

Protecting Our Legacy: Trash or Treasure

Purpose

To teach members how everyday items can be properly disposed of, reused, recycled, or composted to help conserve natural resources and reduce waste.

Time

6–8 minutes

Materials

- 4 signs:
 - Recycle
 - Compost
 - Reuse/Donate
 - Trash
- 20–30 laminated item cards
- Score sheet (optional)

All materials can fit in a small folder or envelope for travel.

Set-Up

Place the four category signs in different corners of the room.

Mix up the item cards and place them in a stack at the front.

Introduction (30 seconds)

“One of the easiest ways we can protect natural resources is by reducing waste. Today we’re going to see how well you know whether common items are trash, treasures that can be reused, or resources that can be recycled or composted.”

How to Play

Option A: Team Relay

Divide the room into 2–4 teams.

One member from each team comes forward at a time.

You show them an item card.

Examples:

- Plastic water bottle
- Banana peel
- Old t-shirt
- Newspaper
- Broken toy
- Aluminum can

Players must quickly run to the category they believe is correct.

After everyone chooses:

- Reveal the answer.
- Award points to correct teams.

Continue with several rounds.

Include a few items that people often get wrong.

Examples:

- Pizza box (clean = recycle, greasy = trash/compost depending on area)
- Batteries
- Light bulbs
- Electronics
- Plastic utensils

After the reveal, explain why.

This adds an educational component instead of just a guessing game.

- Banana peel → Compost
- Apple core → Compost
- Orange peel → Compost
- Food-soiled napkin → Compost
- Plastic water bottle → Recycle
- Aluminum can → Recycle
- Newspaper → Recycle
- Cardboard box → Recycle
- Glass jar → Recycle

- Milk jug → Recycle
- Old t-shirt (good condition) → Reuse/Donate
- Old backpack → Reuse/Donate
- Pair of shoes (good condition) → Reuse/Donate
- Toy in working condition → Reuse/Donate
- Grocery bag (reusable condition) → Reuse
- Broken ceramic mug → Trash
- Styrofoam cup → Trash
- Chip bag → Trash
- Used tissue → Trash
- Broken plastic toy → Trash

Trick Question Cards

- Batteries → Special recycling location
- Light bulb → Special recycling/disposal
- Cell phone → Electronic recycling
- Laptop → Electronic recycling
- Pizza box → Recycle if clean; trash/compost if greasy
- Plastic utensils → Usually trash

- Coffee cup → Depends on local recycling rules (often trash)
- Ink cartridge → Special recycling program

IF YOU RUN OUT OF TIME:

Suggest real life scenarios for double/triple points

"Your family just finished a birthday party. You have empty soda cans, greasy pizza boxes, balloons, paper plates, and unopened party favors. What should happen to each item?"

- Soda cans → Recycle
- Greasy pizza boxes → Compost (if accepted locally) or Trash
- Balloons → Trash
- Paper plates → Compost if uncoated and accepted; otherwise Trash
- Unopened party favors → Reuse/Donate

"You're cleaning your closet and find a jacket that doesn't fit you any more, worn out sneakers with holes, and an old backpack that's still in great condition."

- Jacket → Donate/Reuse
- Worn-out sneakers → Trash (or textile recycling if available)
- Backpack → Donate/Reuse

"Your family is cleaning the garage and finds old paint cans, dead batteries, broken flower pots, and a working bicycle that no one rides anymore."

- Paint cans → Hazardous waste collection or trash if dried out
- Batteries → Special recycling location
- Broken flower pots → Trash
- Working bicycle → Donate or sell for reuse

"After a picnic, you have watermelon rinds, plastic water bottles, aluminum foil, and a reusable water bottle someone forgot."

- Watermelon rinds → Compost
- Plastic water bottles → Recycle
- Aluminum foil → Recycle if clean; otherwise Trash
- Reusable water bottle → Reuse (return it or keep using it)

Debrief (1 minute)

Ask:

"Which item surprised you the most?"

Then conclude with something like:

"Every bottle recycled, item donated, or food scrap composted helps conserve natural resources and keeps waste out of landfills. Small choices today help create a lasting legacy of conservation for future generations."