

We Can Make a Difference

This lesson explores how to be responsible for the environment, particularly around our use of plastic bags. This lesson includes a nonfiction story that models responsible re-use of plastic bags and gives students a chance to turn a plastic bag into something else creative and fun.

Kindness Concept(s)

Responsibility, Kindness

Lesson Timeframe

45 minutes

Required Materials

- ☐ Plastic bags
- ☐ Scissors
- ☐ Duct tape
- ☐ Regular tape
- ☐ *"One Plastic Bag: Isatou Ceesay and the Recycling Women of the Gambia,"* by Miranda Paul

Standards Map

This lesson aligns with CASEL Competencies, National Health Education Standards, and Common Core State Standards. Please refer to the [Standards Map](#) for more information.



**DESIGNATED BY CASEL
AS A RECOMMENDED PROGRAM
FOR SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING.**
See last page for details.

Lesson Objective

Students will:

- Investigate the impact of plastic bags on the environment and economy.
- Evaluate how different decisions impact habitat, especially the environment.
- Discuss the impact of responsible decision making on quality of life and habitat.
- Create recycled bracelets using plastic bags.

Teacher Connection/Self-Care

The root word for responsibility is “responsus” which is Latin for “to respond”. How do you respond to others throughout your day? This week, reframe things that might normally generate a frustrated or negative response (even simple things like getting caught at a red light or spilling something). Choose to respond with kindness, both internally and externally.

Tips for Diverse Learners

- You may need to assist students with the bracelet project in twisting the strips or tying knots.
- Be sure not to shame students for their use of plastic; rather, encourage them to think about small things they might change in their daily lives that could have a positive impact on the environment. It's easy to overlook the everyday items or practices that do harm to the environment over time and this lesson is designed to bring some of those items/practices to light.



Share

5-7 minutes

Review the definition of **responsibility** - see if students can recite it without help: *being reliable to do the things that are expected or required of you.*

RANDOM ACTS OF KINDNESS
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If you have done the other lessons in this unit, students have talked a lot about what they are responsible for either for themselves or for the spaces around them - like the classroom or their bedrooms at home. Today's lesson will be about how we can take care of nature and the environment.

Ask: When I say the word "environment," what do you think of? *Invite student responses.*

Discuss the different responsibilities we have - even as 2nd graders - for the environment:

- Recycling
- Picking up litter
- Donating gently used items to charity instead of throwing them away (or purchasing used items instead of buying new)
- Planting trees



Inspire

10-12 minutes

This lesson will help students explore new uses for the common plastic shopping bag - something most families have an abundance of. You can open with this riddle to see if students can guess what you'll be talking about:

What Am I?

I'm light as air, but I carry a load,

I'm often reused or left by the road.

I help you shop, but I'm not great for the sea,

What am I, and what should you do with me?

Answer:

Plastic bags! How many of you brought your snack today in a plastic baggie or had a plastic-wrapped snack? (Hold up an example if possible.) We use these a lot in our daily lives, don't we?

Ask:

- How many of your families use reusable bags when you go to the store?

Discuss:

This is something that many stores and environmental groups are trying to get families to start doing. (You can talk about reusable bags that your school might have with the school name or logo on them or talk about plastic bag ordinances in your city, if that's applicable.) If you think about it, you use a reusable bag everyday with your backpack! Many of you bring the same backpack to school everyday to carry your work and special items. Sometimes we even use the same backpack for a couple of years! That is one way we can be kind to the environment: reuse what we have!

Share:

Here are some interesting facts about plastic:

- *There are about 5 trillion plastic bags used each year around the world (that is 160,000 bags per second!). [Source: TheWorld Counts:*

<https://www.theworldcounts.com/challenges/waste/plastic-bags-used-per-year>]

- Researchers estimate that it can take up to 1,000 years for a plastic item to decompose, which means break down back into the soil, in a landfill! [Source: Center for Biological Diversity: https://www.biologicaldiversity.org/programs/population_and_sustainability/sustainability/plastic_bag_facts.html#:~:text=It%20takes%201%2C000%20years%20for.continue%20to%20pollute%20the%20environment.]
- 90% of the non-naturally occurring ocean debris floating in the ocean is plastic! [Source: National Park Service: <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/oceans/ocean-plastics.htm>]
- About 100,000 animals, such as dolphins, turtles, whales, and penguins, are killed every year when they eat the plastic bags that are floating in the ocean. The toxins from the plastic get into the animals or they choke. [Source: HelpSaveNature: <https://helpsavenature.com/environmental-pollution-harmful-effects-of-plastic-bags>]



Empower

20-25 minutes

Read/listen to the following story about the impact that plastic bags had on one woman's community and what she did to help reuse the bags to both save the environment and help her family!

Read: "One Plastic Bag: Isatou Ceesay and the Recycling Women of the Gambia," by Miranda Paul

Read Aloud Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sjvfqHmb6Wk> (7 min)

Ask:

- What happened with the plastic bags?
- What did Isatou do with the bags?
- How did that help the community and her family?

Activity:

Today we are going to do something unique with plastic bags. We are going to make recycled bracelets to give to someone else. Maybe we want to give them to a special friend or maybe to a parent to help them remember to use reusable bags when they shop!

Video Instructions: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XH4BxPas70>

(To save time, you can come with the bag strips pre-cut; you need three strips per student.)

Verbal Instructions:

1. Find several plastic bags (varying colors, if possible).
2. Cut the bags along the seams so it lays flat.
3. Cut the bags into strips about 1-1.5 inches wide, and the long length of the bag.
4. Make sure there are three strips per student.
5. Give each student three strips.
6. Students individually roll or twist each strip until it forms a thin rope.

7. Students put all three twisted ropes together and tape one end of the bunch to their desk or table.
8. Students do a simple braid starting at the taped end and working their way to the loose end.
9. Pull the braid tight and tie a knot at each end of the braid.
10. Students can then tie each knotted end together or can use duct tape (printed or colored tape is fun) to secure the two ends together.



Reflect

5 minutes

Commend students on their bracelets. Invite them to reflect on the following questions:

- What else can you do to help reduce your use of plastic?
- How do you reuse plastic shopping bags when you get them?

Remember to reuse whatever you can, including your plastic bags. If you don't have reusable bags for groceries, be sure you save your plastic bags and use them for something else; maybe you can even bring them back to the store to use again. Sometimes department stores have a place where you can recycle your plastic shopping bags. Work hard to think about your impact on the environment, especially when it comes to plastic! We can make a difference!



Extension Ideas

- There are other DIY projects for kids and plastic bags, including purses like the character in the story made or even mats that can be donated to shelters.
- Kids can brainstorm other ways to reduce their plastic use with their families, including encouraging parents to use reusable bags.
- If kids don't already, have them encourage their family to start recycling plastics at home. They can check with their local sanitation department to see if there are recycling programs nearby.
- Do a quick geography lesson about Gambia; where it's located and what the culture is like there. You could also research the impact of plastic and pollution on this region specifically or talk about the habitats that Gambia has.



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PROGRAM FOR SOCIAL
AND EMOTIONAL
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The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) has been reviewing evidence-based SEL programs since 2003. Kindness in the Classroom® meets CASEL's SElect Program and is included in the CASEL Guide to Effective Social and Emotional Learning Programs.

Kindness in the Classroom® met or exceeded all of CASEL's criteria for high-quality SEL programming. Kindness in the Classroom® received CASEL's highest designation for high-quality SEL programming.

<https://casel.org/guide/kindness-in-the-classroom/>