

Compost Bags

Objectives:

Students will!

- Investigate the process of decomposition by engaging in a fun hands-on activity with their leftovers from lunch
- Understand the connection between waste and decomposition

Educator Notes

- Make sure that the students bring in a packed lunch from home for this activity
- Make sure that teacher supervises students' use of scissors

Materials:

- Lunch leftovers
- Scissors
- Plastic zip-lock sandwich bags (one for each student)
- Soil
- Spray bottle of water (you can fill up a Windex bottle with water)

Preparation:

Place a handful of soil into each of the zip-lock bags before the start of the activity.

Key Vocabulary:

biodegradable | compost | decomposition | reusable

Activity:

Start the activity by asking the students to name some of the things they have thrown away recently. What happens to these things? Do they stay the same forever? Do they disappear? Break down? Record the students' ideas on the board. As the students come up with ideas, try to incorporate explanations of the key vocabulary terms. Explain that the students are going to conduct an experiment with their leftovers to learn about what happens to the stuff they usually throw away.

Give each student a plastic zip-lock bag with soil. Explain to the students that they will place one small piece of every single item (food, peels, corners of lunch bags, napkins, utensils, etc.) from their lunch into the bag. Tell the students not to add any meat to their bag as this could

cause dangerous bacteria to grow.

After the students have filled their bags, go around to each student, and lightly spray the bag with water using the spray bottle. Now, ask the students to breathe air into the bags, and then seal them. Explain that the students will leave the bags in the classroom for 4 weeks and then see what happens. Tell the students that they will check on their bags periodically but will not to open the bags until 4 weeks is up.

Wrap-Up:

Ask the students what they think is going to happen to the bags over the next 4 weeks. Will the food rot? Will the food start to smell? Will the food remain the same? Write these predictions on a large piece of poster paper, and return to these predictions at the end of the 4 weeks so that the students can see how their predictions compare to the actual results.

Extension Activity (K-5):

If older students are completing this activity, they should record the contents of their bag in a journal, and write down their predictions about what is going to happen to each item over time. During the wrap-up session, students should share their predictions with the class. The students can periodically check on their bags over the 4-week period and update their journals accordingly.

Sources:

http://dug.org/storage/school-garden-curriculum/The_Rotten_Truth.pdf