



Lesson Plan: Rethink, Grade 5 Social Studies

Activity

Mock parliamentary committee meeting.

Introduction

Many of the products and packaging that are available to consumers today are made up of natural resources. Often these items follow a traditional linear “take, made, dispose” waste model. This consists of three main steps: extracting raw materials (take), using said materials to manufacture a given item (make), and then throwing the item away when it is no longer needed or wanted (dispose). The traditional linear waste model promotes single-use and is highly wasteful. In this lesson, students will be challenged to rethink waste and participate in a mock parliamentary committee meeting to discuss a possible ban on single-use plastic in Canada. Students will then learn about the Government of Canada’s real-life ban on single-use plastic.

Curriculum Connections

Social Studies, 2018 (revised)

Grade 5

- Strand B. People and the Environments: The Role of Government and Responsible Citizenship

Learning Objectives

1. Illustrate where Rethink falls on the Waste Management Hierarchy.
2. Investigate single-use plastic usage in Canada.
3. Assess and justify if single-use plastic should be banned in Canada.
4. Participate in a mock parliamentary committee meeting.

Resources Provided (located in the resource folder)

- Video: Rethink

Activity Instructions

Prior to Activity

1. Introduce the concept of Rethinking waste.

Rethink is the first “R” in the Region’s Waste Management Hierarchy. Rethink focuses how we view and use natural resources with the understanding that natural resources are limited. Rethink means challenging our current policies, processes, and actions, and focusing on innovative ways to redesign and improve systems to better the environment and the economy. The goal of rethink is to retain and recover as much value as possible from materials and products and significantly decrease or eliminate the need for disposal.

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2. Introduce the use of plastic in our daily lives.

Plastic is a big part of our lives and is found in many of the products we use every day. Some examples include food storage, drink bottles, medical tools, product protection, money, cellphones, clothing and so much more!

Plastic is durable, lightweight, easy to create, and cheap to make and buy. These characteristics make plastic incredibly useful and have provided a cheaper alternative to more expensive natural resources like wood, metals, cotton, silk, and leather. Unfortunately, these characteristics have also led to problems within the environment. With so much plastic being created for single use, these durable and long-lasting products have been accumulating at problematic rates.

Single-use plastics do not just disappear once we no longer need or want them. While some single-use products can be recycled, many of these items are destined for the garbage. If these items are not managed properly, they can make their way into the environment and contaminate soil, air, and water sources including lakes, rivers and streams. These plastics can disrupt ecosystems and food chains, causing negative impacts on the environment and human health.

While the use of plastic products will continue well into the future, a shift in how we use and manage single-use plastic items is required to ensure a sustainable future.

3. As a class, compile a list of at least 10 examples of single-use plastics. **Single-use plastics** are plastic items that have been designed to be thrown out after being used once.

Some common examples include, plastic straws, plastic bottles, coffee stir sticks, plastic cling wrap, plastic cutlery, food take-out containers, and cold drink cups.

4. Ask students to review the list of single-use plastics that the class has compiled. Can they think of any alternatives to the use of these items?

5. Provide students with the following information:

According to the Government of Canada, Canadians throw away over three million tonnes of plastic waste each year. Of this plastic, only about nine per cent is recycled. A major contributor to this plastic is single-use plastic. For years, residents have debated a possible ban on single-use plastic items. Justin Trudeau's Liberal government vowed to ban them and has consulted many experts and politicians on the issue.

6. Explain that in this activity, students will imagine they are parliamentary committee members that are considering the possibility of introducing a bill to ban single-use plastic in Canada. The ban will include plastic straws and plastic utensils.

Committees are small groups of selected Members of Parliament (MP's) assigned to discuss and challenge issues.

7. Assign students one of the following roles:

Role	Responsibility
Chair (1)	Organizes and regulates the discussion. Note: This is a good role for the classroom teacher.
Government Members (4)	Questions (cross-examines) witnesses. In this simulation, government members will support the ban on single-use plastics.
Opposition Members (4)	Question (cross-examines) witnesses. In this simulation, opposition members will oppose the ban on single-use plastics.
Witnesses (16)	Prepare a presentation to argue your viewpoint to the other committee members. Each of the witnesses below should be represented by at least three people. The four witnesses in this meeting are: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A straw and plastic utensil manufacturer. 2. An environmental conservation group. 3. A group of local scientists researching plastic pollution. 4. A group representing restaurants (including fast food businesses) in Canada.

8. Once assigned a role, students will conduct research from the perspective of their committee member group. Offer students at least one classroom period to complete their research. During this time:

- Students in the witness group will prepare a two-to-three-minute presentation to share their viewpoint and thoughts on the ban. Students will need to decide if their witness group is for or against the ban before preparing their arguments.
- The government and opposition groups will consider their viewpoint and prepare at least four potential questions to ask each witness group.
- Groups against the ban may consider factors like the impact on employment, the availability of the proposed alternative products to replace the banned products (if necessary), cost, time to make changes to businesses, convenience for consumers, etc.
- Groups agreeing with the ban may consider factors such as environmental and human health benefits, the availability of alternative products (if necessary), opportunity for new products, etc.

9. Offer students the option to dress in formal attire on the day of the committee meeting.

Day of Activity

1. Group and seat students in the classroom based on their role.
2. Have students make a folded nametag to place in front of them.
3. Begin the meeting with the introduction of the Chair. Have the Chair introduce the bill to be discussed and the participating committee members.

4. Once everyone has been introduced, the first witnesses can take the stand and present their viewpoint and thoughts on the ban. The witnesses will have two to three minutes to present their points.
5. Upon conclusion of their presentation, government and opposition members can assemble separately and choose at least two questions from their prepared list that they would like to ask the witness. Both sides must participate.
6. The witness group will do their best to respond to the questions raised by the government and opposition members.
7. Following the presentation and questioning of the first witness, repeat steps four and five until all witnesses have presented and been questioned. Rotate between government and opposition members so everyone has a chance to speak. This should take approximately 30 minutes.
8. Once all witnesses have presented, open the floor to any last questions or comments.
9. Have the Chair conclude the meeting with an anonymous class vote. Students will decide if they think single-use plastics should be banned or not. Reveal the results of the vote.

End of Activity

1. Share the Government of Canada's real-life ban on single-use plastic.

The Government of Canada introduced a ban on the manufacturing and importing of several single-use plastics beginning in December 2022, and the ban on the sale of these items in Canada as of December 2023. The list of banned single-use plastic items includes:

- checkout bags
- cutlery
- food service ware made from or containing problematic plastics that are hard to recycle
- ring carriers
- stir sticks
- straws (with some exceptions)

Over the next 10 years, it is estimated that this ban on these single-use plastics will result in the elimination of over 1.3 million tonnes of hard-to-recycle plastic waste and more than 22,000 tonnes of plastic pollution. That is the equivalent of over one million garbage bags full of litter.

Extension Activity

Have students complete a short, half-page news report summarizing the committee meeting. Remind them to include a headline, a short summary and standout points or details.

Summary

Rethink allows us to challenge and change existing systems and policies. It is important that we all do our part to manage our waste, including government, industry, and community members. Through collective action and advocacy, we can ensure our planet remains clean and healthy.

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Expanded Curriculum Connections

Grade 5, Social Studies, 2018 (revised)

B. People and the Environments: The Role of Government and Responsible Citizenship

B1. Applications: Governments and Citizens Working Together

- B1.1 assess the effectiveness of actions taken by one or more level of governments, to address an issue of national, provincial/territorial, and/or local significance
- B1.2 create a plan of action to address a social issue of local, provincial/territorial, and/or national significance specifying the actions to be taken by the appropriate government or governments, including Indigenous governments, as well as by citizens

B2. Inquiry: Differing Perspectives on Social and Environmental Issues

- B2.1 formulate questions to guide investigations into social and/or environmental issues in Canada from various perspectives, including the perspective of Indigenous People and of the level (or levels) of government responsible for addressing the issues.
- B2.2 gather and organize a variety of information and data that present various perspectives about Canadian social and/or environmental issues, including the perspectives of Indigenous peoples and of the level (or levels) of government responsible for addressing the issues
- B2.5 evaluate evidence and draw conclusions about social and/or environmental issues, outlining the strengths and weaknesses of different perspectives on the issues, including the perspectives on the issues, including the perspectives of Indigenous people and of the level (or levels) of government responsible for addressing the issues
- B2.6 communicate the results of their inquiries, using appropriate vocabulary and formats

B3. Understanding Context: Roles and Responsibilities of Government and Citizens

- B3.7 describe key actions taken by governments, including Indigenous governments, to solve some significant national, provincial/ territorial, and/or local issues
- B3.9 describe some different ways in which citizens can take action to address social and environmental issues