JONES VALLEY TEACHING FARM

AT-HOME ACTIVITIES

Compost 101 Kindergarten – 2nd Grade

DESCRIPTION and OBJECTIVE:

Where does all of our trash go? This lesson gives your student the opportunity to explore a natural way to recycle their food scraps – rather than throwing them into the trash. Combined with the book, *Compost Stew: An A to Z Recipe for the Earth*, students also get a chance to practice letter recognition and literature comprehension before making their own Compost Stew.

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- ⇒ *Compost Stew: An A to Z Recipe for the Earth* by Mary McKenna Siddals
- ⇒ Jar or plastic container (with a lid that has holes in the top)
- ⇒ Kitchen scraps (onion skins, banana peels, egg shells, coffee grounds, etc.)
- ⇒ Leaves
- ⇒ Soil
- ⇒ Water
- ⇒ Worm or pill bug (*optional*)

LESSON / ACTIVITY:

- ⇒ Have your student use their imagination to describe their lunch experience (either from the cafeteria or from home). Have them close their eyes as a fun way to visualize their memories!
  - It could go like this: *"Think about the cafeteria, where you go to eat lunch every day at school. You get in line and you get a tray. You grab a milk and you pick a fruit, like an apple or an orange, and put them on your tray. Then you might pick a vegetable, like mashed potatoes, carrots, or broccoli. Maybe you have a hot dog or pizza. Take a deep sniff in your nose and pretend that you're sniffing your lunch tray. Now open your eyes!"*

- Ask them, “What were some things on your tray?” OR “What are some things we have eaten for lunch at home?” You can pull these items out as examples, especially if they are individually packaged or leave scraps behind (such as an apple or orange).

⇒ Follow up with the question, “What do you with everything that’s leftover when you’re finished?” → It goes in the trash!
- Explain to your student that most of their leftovers should go into the trash, but some things could be **recycled** or even **composted.**
- Specifically, leftover food scraps can often be composted – which is nature’s way of turning food scraps into healthy soil for our plants!

⇒ Read the book, *Compost Stew: An A to Z Recipe for the Earth*, with your student to identify some of the items that are needed to create compost. When you complete the book, ask your student the following questions:
- Is Compost Stew something that you would want to eat? Why or why not?
- What goes in the compost?
- What else can go in the compost other than food? → Point out that compost needs other ingredients (like leaves and paper) and critters (like insects and worms).

⇒ Gather the materials listed above and begin to make your own Compost Stew!
- Begin by adding some soil to your jar. If you choose to do so, dig around outside to find a worm or a couple of pill bugs (i.e. roly polys) to add to the soil at the bottom.
- Ask your student, “What did the “W” stand for in our book?” Wiggle your finger like a worm. “Does a worm have a small or big mouth?”
  - Have your student rip the kitchen scraps into small pieces to make it easier/quicker for the bugs to digest.
- Once the kitchen scraps are small enough, add them to the jar followed by a layer of leaves.
  - Repeat this step a couple of times to create a few layers of **brown** and **green** organic matter (reference the diagram provided below).
- Before closing the jar, add a few drops of water to moisten the soil and food scraps – for the worm and the process of decomposition!
  - Repeat this step every few days if your Compost Stew starts to dry out.
- Create a mark on the jar to signify where the compost started so that your student can track how it compresses over the next few weeks.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

⇒ Check out the links below to learn more about topics related to this activity!
- Making the Most of Compost!
- How to Compost

HOW TO MAKE COMPOST

1. Add brown material and green material in layers. Ratio of 2 parts brown to 1 part green.
2. Add water and air as needed.
3. Over time the pile will shrink as the layers are transformed into humus in a process known as decomposition.

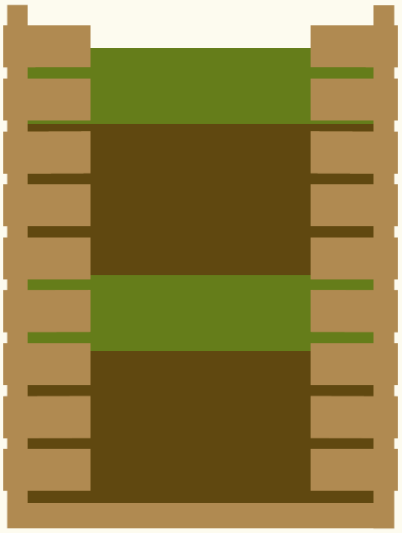
GREEN

PROVIDES NITROGEN

vegetable & fruit waste (apple cores, carrot tops, etc.)

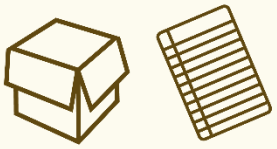
kitchen scraps (eggshells & coffee filters/grounds)

yard waste (grass clippings without seeds)



BROWN

PROVIDES CARBON



shredded cardboard & paper (without tape or chemicals)

wood shavings/sawdust

dried leaves

DO NOT ADD

weeds, plastic, dairy products, meat & bones, bread, trash, metal