

TURNING THE TIDE ON TRASH

A LEARNING GUIDE ON MARINE DEBRIS



LESSON FOUR

Taking Action

Grade Level:
Grades 5-12

Subjects:
Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies

Overview:
This lesson is designed to increase students' awareness of volunteer activities they and their families can participate in that will promote cleaner, healthier oceans and waterways. Students will learn about the efforts of private organizations and individuals, both locally and nationally, to prevent marine debris and take steps to become involved in a stewardship activity.

Objectives:

- Identify volunteer activities in the community that assist with preventing marine debris.
- Participate in one of these events or programs.
- Reflect on the experience.

Vocabulary:
civic and environmental organization, stewardship, volunteerism

Materials:
Varies based on the activity selected.

Learning Skills:
Public Speaking and other skills (based on the activity selected)

Duration:
Varies (based on the activity selected)

SAFETY & REGULATIONS

Varies (based on the activity selected)

Activity

Students investigate environmental groups, local governments, business and industry, and other civic and private organizations to learn what they are doing to prevent marine debris. Students learn about local volunteer stewardship events, participate in the event, and present an oral report on their activity. The class then writes a letter asking a representative of one of these groups to come to the school to discuss the group's efforts.

1. Tell the students that they will be researching local, state, and national groups and government agencies and learning about events and activities that involve volunteers in either preventing marine debris or cleaning up litter and debris. This research can be done on the Internet, by looking in the local telephone book, or by contacting your local conservation district (see sidebar).

The students can obtain much of this information from the Internet, or they can contact the organizations directly and request that literature be sent to the students by mail. In addition, students can call or visit local officials who are responsible for public health or environmental issues, asking them for more information about their organizations. Students can also contact their municipal or county government employees to learn if there are local Keep America Beautiful or Clean Community programs.

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CONSERVATION DISTRICTS

Across the United States, nearly 3,000 conservation districts – almost one in every county – help people conserve local land, water, forests, wildlife, and related natural resources. Known in various parts of the country as “soil and water conservation districts,” “resource conservation districts,” “natural resource districts,” “land conservation committees,” and other similar names, they all share a single mission: to coordinate assistance from all available sources – public and private, local, state and federal – in an effort to develop locally driven solutions to natural resource concerns. Employees of conservation districts are knowledgeable about local and regional nonprofit groups that conduct clean up events along rivers and beaches. They also are aware of Adopt-a-Stream, Adopt-a-Beach, and storm drain stenciling programs in which your school can get involved. To find your local conservation district, check in your local phone book or visit the National Association of Conservation Districts’ web site at www.nacdnet.org/.

Using these resources, have each student develop a list of organizations whose work focuses on marine debris prevention and related issues (such as wildlife entanglement and protecting endangered species). Student lists should include government agencies such as the US Environmental Protection Agency and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, industry groups such as the commercial fishing and plastics industries, non-profit organizations

including environmental groups and research institutions, and civic or local groups such as recreational boaters and sport fishermen. There are also a number of children’s groups working to protect the environment. Assist any students that are having difficulty, so that each student has discovered projects or activities from at least two or three organizations. Students should record the name, address, and phone number of the organizations, as well as a short description of the group and its work. Students will learn that litter and debris prevention is a concern of many people and groups from the local to the national level.



A recycling bin for monofilament fishing line

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2. When the students have completed their research, have them present short oral reports to share what they found with the class. Afterward, discuss the variety of actions people are taking to prevent marine debris. Have the students consider which methods they think will be most effective and why.

3. With the students, discuss and select one of the projects as a class project. Examples of projects include:

- Adopt-a-Beach, Adopt-a-Stream, or similar program where your school or class will “adopt” a location, and then plan cleanup activities and other stewardship actions.
- Participate in a cleanup event already planned for a local beach, river, or stream.
- Stencil storm drains with “Do Not Dump” messages to help people understand that storm drains often drain directly into streams.
- Start an ecology club or recycling program in your school.
- Participate in the “Ring Leader” program that recycles six-pack holders. For information, visit www.ringleader.com/.
- Volunteer to assist with a community-wide environmental event, such as Earth Day celebrations, recycling of small electronic items (also called “e-cycling”), and other events that educate people about the correct and responsible ways to dispose of waste.

4. Alternatively, students can select different volunteer activities to participate in if there are multiple events in your community.

5. After participation in the event, each student can give an oral presentation on what they did, what they observed during the event, the role of volunteers in such events, and lessons they learned through their participation.

EXTENSIONS

Choose an agency, organization, or business that the students found interesting and have the class compose a letter asking a representative to visit the class. Afterward, have the students write a two- or three-paragraph report on the representative’s presentation. The report should describe the organization and what the representative does. The students can also include suggestions to implement some of the organization’s prevention techniques in the community. This report can be printed in the school newspaper.

Ask students to research careers in the environment. The students can interview individuals who hold environmental jobs (such as scientists, writers, environmental lawyers, organic farmers, park rangers, town planners, government and environmental group staff, and business people). Students can also look in the library for books, magazine articles, and pamphlets about environmental careers. Have the students report to the class on their findings.

DIVE DEEPER:

Other Resources on Marine Debris

- NOAA’s Marine Debris 101: www.marinedebris.noaa.gov
- EPA’s Marine Debris site: <http://water.epa.gov/type/oceb/marinedebris/index.cfm>