items? *Garage sales, flea markets, secondhand stores, Goodwill, Salvation Army, Purple Heart.*
- C. List with students ways in which people are already finding new uses for old materials (e.g., making patchwork quilts out of scrap clothing, making pencil holders out of cans, making bird feeders from milk cartons, creating works of art from paper scraps or sculptures from metal and other materials).

## PROCEDURE

- A. Discuss with students how to select items to bring. Make certain to establish clear guidelines concerning what is acceptable to bring to class (e.g., no toy guns, or toys that could cause injury, such as sling shots). Also, students should understand that whatever they bring to class to give away should be something they really do not want anymore.
- B. Determine how the exchange will take place. It is important to establish some basic parameters for what is acceptable at the exchange, as defined by students. Listed below are some questions to consider:
1. How could parental permission for an exchange of items be managed? (Students could draft an official exchange form with a sign-off blank for parents.)
  2. What should be the most and least number of items that a student can bring to the exchange? Students might also want to discuss a size limit for the items, as they will be bringing them to school.
  3. What will be the parameters of exchange; i.e., what is acceptable to bring in? How can you ensure that this exchange will not be just be a “dumping ground”? Should there be a “quality control” position, consisting of two or three students who decide whether an item is exchangeable or not? If so, the

class should design a list of criteria that each item must fit before it can be accepted into the exchange.

4. What will be the “rate of exchange”? Is it appropriate to have an appraisal; e.g., a number of points given to each item? Or should the exchange rate be one item for one item?
  5. Can students donate items without taking something?
  6. What should be done with items that are not exchanged (e.g., the unselected items would be taken back by students bringing them or, when appropriate, taken to a secondhand store or a children’s home).
  7. Should we advertise our items? Students can be encouraged to develop an advertisement or slogan for their items. The donations could also be anonymous, and students could select an item (that is not one they brought) to advertise.
- C. On the day of the exchange, fill the atmosphere with lots of auctioneer hoopla. Hold up different items and pitch their value. See what the class thinks the items are worth. After displaying lots of items and advertising their worth, proceed with whatever kind of exchange your class has designed.
- D. Have students calculate how many items did not go to the landfill as a result of this event. They can design a chart to show this.

## DISCUSSION/QUESTIONS

Put on the auctioneer’s hat again and fill the air with excitement. “Well ladies and gentleman, boys and girls, what did you think of our exchange? What was the thing about it that impressed you the most? Here at Earth Savers’ Exchange and Premier Auctioneers we are always trying to find better ways to meet the needs of our customers. Could you please help us by answering the following questions?”

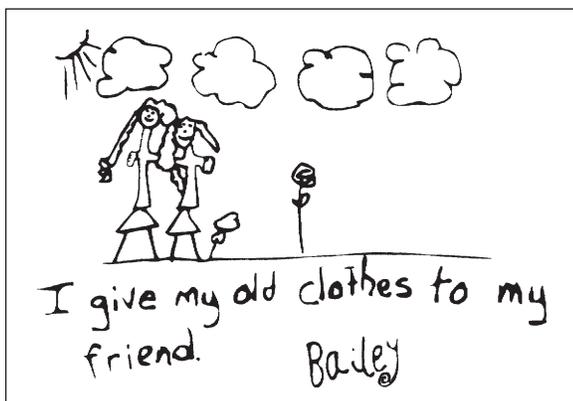
- Why is reusing an item a good idea? *It won’t go to a landfill; it saves natural resources.*
- What natural resources did you conserve by giving the items away instead of throwing them away? *Plants, minerals, fossil fuels.* Students can make a chart.
- Are new things always better than used things? Are new products always better than

older models? Why? How?

- Should we do this again? If so, what changes should we make to improve the waste exchange?

## APPLICATION

- A. Ask students to identify one or two items at home which they can reuse or give to someone else. In their journals they should draw and describe their items and their new use or identify the potential recipients (who would not throw the items away) and describe why they selected these students.



Submitted by Debby Carter's first-grade class at Coyote Valley Elementary School, Middletown Unified School District.

- B. Have students develop categories for the items brought in to be exchanged, based on natural resources used. (This is especially valuable if students have participated in lessons from the K-3 Module, Unit 1, on natural resources.)

**Project Idea:** Reuse paper and other materials in the classroom. Have boxes of scrap paper available for various projects. Make books or journals about recycling out of discarded wallpaper ends (for covers) and rolls of paper (for pages inside the covers). Wallpaper companies, newspaper offices, and printing shops are good sources for these materials.

## VARIATIONS

- A. Have students weigh each item and determine the total weight of items that did not go to the landfill as a result of this event.
- B. Have students write about or describe verbally the attributes of the item they brought in. Students can also explain the reasons why they want another item and what they plan to do with it. For younger students

these descriptions can be recorded on a tape recorder or narrated to an older student, who can write the information down.

- C. Organize a reusable items drive and donate the things collected to an organization selected by students.
- D. Have students develop classroom currency. Have students earn the currency for the auction.

## EXTENSIONS

- A. Invite someone from a thrift store or charitable organization that operates a second-hand store to visit your class. Ask students to prepare questions.
- B. Have students do the exchange of unwanted items with other classes.
- C. Assign students to publish a special barter want ad. Put in requests for items for which they are looking; e.g., willing to exchange item "X" for item "Y."
- D. Introduce students to the CIWMB's CALMAX and KidMAX programs. CALMAX is a materials exchange program that promotes the reuse and recycling of businesses' excess products, materials, and discards. A bimonthly catalog lists materials available and materials wanted. Any business, nonprofit group, or government entity may list, at no charge, materials it has available or materials it needs. KidMAX supplements CALMAX by offering a materials exchange specifically targeting California schools. More information is available at: California Integrated Waste Management Board's CalMAX, MS-14, 1001 I Street, P.O. Box 4025 (mailing address), Sacramento, CA 95812-4025.

[www.ciwmb.ca.gov/CalMAX/kidmax.htm](http://www.ciwmb.ca.gov/CalMAX/kidmax.htm)  
(KidMAX)

[www.ciwmb.ca.gov/CalMAX/](http://www.ciwmb.ca.gov/CalMAX/)  
(CalMAX)

## RESOURCES

### Videos

*It All Adds Up (Waste/Pollution).* The Outside Story with Slim Goodbody series. Produced by

the Agency for Instructional Technology (AIT) and the Slim Goodbody Corporation, 1991. Bloomington, Ind.: Agency for Instructional Technology (AIT) (distributor) (15 minutes).

Stresses the importance of dealing with waste responsibly and shows various ways in which humans dispose of waste. Encourages students to reduce, reuse, and recycle much of the waste they create.

*Kids Talkin' Trash.* Alameda County Waste Management Authority, 1995. Distributed by the California Integrated Waste Management Board (14 minutes).

The video shows students putting on a Recycle Art Fair.

*Recycling: It's Everybody's Job.* Washington, D.C.: National Geographic Society, 1992 (20 minutes).

For a class project, students sort through and

separate family garbage to learn why recycling can be part of a solution to our solid waste problem.

### Books

Brown, Laurie Krasny, and Marc Brown. *Dinosaurs to the Rescue.* New York: Little Brown and Company, 1992.

Dinosaur characters introduce some environmental problems and suggest ways children can help. Includes a section on exchanging items or giving them away.

Williams, Karen Lynn. *Galimoto.* Illustrated by Catherine Stock. New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1990.

A boy collects pieces of wire to make a toy.

When it comes to responsible waste management, recycling has gotten all the press. Yet, in profes-

## EXAMPLES OF LETTERS TO PARENTS FROM TEACHERS

Dear Parents or Guardians:

Tomorrow is our book exchange. The students and I have decided on some guidelines for the books. Books should have:

- Both covers
- All pages
- No writing, stamps, or stickers
- No stains
- No tears
- Not be falling apart

Students are to bring one or two books they would like to exchange. They may donate books without taking another. Leftover books will go into the book box.

Students decided that we should have a parent permission form. Please return the permission slip below to school tomorrow with the books to be exchanged.

Thanks,  
Miss Harris

I give permission for \_\_\_\_\_ to exchange the following book(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Parent's signature \_\_\_\_\_

Submitted by Anne Harris, second-grade teacher, Jefferson Elementary School, Cloverdale Unified School District.

Dear Parents,

Part of the unit I am teaching on waste uses the slogan "Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, and Rot." The students are confused about reuse. So, on Friday, I would like to have an exchange. I am asking each child to bring in one item (toy, book, stuffed animal, clothing, etc.) that (s)he would be willing to give up. We will call that the "used item." On Friday, everyone who brought in an item will get to exchange with a classmate for another item which will then be "reused" rather than put in the garbage. Your child will bring home only one item (don't worry).

Thank you for your cooperation,  
Ted Schut

Submitted by Ted Schut, first-grade teacher, Ripona Elementary School, Ripon Unified School District.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR THE TEACHER

sional circles, recycling ranks second on the list of environmentally friendly options. What method tops the charts? It is the time-honored but recently neglected practice of waste prevention, also referred to as “source reduction” or reducing and reusing.

In its report entitled *The Solid Waste Dilemma: An Agenda for Action* (1989), the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) listed both reducing and reusing ahead of recycling in its hierarchy of waste management techniques. The rationale for such a prioritization is simple. Garbage that never gets produced will never have to be disposed of. Reducing and reusing also eliminates the need for handling and transporting materials, making it cheaper than other options. In addition, neither reducing nor reusing necessitates the energy-intensive remanufacturing step, which is required in recycling.

Practiced for years by the local milkman, reuse went out of style in the years following World War II. However, the idea has by no means disappeared. Every time we go to the grocery store, we reuse a shopping cart to gather our selections. Every time we bring our own grocery bags to a grocery store, we are reducing our use of paper or plastic grocery bags. Every time we purchase a refillable bottle, we participate in a well-organized system of reuse. There are dozens of other ways that we can reduce the amount we use and give common discards a second life. All that is required is an awareness of the possibilities, a gradual rejection of the “disposable” ethic, and persuasion of manufacturers to make fewer disposable and more reusable products. For more information on waste prevention, see “Appendix B–II, Waste Prevention.”



A book exchange event at Louisiana Schnell Elementary School, Placerville Union School District. Photograph submitted by Becky Williams from the California Integrated Waste Management Board.