



SSHEAN

*Social Studies & History Education
in the Anthropocene Network*

“War Junk”

Thinking Critically about Waste in the Past, Present, & Future

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Lesson Challenge

In this lesson inspired by Alex Souchen’s book, *War Junk*, students will learn about waste and imagine the transition to a more sustainable use of materials and objects in the future.

Students will explore how the value of materials and objects changes over time, and is unique to different people, by considering historical examples of how people dealt with waste in postwar Canada.

In groups, students will brainstorm possible ways to reuse, recycle, and upcycle fossil fuel-powered vehicles and their parts in the future.

The accompanying materials for this lesson include: a Lesson Plan (this document) for teachers, a Slideshow, and an Activity Sheets package for students.



Inquiry Question

How can learning about the past help us imagine possible uses for future waste?

Lesson Details

Grade Level

- Grades 9-12 and postsecondary (ages 14+)

Subject Areas

- Social studies (history)
- Environmental studies
- Science & technology

Duration

- 60-75 minutes

Learning Objectives

- Students will learn:
 - to identify examples of reusing, recycling, and upcycling materials and objects considered to be waste.
 - to consider how the value of materials and objects changes over time, and is unique to different people depending on their circumstances.
 - to understand how historical examples can help us better deal with waste today and in the future.
 - to work in a group to imagine transitions to a more sustainable use of materials and objects in the future.

Background Knowledge

- Consider what your students have previously learned about:
 - The meaning of waste and its forms, functions, and values.
 - The different ways of dealing with waste, including reusing, recycling, and upcycling.
 - The history of the Second World War on Canada's home front and postwar Canada, including the social and economic conditions of the time.

Vocabulary

Waste

Refers to materials and objects that are considered to be no longer useful, valuable, or required.

Reuse

Using what materials and objects you have available, for similar purposes; using them carefully and not wastefully. May also be called "thrift."

Recycle

Breaking waste into parts and converting it into something new; the value does not necessarily change.

Upcycle

Creative reuse of waste; transforming it into something new, of greater quality and value.



Summary of Activities

1. Consider ways to determine if something is waste, by asking questions about an object's form, function, and value.
2. Consider how an object's value can change over time, and be unique to different people depending on their circumstances.
3. Examine historical examples of how waste was reused, recycled, and upcycled.
4. Identify ways to reuse, recycle, and/or upcycle different forms of waste in the past, present, and future.
5. Reflect on waste in the past, present, and future.

Considerations for Creating a Positive Learning Environment

Teachers are encouraged to consider the following while implementing this lesson:

- Consider allowing students to form their own groups to imagine possible ways to reuse, recycle, and upcycle vehicles and their parts.
- Encourage students to delegate group members to record ideas on different areas of the graphic organizer for Activity Sheet 2.

Accommodations

- Provide verbal image descriptions for visually impaired students.
- Allow students to verbally complete the Activity Sheets.
- Allow students to complete the group activity individually.

Criteria & Concepts

Recommended Criteria

- Reuse
- Recycle
- Upcycle

Historical Thinking Concept(s)*

- Continuity and Change

* Seixas, P. & T. Morton. (2013). *The big six historical thinking concepts*. Nelson. www.historicalthinking.ca



Lesson Activity

In this activity students will learn about waste and imagine the transition to a more sustainable use of materials and objects in the future. They will consider historical examples of how people dealt with waste in postwar Canada, and then work in a group to brainstorm possible ways to reuse, recycle, and upcycle fossil fuel-powered vehicles and their parts in the future.

Setting Up the Activity

Begin by moving through slides 2-6. Introduce the concept of waste and questions students can ask to determine if something is waste. Use the callout on slide 3 to lead a short discussion about students' own definitions and examples of waste in their everyday lives. When discussing how the value of objects is unique to different people depending on their circumstances, use the example of the cardboard box on slide 4. Explain how someone who is moving might find the box more valuable, whereas someone else might consider it waste because the box has fulfilled its purposes (e.g., packaging). To assist with this discussion, use the scale (double-sided arrow) on slide 5 and have students provide a rationale for where on the scale they might land (towards valuable or waste) in answer to each question. Begin with the "cardboard box for someone who is moving" example. Then have students think about how their answers might change over time or in different circumstances (e.g., a wet or broken box, purchasing or sending something, etc.). Consider adding to the statistics on slide 6 with some from your local community.

Refer to slides 7-9 to explain how people dealt with waste in postwar Canada, as examined by Alex Souchen in the book *War Junk*, and then draw connections to our need to deal with waste today. Use slide 9 to define key vocabulary that will be used throughout the lesson and activities: reuse, recycle, and upcycle. Allow students the opportunity to practice identifying examples of these three terms by posing the question at the bottom of slides 10 and 11.

Examine "Example 3: Barnyard Bomber" (slide 12) and then describe how some objects (e.g., aircraft, other vehicles) are made of many parts, which can be separated and valued/used on their own (slide 13). Students will complete Activity 1 (slides 14 and 15) by filling in the chart on Activity Sheet 1. Once students have identified ways to reuse, recycle, and/or upcycle each of the three different aircraft parts, take up some of the ideas provided on slide 15 as a class.

Explain the historical thinking concept "continuity and change," referring to slides 16-18, and how each guidepost relates to the lesson (Guidepost 1: there are both continuities and changes in the form, function, and value of materials and objects over time; Guidepost 2: postwar Canada and climate change can be considered turning points in dealing with waste; Guidepost 3: the concept of progress and decline can also be applied to materials and objects). Set up the next activity by considering the image on slide 19, and comparing the change in value of planes and vehicles over time.

Estimated Time

- 60-75 minutes

Required Materials

- Slideshow
- Activity Sheets
- Electronic devices



The Activity

1. Begin by presenting students with the scenario on slide 20, and pose the two questions.
2. Allow students to form groups of 3-4 members, and pass out Activity Sheet 2 to all groups.
3. Instruct students to begin by discussing the different parts and materials that make up a vehicle today (e.g., engines, seats, windows, electrical wiring). Consider compiling a list as a class and display it somewhere in the classroom for all groups to see.
4. Encourage students to use their imagination to think of possible ways to reuse, recycle, and upcycle vehicles and their parts. Circulate around and guide each student to record ideas in a different part of the graphic organizer. Students may record words and/or drawings as part of their brainstorm.
5. Ask each group to present their favourite ideas to the class, with a rationale describing how the idea fits under “reuse,” “recycle,” or “upcycle.”
6. Provide students time to reflect on the Thinking Questions (slide 23) and discuss as a class.

Extension

Invite students to research real-life examples of reusing, recycling, and upcycling vehicles and their parts. They may collect photographs and website links.

Consider having students choose from a list of options (e.g., planes, food, clothing, plastic bottles) to complete the activity. This approach may require students to complete additional research.



References & Further Reading

- Hird, M.J. (2021). *Canada's waste flows*. McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Humes, E. (2013). *Garbology: Our dirty love affair with trash*. Penguin.
- Seixas, P. & Morton, T. (2013). *The big six historical thinking concepts*. Nelson.
- Souchen, A. (2020). *War junk: Munitions disposal and postwar reconstruction in Canada*. UBC Press.
- The Conference Board of Canada. (2008). Municipal waste generation.
<https://www.conferenceboard.ca/hcp/municipal-waste-generation.aspx>

