

OPEN YOUR EYES TO LITTER



THINK BEFORE YOU TOSS



A fun activity and coloring book
for kids grades 4-6!



Keep
Pennsylvania
Beautiful

Today, there are many products available to us, often packaged in materials such as **paper, plastic, glass** and **aluminum**. If the packaging is NOT recycled, it becomes **TRASH!** Even the products themselves eventually become trash too...



... if they are not **reused, repaired, or recycled.**

Where will all the trash go?

Imagine how much trash would accumulate if we didn't have places to put all the products and packaging that become trash!?! That is why it's important to **think before you toss**.

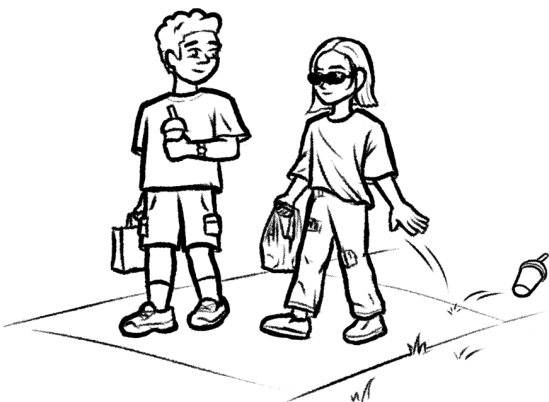
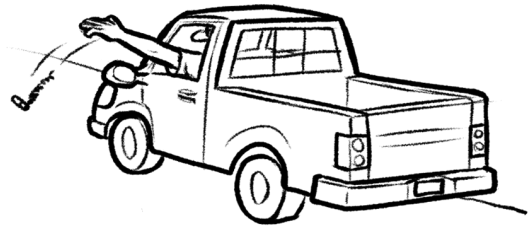
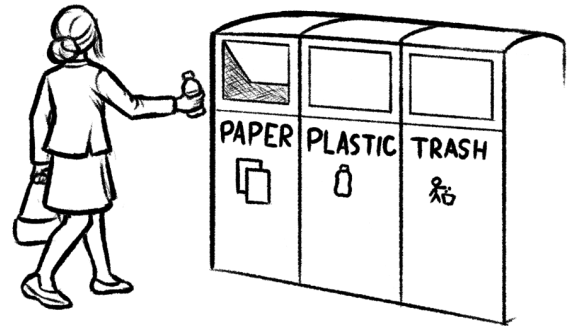
Recycling is more than just putting items in a bin. It's about giving new purpose to old items and being mindful of our impact on the Earth we share.



Not all ideas are good ideas!
Cross out which thoughts are **not** a good idea.
What could he do instead?

Some trash ends up where it doesn't belong because it is littered or **dumped**. This can happen when people don't know the right way to get rid of their trash. It can also happen when someone drops litter by accident, doesn't think or doesn't care.

Regardless of how trash ended up there,
YOU can be part of the solution.



According to Keep America Beautiful, roughly 81% of littering occurs purposely.

Write one way to **prevent** each of the scenarios above from causing litter. Be creative!

My Litter Footprint:

A **litter footprint** is the amount of trash people accidentally or purposely leave behind in places it doesn't belong.

Even 1 piece of litter can harm our world.

Every smart choice makes the Earth cleaner!

Step 1: Circle your choices for each category.

Snacks & Drinks

How often do you use disposable wrappers, bottles, or cups?

- mostly reusable = 1 pt
- sometimes reusable = 3 pts
- mostly disposable = 5 pts

Outdoor Habitats

After being outside, how carefully do you cleanup?

- always check for trash = 1 pt
- sometimes forget = 3 pts
- ignore it = 5 pts

At School

If you see litter on the ground, what do you do?

- pick it up (safely) = 1 pt
- tell someone = 3 pts
- ignore it = 5 pts

Recycling

What do you usually do with recyclable items?

- recycle correctly = 1 pt
- sometimes recycle = 3 pts
- throw in trash = 5 pts

Shopping

I like to buy:

- thrifted clothing = 1 pt
- items that last = 3 pts
- fast fashion = 5 pts

Step 2: Add all your points!

Litter footprint score: _____

5-10 points: Litter Legend

You make thoughtful choices to help prevent litter.

11-18 points: Clean-Up Crew

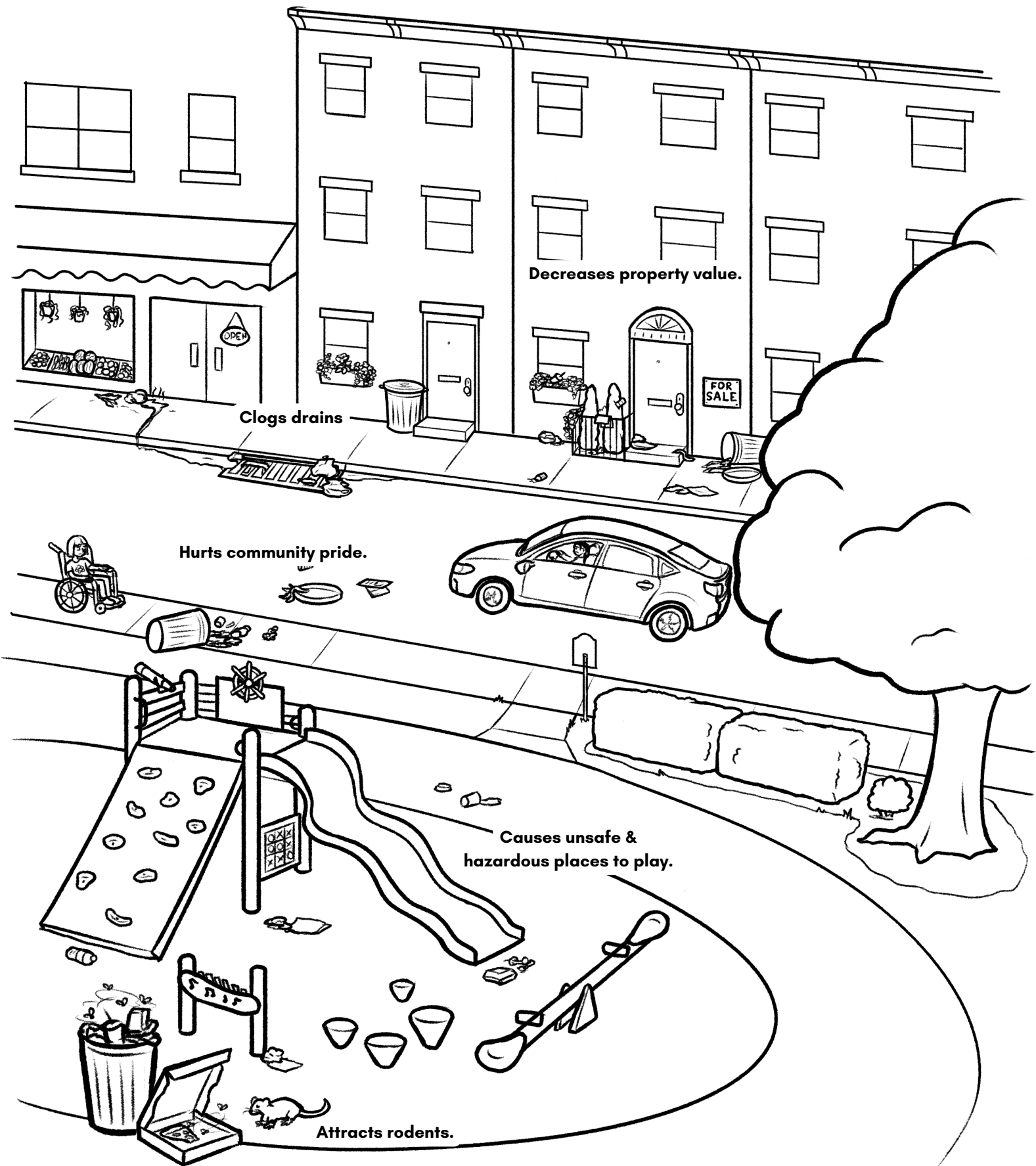
You're on the right path. A few small changes can make a big difference.

19-25 points: Trash Talker

You have lots of opportunities to reduce waste and protect nature.

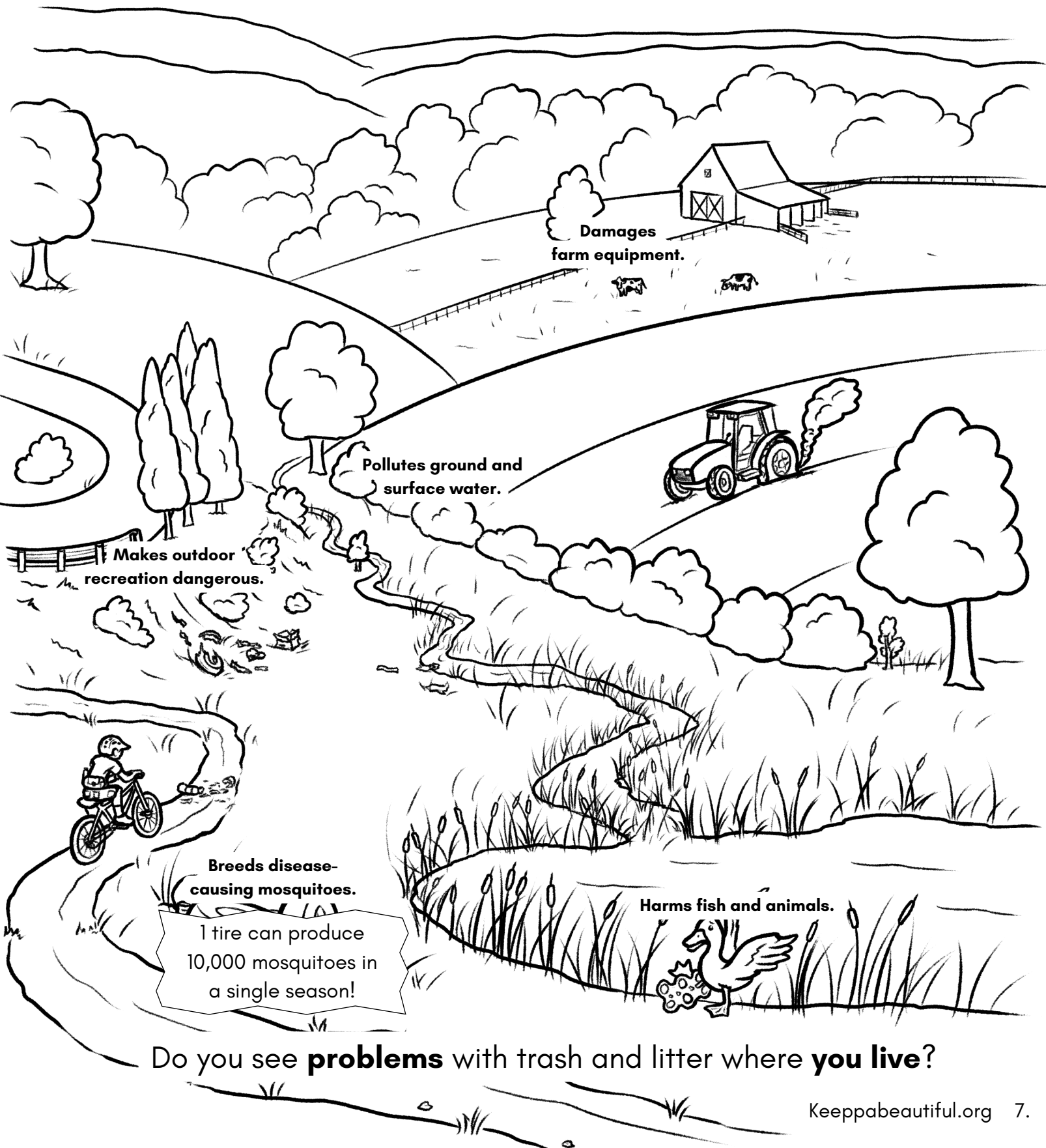
Choices matter.

An accumulation of trash and litter can cause many different problems. In the **city**, it...



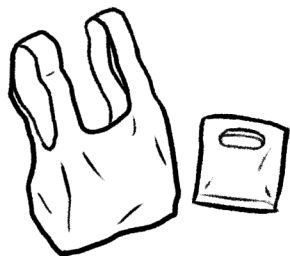
In the **country**, it...

Ruins beautiful scenery.



Do you see **problems** with trash and litter where **you** live?

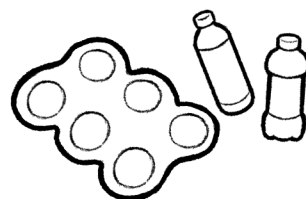
When trash is littered or dumped, it can be there for a long time. Some things last **forever**. The only way trash really gets cleaned up is when **people** clean it up.



Plastic bags
10-20 years*



Plastic packaging
500 years*



Plastic six-pack holders
100 years*

*Breaks down into **microplastics**
that last forever.

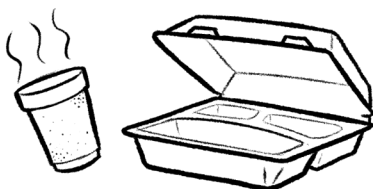
30% of all litter in
Pennsylvania is plastic.



Nylon fabric
30 - 40 years



Glass bottles
1,000 years



Polystyrene
Indefinitely



Steel cans
50 years



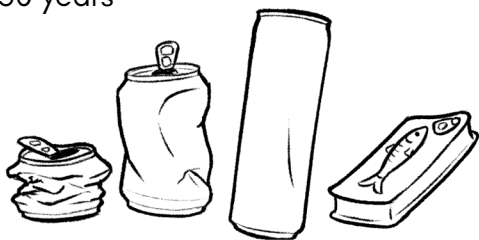
Wool sock
1 - 5 years



Cigarette butts
5 - 15 years



Orange & banana peels
Up to 2 years



Aluminum cans
500 years

Recycling aluminum cans saves
95% of the energy needed to make
new cans from raw materials.

Calculate how old you would be when each material is finally
broken down.

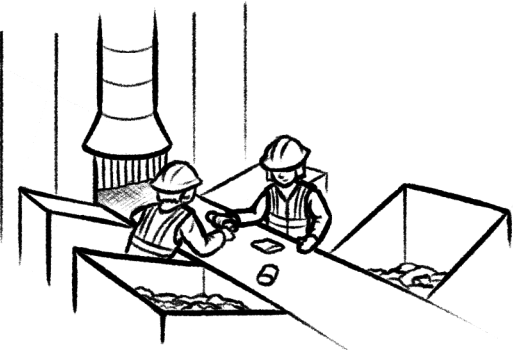
Green Economy

Some people have **jobs** cleaning up litter, trash, and recycling. According to the Pennsylvania Recycling Markets Center (2026),

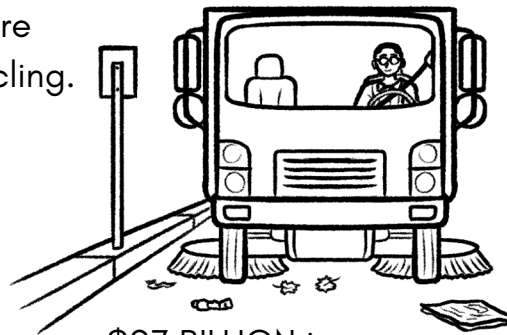
In one year...



319,628 jobs were created from recycling.



\$\$\$: Wages for these jobs were 33% higher than the Pennsylvania average.



\$27 BILLION in wages were earned from recycling.

Others **volunteer** to clean up litter on their own.



Volunteers Make a Difference!

Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful has partnered with 3 million volunteers over the years, cleaning up over 165 million tons of trash and more than 1.2 million tires!

Math Time:

3 million written in numeric form is 3,000,000.

How do you write 27 billion?

How about 1.2 million?

You can even **adopt** areas you care about to help keep them litter free.

It's important that we all think about how much trash we're making. In fact, many things end up in the trash that didn't need to be purchased in the first place!

What a waste!

Think Before You Buy:

- Do I already have something similar?
- How much use will I get from the item?
- What will I do with the item when it's no longer useful?

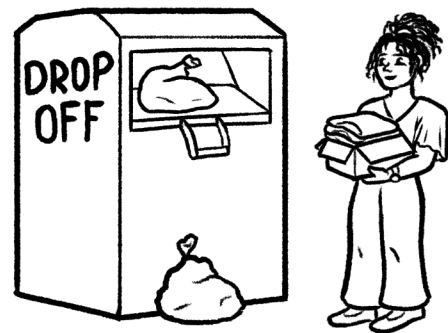
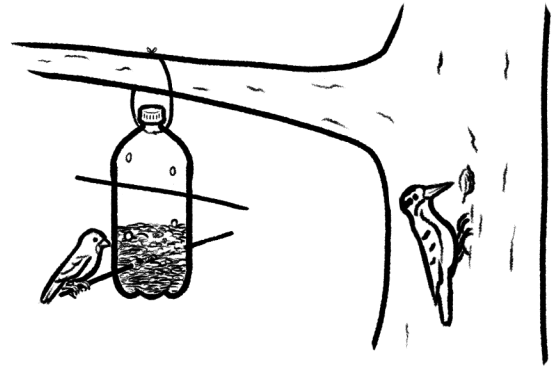
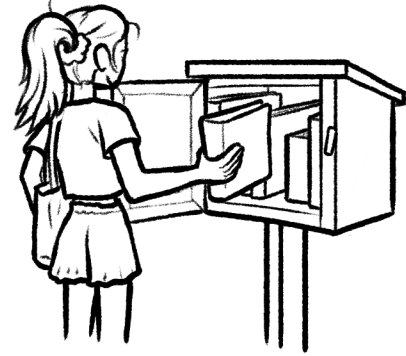


Buy only what you **need!**

Choose products with **minimal packaging** to conserve natural resources. Recycling is important but only **after** reducing and reusing.

Lots of items we throw away can be **reused**.

Identify what is being **reused** in these pictures. Which ones will you try?



Reusing materials extends their life.

Here are some ways you can reuse items:

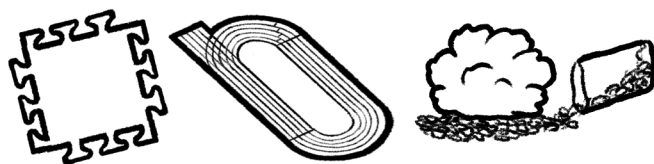
borrowing tools, mending clothes, and repairing appliances.

And many things can be **recycled**.

Match each item on the left to the product it can be recycled into on the right.



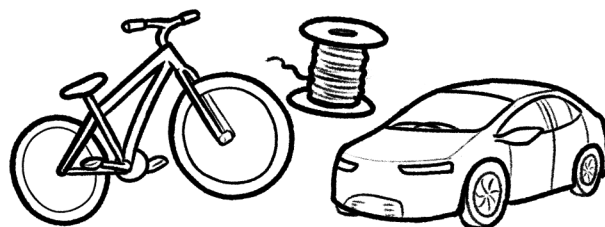
Leaves, fruit and vegetable scraps



Flooring, running track, crumb rubber
(used for turf & playground surfaces)



Milk jugs, Laundry detergent bottles
(HDPE plastic)



New automobiles, bike frames, wire



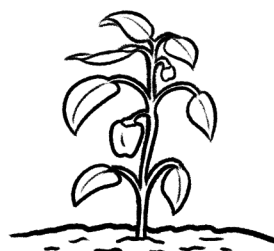
Automobiles, appliances, steel cans



Fleece jacket, insulation, carpets,
fiberfill, shower curtains



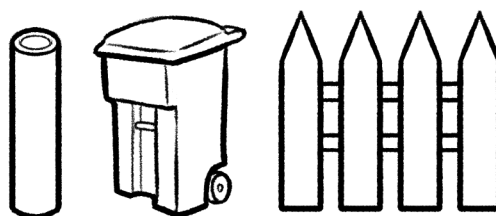
Used Tires & Sneakers



Compost to help grow new gardens



Plastic bottles, jugs, jars (PET Plastic)



Piping, containers, fencing

Inside Scoop on Recycling:

The way you recycle depends on where you live.

Recycling is collected differently for each municipality. Here are some ways your trash might be collected:

single stream – you can recycle items together in one bin.

This makes it quick and easy to put out recycling.



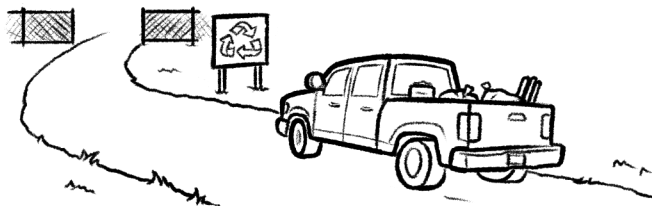
dual stream – items must be separated into categories before being collected.

Typically paper and cardboard go in one bin, while glass, plastic and metals go in a separate bin.

This saves time and money for the recycling facility.



Some locations do not collect curbside recycling, but have **drop off** locations instead, where materials are sorted into designated bins and each bin is clearly labeled for a specific material type. *When materials are separated, items have less of a chance of being soiled and a better chance of being turned into something new.*



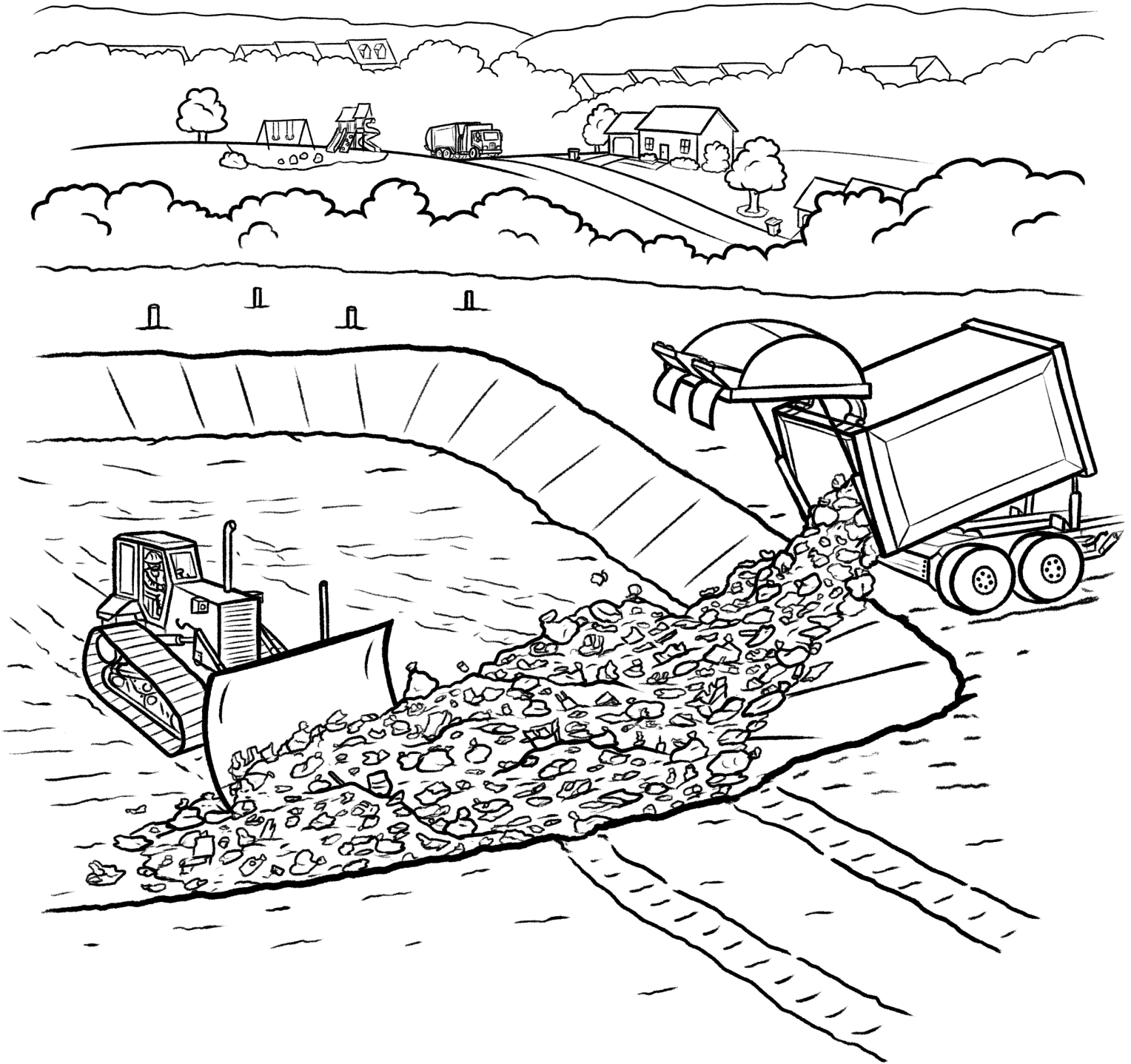
No matter how you recycle, **clean** all items first.

My recycling is:

single stream dual stream drop off

(Check your municipality's website and circle your answer above)

What happens to the trash we **throw away**?

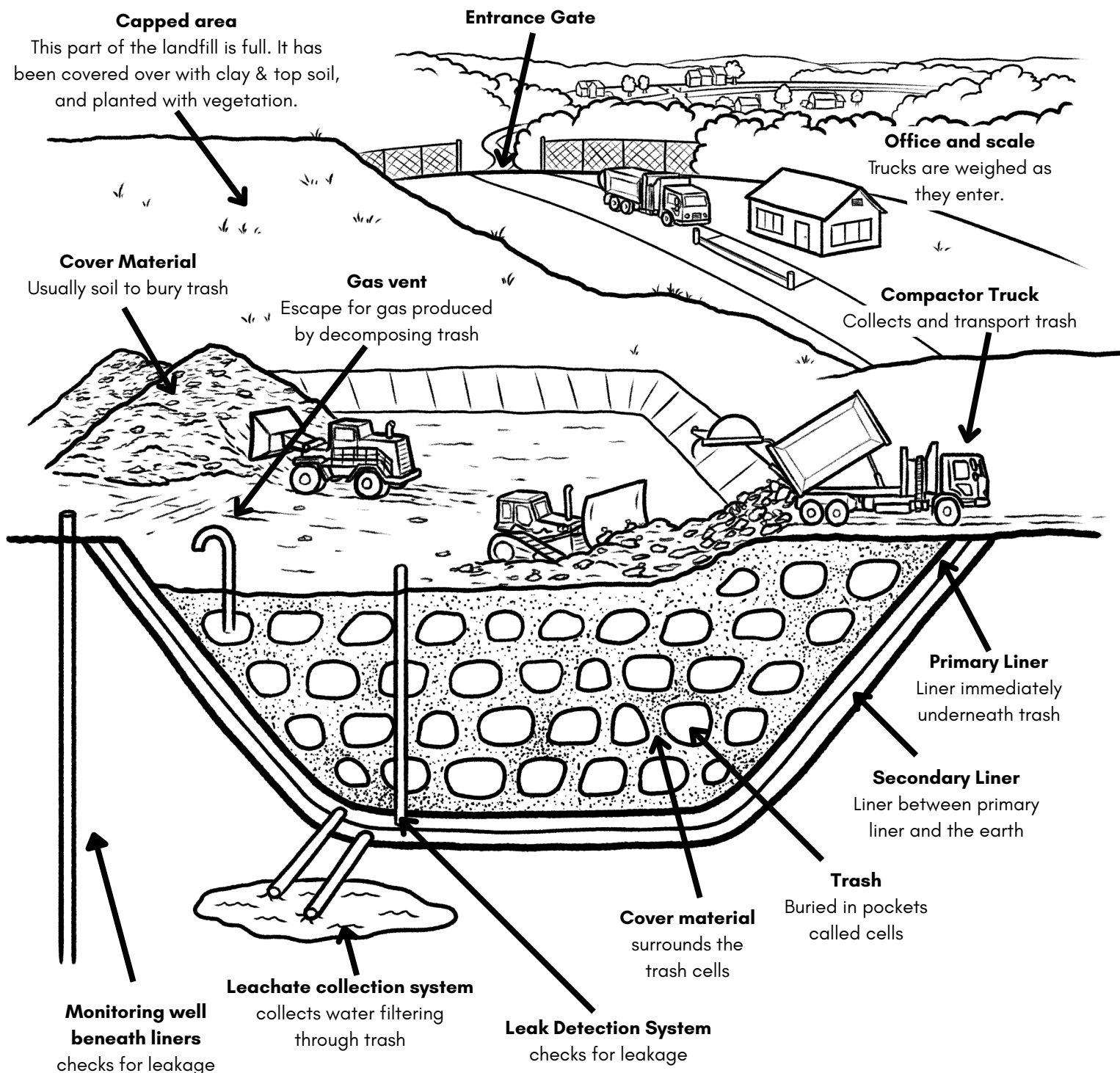


When we put trash out for collection or in a dumpster, it is usually picked up by workers and carried away in a truck. Today, most trash is buried in landfills, where it takes a **long** time to decompose. That's not all! Landfills must be **maintained** long after being filled.

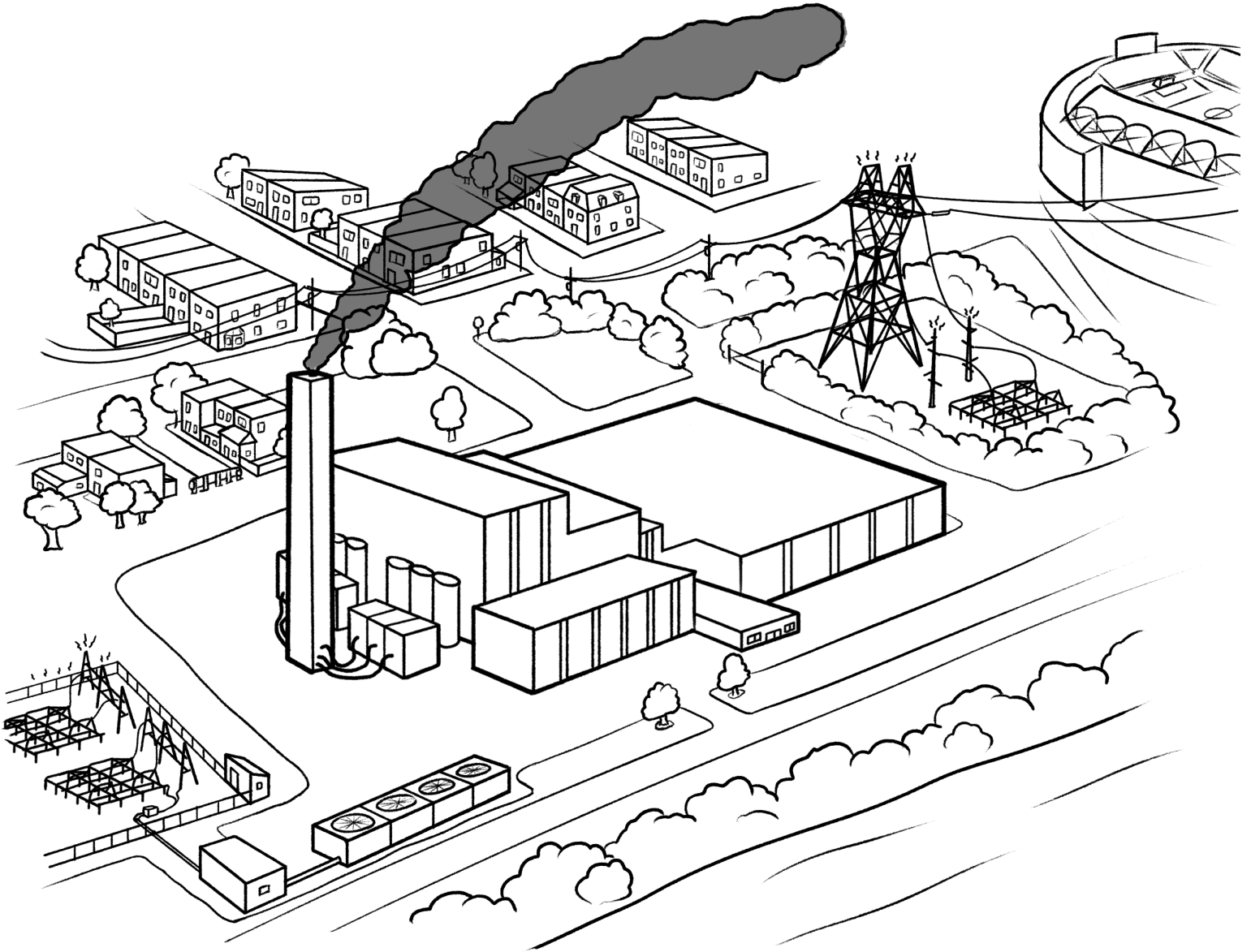
A **landfill** is a large area of land that is dug out and lined with clay or plastic to prevent pollution.

Heavy equipment compacts each new layer of trash, and then covers it with soil.

Check out the cross section of a typical landfill:

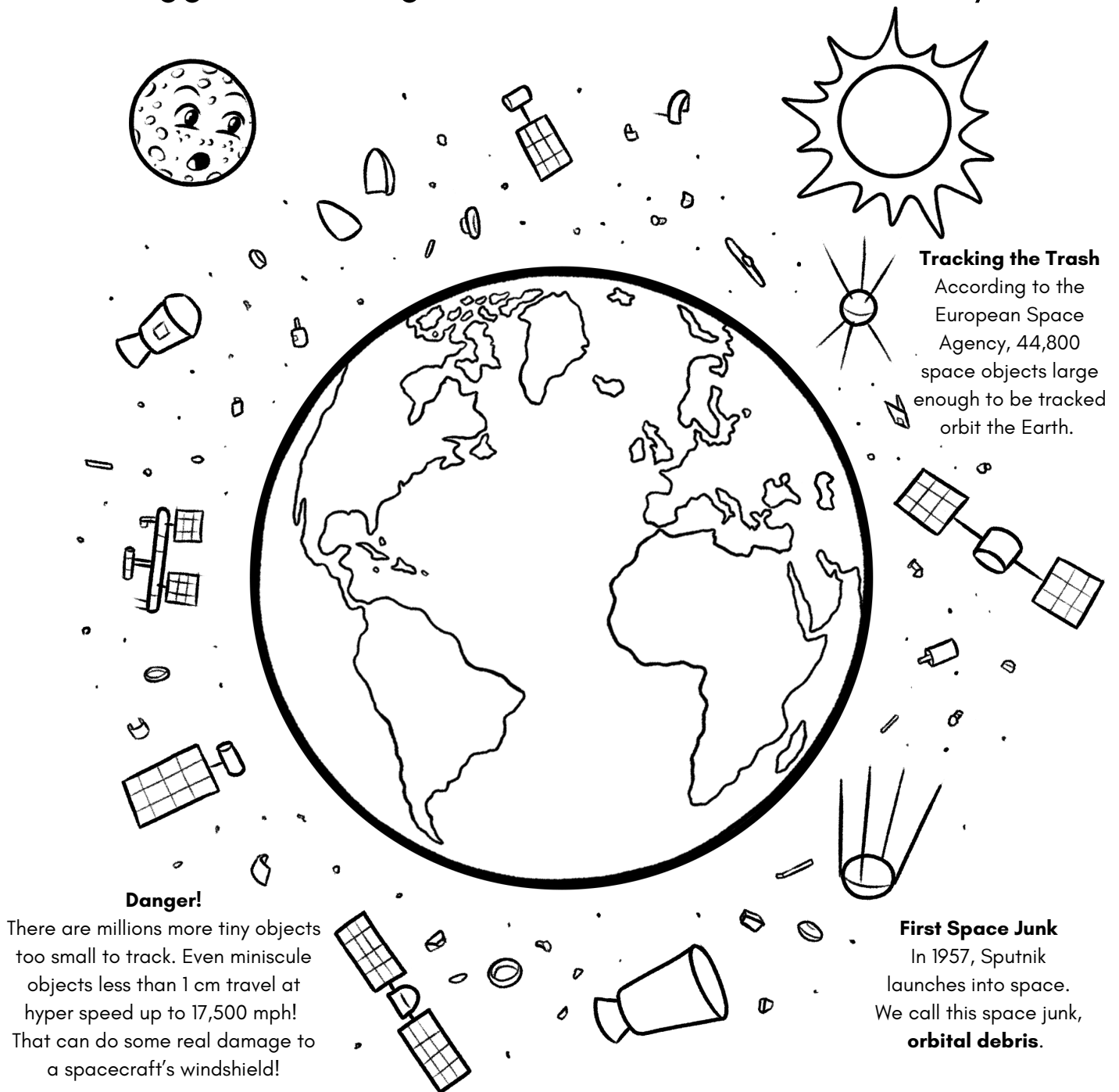


Other trash is burned at special incinerators called **resource recovery facilities**. Resource recovery facilities have furnaces that burn trash at a very high temperature to make steam and generate electricity.



Every method we now use to dispose of our trash has some limitations. For example, incinerators can reduce the amount of waste sent to landfills, but they also release pollutants into the air, negatively affecting air quality and human health, which is why regulators monitor emissions. We must find cleaner, more sustainable ways to manage waste. This makes it more important than ever to...**Think before you toss.**

Scientists agree there will always be some kind of trash. The biggest challenge will be how to control it safely.



Today there is even trash in outer space!

Thousands of pieces of old rockets and satellites orbit the earth. They must be carefully tracked so they do not damage new space equipment.

No volunteer group can go into space and clean up this trash.

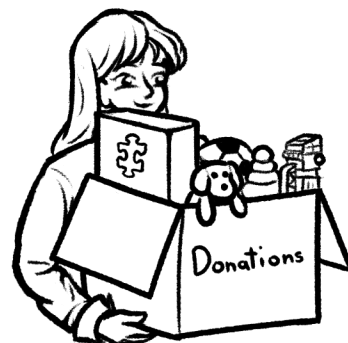
It will remain a problem to be solved in the future.

How can **YOU** make a difference today?
What can you do at home, in school, and in your community?

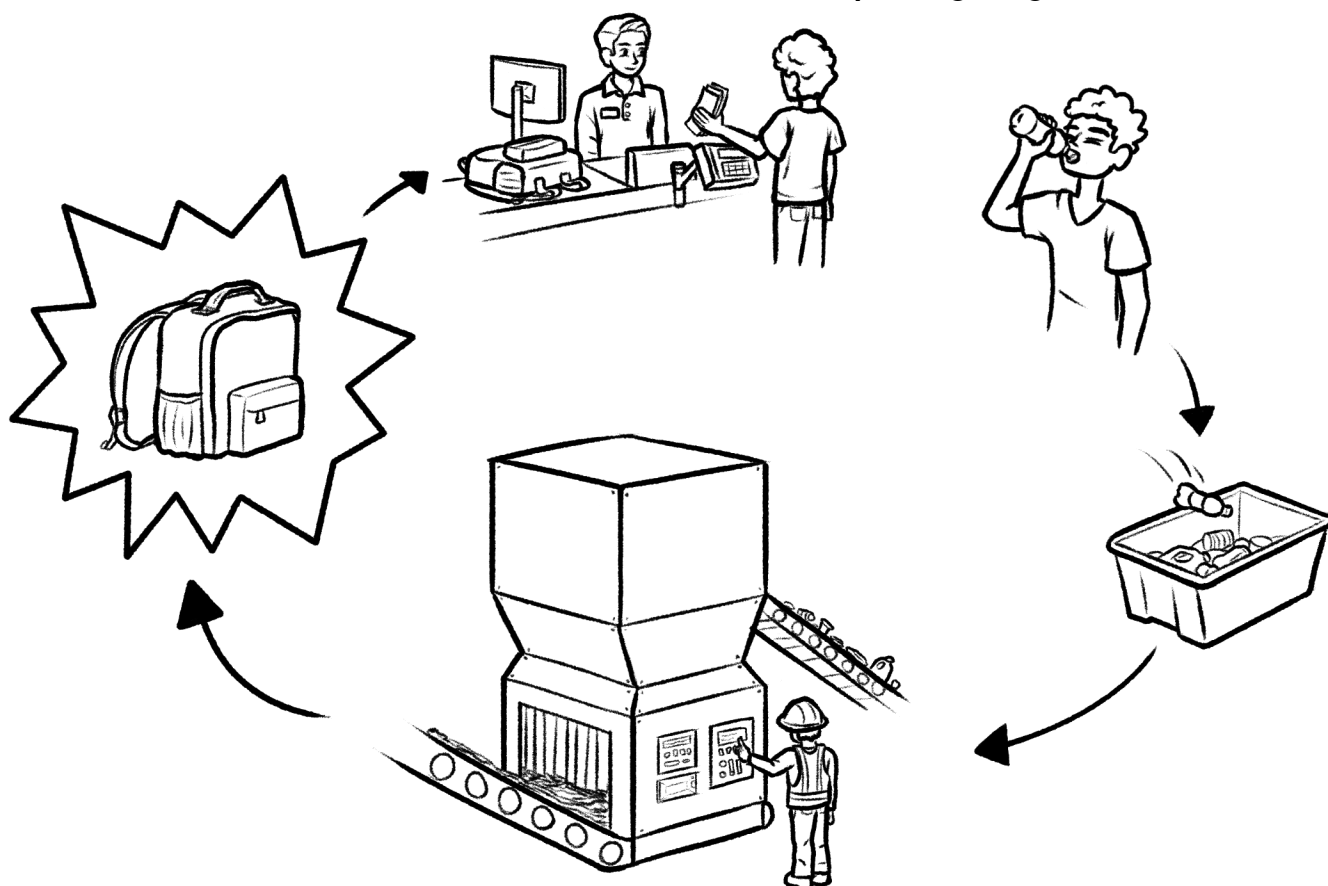
Think
before you toss.



Care
about what you do with things
you no longer need or want.



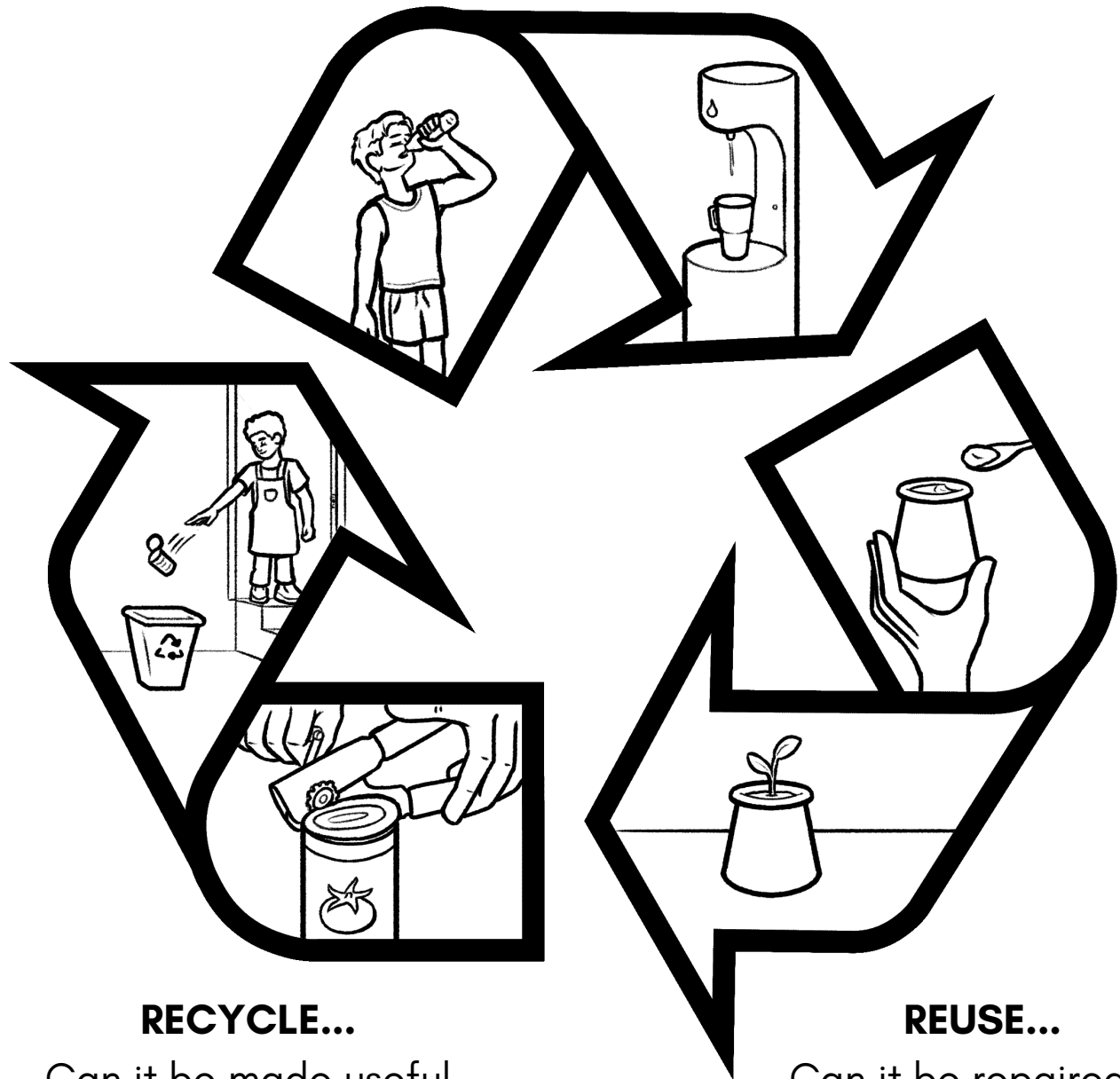
Buy recycled products
and products that can be recycled. Read
labels and look for recycling logos.



This recycling symbol is called the **mobius loop**. It means the item could be recycled (*but you still need to check your municipality for what items they will take.*)

REDUCE...

How can we use less materials so we can stop adding waste?



RECYCLE...

Can it be made useful again and again?

REUSE...

Can it be repaired or used in a different way?

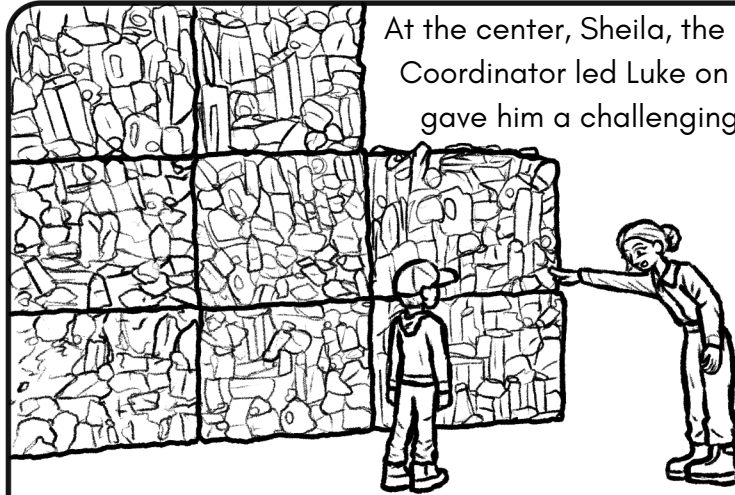
When a number is inside the loop, it tells you what type of plastic it's made of. Some plastic is easier to recycle than others.

The Recycling Ambassador

For his 10th birthday, Luke from Fayette County asked his mom for something truly unique...



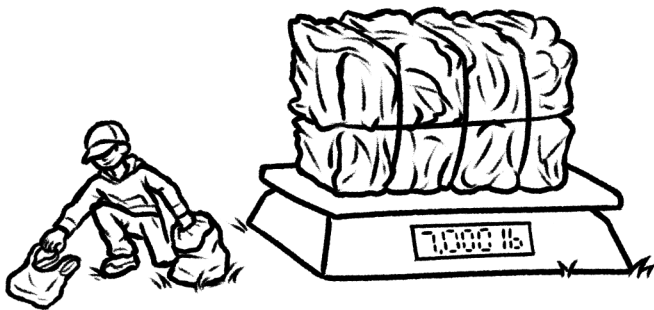
to tour his local Recycling Center!



At the center, Sheila, the Recycling Coordinator led Luke on a tour & gave him a challenging task...

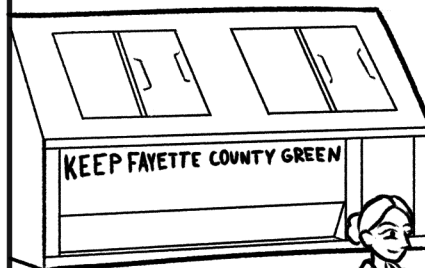
collect **1,000 bags** as part of the Nex-Trex Challenge.

In just 4 months, Luke reached his goal. Then, he went on to do something unexpected... he kept going!



He collected over 7,000 pounds of plastic film!

Luke's dedication inspired others to recycle and care for the environment.



"In recognition of your outstanding achievement, we're naming you Fayette County's Recycling Program Ambassador!"



Protecting Lake Erie



"We need a way to stop trash from entering Lake Erie!"

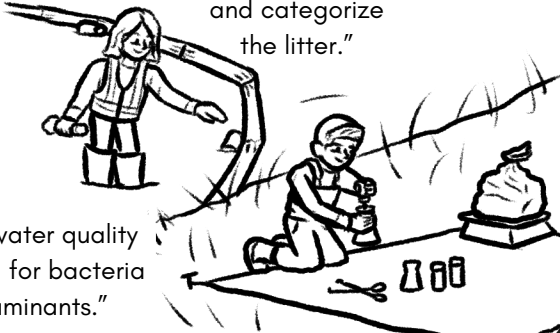
Litter control booms are floating barriers that capture trash and make cleanup much easier!



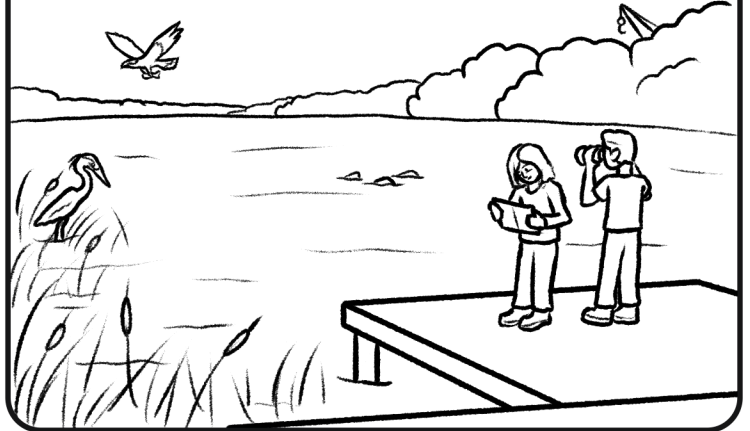
College students from the Regional Science Consortium at Tom Ridge Environmental Center monitor the sites and gather valuable data.

"Let's count and categorize the litter."

"I'm testing water quality and checking for bacteria and contaminants."



The data helps researchers understand how litter affects our waterways, how effective the booms are, and how to stop pollution at its source.



City of Lancaster - River Connections

Storm drains connect our streets to our waterways by carrying rainwater (but sometimes litter comes along for the ride).

"We're turning people's river stories into art for all to see."



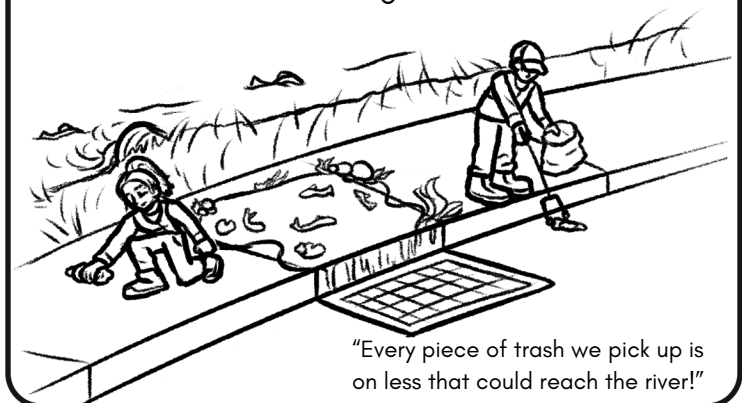
Storm drain murals help us see the connection between our neighborhoods and the Conestoga River.



Rain can carry litter through storm drains and into our waterways.



Through storytelling and public art, River Connections helps residents become stewards of the river while honoring the history and communities that have long been connected to it.



"Every piece of trash we pick up is on less that could reach the river!"

As our world becomes more crowded, the best way to conserve our **natural resources** is to use our imaginations and change the way we live.



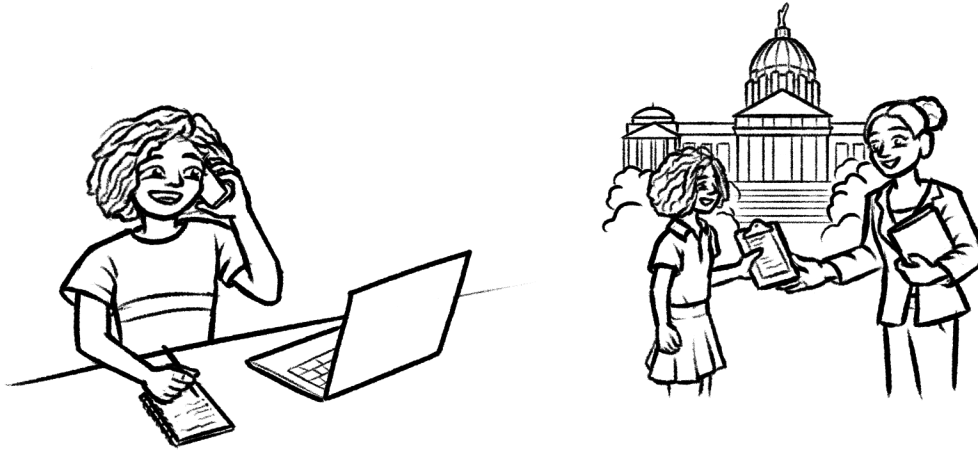
Think before you toss.

Open your eyes to litter.

Open your *mind* to thinking and caring about our environment.

Working together, we can help make less trash and keep tomorrow's world litter free!

What Happens to **YOUR** Trash After You Toss?



Research the answers to these questions to find out how **your community** deals with its waste:



Is my community required by law to have **waste pickup**?



Who are the **waste haulers** in my community?



Does my community have a designated **recycling coordinator**?



What does my community collect for **recycling**?



Where do **recycled** items first go? Where do they go from there?



Where does my trash go after it's picked up? Does it go to a **landfill, incinerator**, or a **resource recovery/ waste to energy plant**?



How does my community handle the items that are NOT accepted by the landfill/waste to energy plant? Are there **special collections (such as TV's)**?



How many years of landfill space are remaining at landfills used by my county? Then what will happen?

The more you **know**,
the **better choices** you can make!

Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful

105 W. 4th Street • Greensburg, PA 15601-2981



Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful would like to extend a special note of thanks to the various artists, educators and illustrators that contributed to the original PA CleanWays' Open Your Eyes to Litter series. Over one million copies of the original series were distributed to schools throughout Pennsylvania over the years and these booklets were instrumental in educating Pennsylvania's youth about litter, recycling and keeping our communities clean.

The original series was the foundation for this new Open Your Eyes to Litter series and when appropriate, the original text and illustrations were maintained or adapted. Working with Eastern Pennsylvania Coalition for Abandoned Mine Reclamation and Illustrator Brady Mock, Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful has updated the series to account for the changing environment, new environmental education standards and new types of litter.

A teachers guide, including PA State Academic Standards addressed, is available online at [keeppabeautiful.org/Programs/Education/Open Your Eyes to Litter](http://keeppabeautiful.org/Programs/Education/Open%20Your%20Eyes%20to%20Litter).

This book was created with funding from the
PA Department of Environmental Protection.



Special Thanks to Our Design Team:

Eastern Pennsylvania Coalition for Abandoned Mine Reclamation, revisions and updates
Brady Mock, illustration
Jackson Graphics, original illustration and design

Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful is a nonprofit whose mission is empowering Pennsylvanians to keep our communities clean and beautiful. For more information visit keeppabeautiful.org, email info@keeppabeautiful.org or call 724.836.4121.