

Activity Idea - Rubbish Vanishing Act



Match the litter to the length of time it can take to rot away. Below is a list of different types of litter and the length of time it takes to biodegrade or decompose. This activity works well if you print out pictures or ask children to draw their own pictures of different types of litter and get them to work together to put them in order from shortest length of time to biodegrade or decompose to longest length of time.

The discussion can then be opened up to why some types take longer than others and what other factors will determine the length of time it takes e.g. weather conditions including temperature, oxygen levels, and degradation at sea, for some materials would be different to that on dry land.

To show how this works in real life why not carry out an experiment. You will need samples of different kinds of rubbish that could end up as litter, a trowel, plant pots or soil, and labels. It is important to use different types of litter like an apple core, a crisp packet, paper and glass. Bury the rubbish in some earth (outdoors or indoors using plant pots) remembering to place a label above where each piece is buried. About six weeks later, carefully dig under each label. What do you find?

Paper Towel	2 - 4 weeks	Leather Shoes	25-40 years
Paper bag	1 month	Tinned Steel Can	50 years
Newspaper	1.5 months	Crisp Packet	75 years
Apple Core	2 months	Rubber-Boot Sole	50 - 80 years
Cardboard	2 months	Plastic containers	50 - 80 years
Plywood	1-3months	Aluminium can	200 - 500 years
Orange Peel	6 months	Plastic Bottles	450 years
Banana Peel	2 years	Disposable Nappies	550 years
Woollen Sock	1 - 5 years	Plastic Bags	200-1000 years
Milk Cartons	5 years	Styrofoam Container	More than 1 million years
Balloons	5 – 6 years	Glass Bottle	Undetermined
Cigarette Butts	10 -12 years	Chewing Gum	Never