

# Pick Up A New Attitude

## Understanding Litter and Littering Behavior

### Objectives

Students will be able understand why litter is undesirable, identify reasons why people litter, and develop a targeted message to change littering behavior.

### Web-Directed Research

These activities correlate with the Keep America Beautiful “Clean Sweep U.S.A.” web site ([www.kab.org/cleansweepusa](http://www.kab.org/cleansweepusa)) targeting grades 5-8, and are designed to expand on the objectives in this lesson.

1. Develop and conduct an online survey about individual littering behaviors. Create an “attitude” survey that helps to identify why people litter. What is the most common reason? Use [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com) to create a unique survey.
2. Define a public service campaign. Locate one or more campaign on the web (for example, “Don’t Mess with Texas”) and identify its primary components. Does your state have an anti-litter campaign?
3. Describe a litter “assessment,” “index,” or other tool that can be used to evaluate the litter problem in a specific location. Why might information from a litter assessment be useful?
4. Find out what is the most littered item. What percent of all litter is this item?
5. Identify the top five predictors of littering behavior. Why do people litter? Where do people litter? What do people litter?

### Web sites to consult:

- Ad Council public service campaigns ([www.adcouncil.org](http://www.adcouncil.org))
- Create an on-line attitude survey ([www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com))
- Keep America Beautiful litter prevention research and activities ([www.kab.org](http://www.kab.org))
- Organize a youth-led cleanup ([www.kab.org/youthtakeaction](http://www.kab.org/youthtakeaction))
- Texas anti-litter campaign and research ([www.dontmesswithtexas.org/](http://www.dontmesswithtexas.org/))
- Tennessee anti-litter campaign ([www.stoplitter.org/media.html](http://www.stoplitter.org/media.html))
- Louisiana anti-litter campaign ([www.keeplouisianabeautiful.org/html/media.php](http://www.keeplouisianabeautiful.org/html/media.php))
- Georgia anti-litter campaign ([www.litteritcostsyoud.org/campaign.aspx](http://www.litteritcostsyoud.org/campaign.aspx))

### In-Class Activity

#### Method

Students will discuss the types and sources of litter, evaluate the litter problem at their school or a nearby neighborhood, and then create a targeted anti-litter message/slogan.

#### Materials

A large bag of clean “litter” (paper sack, disposable cup, small glass bottle, string, snack bag, plastic six-pack yoke, balloon, orange peel, beverage can, straw)

#### Vocabulary

attitude, behavior, litter, litter prevention, littering

## Procedure

### *Background:*

The careless and casual handling of waste creates litter. Litter is blown by wind and traffic and carried by water. Once litter has accumulated, it invites people to add more. Keep America Beautiful, Inc. research has identified three attitudes that allow people to feel it is acceptable to litter:

- They feel no sense of ownership of the property.
- They expect someone else will clean up after them.
- They believe it is acceptable to litter where trash has already accumulated.

Keep America Beautiful research has identified seven primary sources of litter. Litter from motorists and pedestrians are “deliberate” acts of littering. The next five are considered “passive” forms of littering, which account for about 40% of litter.

1. Motorists (debris thrown out of car windows or left on the side of the road)
2. Pedestrians (individual littering of packaging, beverage containers, cigarettes butts, etc.)
3. Household trash at the curbside (leaving lids off trash cans; overflowing trash cans; unbundled or covered paper that blows, etc.)
4. Dumpsters used by businesses (overflowing dumpsters or uncovered trash that invites blowing and spreading)
5. Loading docks (high truck traffic contributes to litter)
6. Construction and demolition sites (debris in and around sites and blown by wind or carried by rain)
7. Uncovered trucks (trash falling or blowing off moving and stationary vehicles)

Where do pedestrians and motorists litter most?

- **Special event venues** - fairs, concerts, soccer game or other events that attract a large number of people
- **Roadways and highways** – road sides, on/off ramps, median strips, and rest stops
- **High traffic areas** – fast food businesses, convenience stores, picnic or play grounds, stadium bleachers, and other areas with a lot of foot traffic
- **Transition points** – places where someone stops eating, drinking or smoking before proceeding, such as entrances to buildings, train platforms, and bus stops

### *Procedures:*

1. Introduce the term LITTER. Lead a discussion with the students asking the following questions:
  - What is litter? Is littering accidental? (Briefly discuss “passive” and “deliberate” littering.)
  - What types of items can be litter? Have students give specific examples.
  - How do you feel about litter? Have students describe littered places they have seen and how it made them feel.
2. Take the large bag of “clean” littered items and dump them out on a table so that students can see the contents. Use the following to help them identify who and where something might be littered.
  - Where do you think these items were littered? (Go through each of the items. Consider the seven sources of litter.)
  - Select certain items and ask students who or what might be the source of the littered item. (For example, litter blown from a trash can, a motorist, a pedestrian, etc.)

- Why do you think people litter? (Introduce three attitudes described in “Background” information. Reasons might include, “no trash can;” “trash can too far away;” “trash can full;” “doesn’t care;” “custodian will pick trash up;” “other people litter;” etc.). Students may want to recall a time when they littered and examine why.
3. Introduce the term LITTER PREVENTION and ask students to explain what it means. Although communities must periodically pick up litter, the real solution to the litter problem is to prevent LITTERING in the first place. Tell the class that they will be creating a litter prevention slogan targeting a specific type of litterer or littering behavior.
  4. Break students up into teams of 4-6. Based on their understanding of the attitudes behind why people litter, have student teams create a litter prevention message/slogan and perhaps a visual that will attract attention and target a specific attitude or littering behavior (for example, “everybody else does it,” or “the custodian or somebody else will just pick it up,” etc.). For other ideas, see “Enrichment”.
  5. Have students present their campaign slogans/visual to the class and explain how they came up with the message, the attitude they hope to change, and a defense of why their “slogan” will be effective.

### **Assessment**

- Have students define litter, describe reasons why people litter, and where items are most likely to be littered. Students should also be able to explain why their “slogan” or litter prevention message will be effective.

### **Enrichment**

- Run a litter prevention slogan and poster contest in the school. Display entries to businesses and the public during a litter prevention awareness day.
- Before developing a campaign slogan, have students assess the litter problem at the school (playground, area around bleachers, courtyard, etc.) or in a nearby neighborhood (have an adult or teacher accompany the students). Student teams can use the “Visual Litter Assessment” (below) to help them evaluate the amount of litter, where litter is found, what is being littered, and who is doing the littering.

# Visual Litter Assessment

Team \_\_\_\_\_

Location \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

1. Take a good look at the area and determine as a group how "littered" it is based on the scale below (circle your choice):

No litter      Slightly littered      Littered      Extremely littered

**No litter** = virtually no litter can be observed

**Slightly littered** = upon careful inspection, a small amount of litter is observed

**Littered** = visible litter is easily seen throughout the area

**Extremely littered** = a continuous amount of litter is observed, some large enough to require equipment or extra manpower to remove (e.g. white goods, construction debris, abandoned vehicles, etc.)

2. Is there one or more trash can or a recycling bin in the area?

3. What is being littered? Is there one item that stands out as being most of the litter?

4. Who do you think is doing the littering?

5. Why might someone litter in this location?

6. Where is most of the litter?

7. Who is in charge of the area/location?

8. Describe anything else you think is important about the litter conditions in this location.