

29 Ideas to Bring Recycling Into the Classroom

1. Turn recycling into writing prompts.

Mix up your daily journal or writing activity by giving students recycling-themed writing prompts. We have a list available to download for free at: <https://www.weareteachers.com/printable-recycling-writing-prompts/#getform>. You can print as many sheets as needed to get students thinking about writing—and recycling—in completely different ways.

2. Hold a coat or clothing drive.

This is a fantastic way for kids to extend the life of their own items and, in turn, help someone in need. Ask students to bring in gently used items, then hold a garage sale at the school and sell the collected clothing for a very low cost or even offer for free. Another option is to donate clothing items to a local organization such as a homeless shelter.

3. Add recycling lessons to your lesson plans.

What if you could get teacher-created recycling lessons for free? There are downloadable lessons at: <https://www.weareteachers.com/free-recycling-lesson-plans/>. They are done in the 5E lesson-plan format and come with student worksheets to hand out. Find lessons for science, math, language arts, and more.

4. Take a field trip.

If your community has a recycling facility nearby, see if they coordinate tours. Oftentimes seeing a concept in action has a greater impact than just studying it.

5. Bring in a guest to talk about recycling.

Do you know another teacher, parent, or community member who is super passionate about recycling or being green? Invite them to your class to get your students excited and learning even more about the subject. **Invite Beth Wright, the Assistant Director of Preble County Solid Waste District, to your classroom today for a free recycling presentation including recycling fun facts, activities, and games, and awesome recycled crafts! Email Beth at beth.wright@prebswmd.org to schedule a classroom presentation.**

6. Hold a recycling contest.

What team can recycle the most in a day, week, or even a month? This is an easy challenge to execute—just get multiple recycling bins and start collecting. How you run the contest is up to you, but here are a few ideas: Divide up your class to form two to four different teams, challenge another classroom in the school, or even have a teachers-versus-students contest. To draw attention to collection points, you can hang these printable signs for [cans](#) and [bottles](#) above any recycling bins for which collections count!

7. Create recycling anchor charts.

Anchor charts are a great way to help elementary students learn. They are also a good way to encourage classroom discussion. Remember that anchor charts are meant to be created along with your students. So begin by charting out a main idea or question and then build the chart by getting your students' responses.



8. Turn recycling into a game.

If your students can see the results of their recycling, they're more likely to do it outside of the classroom, too. So how can you show them the amount of paper they've saved or the number of bottles and cans they've collected? Use a sticker chart, take photos, or just recognize students when you catch them recycling. If you want to be really ambitious, try our life-size game of [Recycle Drop](https://www.weareteachers.com/recycle-drop-game). Collect recyclable items until the container is full. And then play the game with your students. The game can be found at: <https://www.weareteachers.com/recycle-drop-game>.



9. Research programs that handle challenging items.

Paper, aluminum cans, and plastic bottles are all items that students can see being recycled every day. But what about items like broken crayons, batteries, or old electronics? Start by dividing the class into several small groups and assign each of them a list of items that are more challenging to recycle. Then have them research to learn how those items can be recycled. As a final activity, they can present their findings to the class.

10. Play bingo and learn as you go.

Visit <https://weareteachers.com/printable-recycle-bingo-game/> to help make learning about recycling more fun for your students. It includes a teacher's guide for lessons and talking points for the different recycling themes featured on the boards. Be sure to take breaks and lead class discussions as you go to help students develop an understanding for all of the icons.

11. Upcycle plastic containers.

You can find oodles of plastic containers around the house that make for organizers and more. Challenge your students to look around their homes or in their recycling bins to find something that can be upcycled or reused. For instance, a yogurt container can be used as a crayon holder, a plastic bottle can be quickly transformed into a vase, and baby wipe containers can hold just about any classroom odds and ends.

12. Hang posters around the classroom and school.

You can send a strong message just by hanging recycling informational posters or art made from recycled items. They're perfect for the classroom and hallways of your school. Ask students for their input about where the posters should go and also talk about what you hope the posters do for the school.

13. Commit to zero waste.

Start a committee to encourage your school to aim for zero waste for all school events such as class picnics, field day, assemblies, etc. Talk to representatives at your school district about moving to zero waste in your school cafeteria.

14. Create a prize bag of reused items.

Get your students' parents involved by asking for items to use for the classroom prize bag. Give them suggestions— toys from restaurant kids' meals, little freebies from conferences, and other odds and ends—and you'll be surprised at the items you can collect. Students will love picking a prize from the "reuse" bag when they hit different milestones

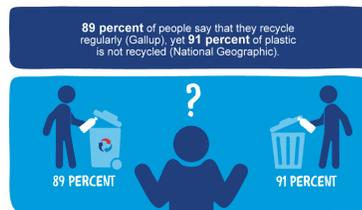
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15. Start a classroom or school Green Club.

It might seem daunting to start your own Green Club, but it doesn't have to be. Check out the article at: <https://weareteachers.com/start-a-green-club/> to help you out. Above all, remember to start small. The club can be established with just a few engaged students and a single purpose. If you're looking for some free resources to hand out at your school or take your Green Club up a notch, we have those, too. Download a coloring page, poster, bookmarks, and more at: <https://weareteachers.com/green-club-printables/>.

16. Create your own infographics to hang in the classroom.

Infographics are fun representations of important details. Go to: [Use This School Recycling Infographic To Educate and Motivate \(pepsicorecycling.com\)](https://pepsicorecycling.com). Assign students to small groups and have them research statistics and facts about recycling. Then challenge them to create their own infographic, presenting what they learned in a visual way.



17. Welcome worms into your classroom!

Worms?! You betcha. Vermicomposting is the method of composting using red wiggler worms. Long story short, the worms eat garbage and turn it into gorgeous, nutrient-rich compost—they are definitely doing a version of recycling. You can get started with this fun hobby in a relatively small space; kids will love it! Contact Preble Soil and Water Conservation District (937-456-5159) to schedule a traveling worm farm visit to your classroom!

18. Plant a garden or a tree.

In general, gardening is an excellent hobby to implement in schools, as it gives back for years! Turn it into a recycling project. Get outside with your students to collect seeds, pods, and even nuts. They can plant the seeds at home in their own backyard or in their neighborhood.

19. Talk about how recycling works.

Be sure to cover the basics. You might think students have an understand how recycling works, but it might not be! Start with "[Life of a Plastic Bottle](#)" and "[Life of an Aluminum Can](#)," two great videos on the Recycle Rally website.

20. Designate a container for scrap paper.

Establish a rule in your classroom that both sides of a piece of paper must always be used. If students have a piece of paper that hasn't been used on the back, have them put it in a container. The backside is great for notes and artwork.

21. Create a recycling game for class.

After your students have learned some basic facts about recycling and sustainability, use a trivia-game-show format to test their skills. Need help? Download a trivia game at: [Your Students Will Love This Free Recycling Quiz Game | Recycle Rally \(pepsicorecycling.com\)](https://pepsicorecycling.com) where the points system has already been figured out for you. Put the presentation on the overhead and start playing!

22. Make your own recycled paper.

Now that you've established a method for collecting paper, it's time to do something with it. Learn how to turn scraps into new paper for your classroom. This process can be a bit involved, and it might be best when spread out over a couple of days, but it's a wonderful hands-on lesson for students.

23. Hold a book or toy swap.

Instead of buying new books or toys, why not hold a giant swap meet at school? So many kids have things that are perfectly good, they just no longer use them. Don't fill up the landfill, pass them on to someone who will enjoy them!

24. Make a PSA about recycling.

A PSA (public service announcement) is a fun way to get kids to further research recycling and turn their newfound knowledge into a video. Encourage students to research PSAs and really work on their overall messaging until it's perfect. You can assign different roles, like director, writer, producer, and on-screen talent. Once it's ready, film the PSA, edit it, and then share it with parents and the public.

25. Challenge students to repurpose objects by using them in art.

Fill an area of your classroom with objects—plastic containers, old beads, and even outdoor objects, like sticks. Then have your students use them to create art. Encourage students to be creative and bring in their own items as well. Here's one of our favorites, made from bottles.

26. Extend the life of everyday items.

Instead of heading to the store every time you need materials for the classroom, take a look around at what you already have and see what you can use repeatedly. Have students follow along during lessons on whiteboards instead of paper. Laminate materials you know you will use over and over instead of making fresh copies every time. Show that not everything needs to be tossed after the first use.

27. Ditch single-use waste.

Building on the previous point, ask students to think carefully about the lunches they bring to school. Instead of single-use bags and packaging, encourage them to pack lunches in reusable containers. Enclose sandwiches in reusable wax wraps and include a cloth napkin that can be thrown in the wash when they get home. Let them know they can purchase items like chips and cookies in bulk and pack them in their own containers. In addition, instead of plastic water bottles, encourage students to bring a reusable water bottle to keep at their desks.

28. Sponsor a community clean up day.

Make posters and recruit participants to clean up your community. Collect recyclable materials and make sure they are properly turned in to recycling facilities. Beautify your neighborhood, but you'll also help the environment.

29. Make the most of your markers.

Is this messy? Yeah. But is it also awesome? Most definitely! Try this activity in your class and turn old stale markers into paint. This would work best if you can be outside to experiment. Go to <https://picklebums.com/easy-art-for-kids-marker-paints> for tips.



*Article is adapted from an original article found at: <https://weareteachers.com/29-ideas-big-and-small-to-bring-recycling-into-the-classroom>