

# Disposable Dilemma

**OBJECTIVE:** To illustrate alternatives to disposable products.

**MATERIALS:** HANDOUT: Disposable Choices (B47)

**VOCABULARY:** disposable, energy consumption, landfill, natural resources, waste

## BACKGROUND:

Disposable goods can be traced back to World War II. Troops were given light-weight, pre-packaged meals called "C rations". After the war, the technology used to make the "C rations" was employed to make T.V. dinners, disposable pens and throw-away razors. From the 1950's until today, the number of disposable products has increased dramatically. For every dollar spent on disposables, the taxpayer spends 8 cents more to dispose of them. The worst aspect of throw-away products is the attitude that they encourage; disposables perpetuate the dangerous cycle of buy, use and discard. Products designed to be used only once do not teach people to adjust their lifestyles for the good of the Earth.

## PROCEDURE:

1. Present the following scenario to the class: Every single product or item they use is disposable; televisions, desks, automobiles, C.D.'s. Everything is to be used once then thrown away.
2. Ask the class to think of what problems this would create. Some examples are the amount of waste generated would require an extensive collection system (i.e. daily instead of weekly pick-up), landfills would quickly reach their capacity and our natural resources and energy consumption would accelerate.
3. After the class has discussed the problems, tell the students to think of the disposable items they use each day (i.e. pens, lunch bags, razors, paper towels). Over the next 24 or 48 hours each student should use the HANDOUT: Disposable Choices (B47), to keep a record of the disposables their household members use.
4. Beside each item on the list have the students fill in a description of the resources used in making the item.
5. Lastly, have the children think of alternatives to the items on their list. The first step is to reduce the number of unnecessary items on the list and then replace the remaining products with reusable or recyclable goods.

# Disposable Dilemma (cont.)

## **EXTENSION:**

1. Compare the cost of each disposable item to its alternative. Students should consider the cost of garbage bags, waste collection and landfill space not just retail prices.
2. Have the students find examples of necessary disposable items (i.e. some hospital supplies). Ask them to explain why the items are necessary. Now take an item from their list and explain why it is completely unnecessary (i.e. made solely for convenience).
3. Design a program to reduce disposable items in the school or classroom.

## **EVALUATION:**

1. Have any of the students changed their attitudes or habits in regards to disposable items?
2. Ask the class to explain the ramifications of disposable products.
3. Name the three most common disposable items in the student's home.