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"Helping Nebraskans enhance their lives through research-based education."

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In This Issue

Farm Views	2
Urban Agriculture	3
Food & Fitness	4
Family Living	5
Horticulture	6
Environmental Focus	7
4-H & Youth	8-9
Community & Home Living	10
Miscellaneous	11-12

2003
LANCASTER COUNTY FAIR



View county fair photos on page 12 of this issue. More photos and 360-degree panoramics are online at lancaster.unl.edu/4h/Fair.

Lessons Learned Through Garbology

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Extension Associate

Trash! Trash! Trash! It's everywhere! In Lincoln, each person generates around 4.5 pounds of garbage per day. This includes all paper, table scraps, plastic, glass and more. Loads of these items go to the Bluff Road landfill. And — it is filling up. It is estimated the landfill will be full by 2024.

What can we do differently? Are there other options? Lancaster County second graders are finding out. They are learning to reduce, reuse and recycle through the 4-H School Enrichment Garbology program.

Garbology: a Waste-Watchers Guide is a curriculum and kit with hands-on activities developed in 1990 by several local organizations, including UNL Cooperative Extension in Lancaster County. Garbology is included in the Lincoln Public Schools (LPS) science curriculum as a core subject for second grade and also is taught in many other Lancaster County schools.

In the fall of 2001, Lois Mayo, LPS Science Curriculum Specialist, Gene Hanlon, City of Lincoln Recycling Coordinator and I decided Garbology needed to be updated. With the help of LPS teachers, we completely revised it. New activities were tested and set to the Nebraska and National Learning Standards of Excellence. Six LPS teachers and their students piloted the program during the 2001-2002 school year. After some revisions, the curriculum was finalized.

The next step was to create 50 learning kits — one for each LPS second grade classroom and a few to be rotated among other Lancaster County schools. The kits contain supplies and materials for all activities included in the curriculum.

Each kit contains a 4.5 pound bag of clean garbage. This meant 225 pounds of garbage needed to be collected, cleaned and sorted! I chose items that could be reused or recycled, but added things that only could go to the landfill, such as broken toys. Of course, I didn't include glass because of safety concerns.

Then, purchasing and gathering the supplies and materials for the kits took an amazing amount of time. For example, I purchased 650 cotton towels and extension staff member Chuck Jungbluth constructed 200 screens and 200 frames for the papermaking activity. The kits contain everything from books to sponges, from soil to cereal. At completion, each kit has about a \$250 price tag. But it's worth it! Each youngster in Lancaster County has a chance to make a difference in solving the solid waste problem.

After kits were delivered to schools in the fall of 2002, Lois and I trained 130 LPS teachers and administrators to use the Garbology teacher's guide. We explained, directed and demonstrated activities from the curriculum. Teachers also were invited to schedule an introductory presentation for students. In teaching this lesson, I introduce youngsters to garbage, the



Arlene Hanna (shown at top) and Lois Mayo held a teacher's training to teach LPS teachers to use the new Garbology teacher's guide.

landfill and more.

It's a delight to watch young minds come up with creative answers when I ask how we can reuse an item. When asked how to reuse an old shoe, one student suggested we fill it with dirt and plant flower seeds. Another suggested using it for a dog toy. Still another wanted to use it to hold his marbles.

Teachers usually spend about 15 classroom hours teaching the Garbology unit. In that time, students learn to identify garbage as natural or manufactured, to describe how garbage impacts the environment and to describe ways to reduce, reuse and recycle.

Parents report their children are checking the codes on plastic bottle at home. In fact, students are teaching their families to recycle. "Reducing, reusing, recycling has become a family project," says Georgia Ross. "We recycle aluminum, paper, plastic and cans. We've learned how to prepare plastic for recycling and so have the neighbors."

In the culminating activity in Garbology, students apply the scientific process to a reducing, reusing or recycling issue at school. By observing their classroom or other areas in their school, students may realize reducing, reusing or recycling problems exist.

At the end of the unit, LPS tests each second grader on the information learned from the program.

Lois Mayo says, "The new Garbology curriculum and kit are having a tremendous impact on the LPS second grade recycling unit. The guide is teacher-friendly and closely correlates with the LPS science curriculum. The wide variety of materials in the kit, the relevant

activities, the printed resources and the videos support the curriculum and make it truly come 'alive.' Students are learning to become responsible stewards of the environment by practicing the 3 R's: Reduce, Reuse, Recycle."

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Lois Mayo, LPS Science Curriculum Specialist



The Garbology kits include a 4.5 bag of garbage. 225 pounds of garbage had to be collected, cleaned and sorted for 50 kits.

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