



HOLD 'ER, PARDNER: A LOOK AT PACKAGING

CONCEPT: Reduce

OBJECTIVES: Students will be able to:

- 1) Categorize types of packaging;
- 2) Compare and contrast ways packaging influences them.

METHOD: Students and teachers bring items from home with various types of packaging and sort into one or four categories as follows: nature's packaging, recyclable, difficult to recycle, recycled.

MATERIALS: coconuts, bananas, peanuts, two apples, one bow, returnable bottles, pottery, polystyrene foam ("Styrofoam"), aseptic box, cereal box with gray inside surface, other types of packaging, markers, sentence strips

VOCABULARY: recyclable, recycled

BACKGROUND:

1. According to the U.S. EPA's *Characterization of Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) in the United States 1996 Update* study, 35 percent of MSW by weight in landfills is packaging. Separated by materials:
 - Glass 7.6%
 - Paper and paperboard 14.5%
 - Steel 1.9%
 - Plastics 4%
 - Aluminum 0.7%
 - Wood 1.5%
2. At the grocery store, Texans spend \$1 out of every \$11 on packaging.
3. According to the Flexible Packaging Institute, the average family discards about 8.3 pounds of paperboard cereal boxes a year. Additional information available at http://www.flexpack.org/environmental_advantages.htm.
4. In one month, the average Texas household disposes of:
 - 28 lbs. Of newspaper
 - 7 lbs. Of steel cans
 - 2 lbs. Aluminum cans
 - 4 lbs. Plastic soda and milk cartons
 - 17 lbs. Glass containers

PROCEDURE:

1. A few days before this activity starts, ask students to bring in things with packaging or empty packages. The teacher should also bring in various types of packaging, including some of the following: coconuts, bananas, peanuts, returnable or glass bottles, aseptic box, cereal box with gray inside surface.
2. Divide the class into small groups and give each class several examples of packaging along with four sentence strips.
3. Have groups write the following words on strip: "Recyclable", "Nature's Packaging", "Difficult to Recycle", and "Recycled". Explain to each group that they are to sort these items into four categories.
4. After each group has come to a consensus, have them list various types of packaging and its origins. For example: paper=trees or recycled paper; plastic=oil; and common glass=sand or recycled glass.
5. Show the two apples. On one of the apples place a fancy bow. Ask students, "Which one would you like to buy?" Chart or graph each student's response.
6. Discuss with the class their responses to the following questions:
 - a. Why do we need packaging? (safety, moving from location to location, shoplifting prevention, etc.)
 - b. After you open a package and empty it, where do you put it?
 - c. How could we change some of the packaging?
7. After each child has responded, ask them why they wanted that particular product. Ask students,
 - a. "How are products packaged to make you want to buy them?"
 - b. "Think about the toys you buy. How are they packaged to make you want to buy them?"
 - c. "How do the choices you make when buying a product affect the solid waste stream?"
 - d. Do you care whether a cereal box is marked that it was made from recycled paperboard?"
8. Have the students save the packaging from Christmas presents and bring it to school for a show and tell discussion. Note the volume of packaging.

EXTENSION:

Collect various toys and discuss how they were packaged. Ask how packaging could be reduced. Discuss cost of packaging to cost of product. Discuss environmental advertising and "green" labeling.

EVALUATION:

Class discussion and individual responses to the questions. Have students write to manufacturers who package products with too much material and ask them to find ways to reduce packaging, or have students suggest ways to reduce packaging to the manufacturer. **This activity was adapted as Waste in Place activity: Pack It In.**