

New York State Department of Environmental Conservation

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An Alphabetical List of Reduce, Reuse and Recycle Ideas For Your Classroom

America Recycles Day/ New York Recycles Day:

- Celebrate America Recycles Day, November 15! This is a day designated to celebrate recycling and encourage purchasing recycled goods. Visit their website for ideas and the “Conversionator” – an interactive “machine” that gives fun facts about recycling: <http://www.americarecyclesday.org/>

Bulletin Boards:

- Use old magazines or the back sides of used paper for lettering, borders, etc.
- Recycle foil, wrapping paper or fabric scraps into backgrounds or borders.
- Create a bulletin board to track recycling and energy saving efforts of the class (or have the kids create one!)

Crayon Recycling:

- Designate a place in your classroom to collect broken crayons, and use them for a math lesson:
 - Make predictions about which color will be the most prevalent (by weight or volume), then sort the crayons by color and graph the amount of each.
- Using a microwave-safe container, melt crayons in a microwave and pour into candy molds to make shapes. Pointy shapes like sea shells work well for writing. You can also place them in a muffin tin and melt in the oven for round crayons, good for coloring.

Competition:

- Hold a 3R challenge: have classes compete to see which class can reduce their waste the most, or puts the most effort into waste prevention.

Headphones:

- At the end of the year, if you know the next grade level requires headphones, send home a note suggesting that headphones be saved for the following year.

Holidays:

Holidays are a time when the amount of trash we make increases substantially. Wrapping paper and shopping bags alone account for millions of tons of trash every year. Here are some 3R ideas for classroom parties throughout the year (and staff parties too!):

- Brainstorm with students ways to minimize holiday trash creation at school and at home.
- Most wrapping paper is not recyclable, due to the heavy inks and other components like foil. Encourage students to think of and try reusable wrappings (newspaper, bags, etc.)

- Involve the students in planning and holding a “zero waste” party: come up with alternatives to wrapping paper (or pledge to reuse it all), compost food wastes, choose only foods that come in recyclable packaging, etc.
- For all parties that involve gift-giving, encourage gifts that are reusable.
- For Halloween parties, choose candies with minimal packaging.
- Instead of exchanging store-bought valentines, make valentines from colored paper scraps in the classroom.
- Make decorations from recycled materials.
- Save decorations from one year to the next.

Lunches:

An average elementary school generates *18,000 pounds* of waste annually just from the packaging for school lunches. As teachers, you can encourage kids to do something about this problem.

- Talk to your students early in the year about where waste comes from in lunches. Encourage kids to talk to their parents about using reusable lunch containers.
- Talk to other teachers about the benefits of reusable lunches, and encourage policies that allow kids to take lunch boxes instead of disposable lunches on field trips.
- The Recycling Council of Ontario offers a website with great resources for holding a waste-free lunch day at your school: <http://www.wastefreelunch.com>
- For more information about what others are doing to reduce waste in school lunches, visit: <http://www.wastefreelunches.org/>

Save Paper:

- Make double-sided worksheets whenever possible.
- Reuse when possible: if you send home photocopied booklets for kids to use for one night or week only, save and reuse them the following year.
- For short notes that will be sent home with all students, save paper by printing multiple copies of the note on one piece of paper and cutting to size.
- Collect scraps of paper from craft projects for recycling instead of throwing them out.

Where To Recycle:

- See the “Curriculum, Fundraisers and Grants” file for some ways to fundraise while recycling!
- Real Simple Magazine offers an A to Z “How to Recycle Anything” list that includes classroom items such as backpacks, crayons and glue. Go to www.realsimple.com and search for “Recycle Anything.”
- Erie County offers a recycling information line: 716-858-6996
- www.earth911.com offers a searchable database for various items you may want to recycle.
- *Call2recycle*: This site lets you enter your zip code and brings up a list of places that accept batteries and cell phones for recycling near you: <http://www.call2recycle.org>
- Buffalo Freecycle is a place where people in Buffalo exchange goods that otherwise would end up in a landfill: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/buffalofreecycle/>

Start A **Recycling Center:**

- Make a STOP box: place the cover of a cardboard box (a standard file box works well) over the opening of every trash can in your room. The box top should be big enough to cover the opening. This forces students to think before throwing something out, because the box top must be lifted to throw something out. If desired, add a sign inside the box that says something like: "STOP and Think: is it truly trash, or can I recycle it?" (Be sure to explain the STOP box to the janitorial staff).
- Have a centralized place where students can recycle:
 - paper, plastic and anything else your school recycles;
 - Binders and other school supplies.
 - Have separate recycling bins for one-sided paper that can be used again, and double-sided or odd-sized paper (cuttings) that can't be used again.
 - Have a 3-hole punch available so that kids can 3-hole punch the one-sided paper to insert in a binder to use for note-taking, drawing or journaling.
- Have a recycling box for random items that can then become part of art projects: candy containers, broken toys, lone mittens, etc.

Snacks:

- To cut down on packaging waste, encourage parents (and students) to opt for healthy snacks with minimal packaging that can be packed in reusable containers, like carrot sticks, raisins or pretzels. Reusable drink boxes and water bottles can replace non-recyclable juice boxes.
- Recognizing that some parents will still opt for convenience, your school can sign up to collect "non-recyclable" items like drink pouches, cookie wrappers, etc. and get cash for your school through a company called Terracycle. See the "fundraisers" file for more details.

Supply Lists:

- Encourage parents to shop for recycled content when purchasing school supplies such as paper, tissues, folders, etc. Suggest they look for the words "Post-consumer content" to ensure products contain paper from consumer recycling programs.
- Consider allowing parents to buy larger sizes for things like glue sticks and hand sanitizer to cut down on packaging waste.