



# Lesson: Packaging - The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly!

**Grade:** 4-5

**Subject:** Science, English

**Objectives:**

Students will:

- recognize natural resources in packaging
- identify the different purposes for packaging
- decide if packaging is necessary and appropriate

**Teaching Time:** Intro 15 minute discussion, home assignment then on a following day about 45 minutes

**Materials:** ONE WEEK PRIOR to this activity, ask students to complete the worksheet listed below and then bring to school several examples of packaging from home. Examples of packaging: frozen food, dry food, drink containers, toys, health care, and household items such as: light bulbs, or cleansers. Teacher should also collect a variety of packages. Try to find examples of similar products where one is “over-packaged” and the other is more environmentally friendly.  
continued...

**REDUCE**  
**REUSE**  
**RECYCLE**

## **Background:**

In the past, packages were refillable and reusable, such as thick glass bottles and cotton flour sacks. Today, in our society, almost 90% of manufactured packaging becomes solid waste and it makes up about 22% of the materials in the landfill. While packaging is important to the longevity of some food products, as well as to the safe transportation of many products, much packaging is excessive and does not show sensitivity to environmental issues in its development or processing. By understanding the factors that affect packaging choices by companies for their products, students will have the background necessary to make wise choices. (Prerequisite: Buyer’s Choice).

## **Procedures:**

- Ask students to bring in samples of packaging that they would consider good and bad from their homes. (Note: Provide a short background discussion of overpackaging, single use packaging and reusability and recyclability to get students thinking. If students are bringing in empty packaging, remind them to include all packaging that came with the product, such as the plastic film wrapping on the outside).
- Bring models of bulk items inside tupperware or used yogurt containers, etc. in order to demonstrate how this packaging alternative works just as well as choosing a single use item for convenience.
- Choose some packaging examples from the students and discuss as a group the purposes for packaging. **What type of material is this packaging? What natural resource does it come from? What purpose does it serve? Some purposes are: protects the product, identifies the product, gives directions, prevents theft, attracts attention. However, some packaging can give a false impression that the product is bigger, better, or more fun than it really is.**
- The packaging material used for a product can make it easier or harder to reuse or recycle--which usually means it will go in the trash! Packages made from two types of materials combined are not really recyclable in most cases because the materials cannot be easily separated. For example, some potato chip bags are made from plastic and aluminum foil. Gum wrappers can be made of paper combined with aluminum foil. Also, some products use more packaging than is really necessary. For example, bananas placed on a foam tray and shrink wrapped or individual servings of crackers, meat and cheese packaged into one ‘meal’.
- Divide class into groups to examine and discuss the pros and cons of the examples of packaging brought from home.
- Assign the “Buyer’s Economics Worksheet” as a take home project.

## **Reflection/Response:**

- Have each group present an example good packaging (reusable, recyclable, not excessive) and an example of poor packaging (non-recyclable material, excessive). Students should discuss each group.

- Reflect on ways students and their families can help reduce waste from packaging. Some examples would be: buy in bulk instead of individual packages, carry items to school in reusable containers instead of disposable or individual containers, recycle packaging whenever possible, and don't buy products with excessive or nonrecyclable packaging.
- Have students write a real or imagined letter to a store owner or manager persuading him or her to reduce the number of products with poor packaging on the shelves and carry more products designed to be environmentally friendly.
- Have students write a real or imagined letter to the manufacturer of one of their favorite products asking them to switch to recyclable materials or to suggest an alternate packaging design that is more environmentally friendly. (If desired, use the postcard format included in the Lesson: Buyer's Choice).

(Alternative:) collect pictures from newspapers and magazines of products (instead of the actual packaging); worksheet, "Buyer's Economics"

(Optional:) Video: "Times A Wasting: Garbage and Recycling in Oregon" (show students the latter portion of the video that show smart shoppers making good packaging choices). See Resource section for availability.

### **Extensions:**

- Use examples of the packaging to create a school bulletin board demonstrating the concept of good v. bad packaging. (See Natural Resource Bulletin Board example in the Resource section).
- Handout the Extension "No Waste Lunch" (see Resource section) and have students practice a no waste lunch over the next few weeks or months. Share experiences with the class. Was it easy or hard? What did they do differently? What substitutes did they have to make?
- Have students make a No Waste Lunch Display in the cafeteria to educate others.

#### **Oregon Common Curriculum Goal:**

##### **English:** Writing

- Use a variety of modes (e.g., narrative, imaginative, expository, persuasive) in

##### **Social Science:** Economics, Analysis

- Understand that resources are limited (e.g., scarcity, opportunity, cost).
- Define and clarify an issue so that its dimensions are well understood.

##### **Career Related Learning:** Problem Solving

- Develop and use productive and socially responsible approaches for resolving problems in family, school, community, and workplace settings.

#### **Grade 5 Benchmark:**

- Write in a variety of modes (e.g., narrative, imaginative, expository, persuasive) and forms (e.g., essays, stories, reports) appropriate to audience and purpose.
- Understand that all economic choices have costs and benefits, and compare options in terms of costs and benefits.
- Examine an event, issue, or problem through inquiry and research.
- Explain characteristics of an event, issue, or problem, suggesting possible causes and results.
- Examine alternative decisions and their impact on individuals.



