Away with Waste!

Listen to a rhyming story to find out about sources of water pollution.

Objectives: Describe some of the ways people pollute waterways. Describe some of the effects of water pollution.

Ages: Primary and Intermediate

Materials: • story on page 60 • drawing paper • crayons or markers • construction paper (optional) • stapler (optional) • glue (optional) • copies of page 60 (optional)

Subjects: Science, Language Arts, and Art

By listening to a rhyming story about water pollution in one community, your kids can discover how pollution can affect waterways. They’ll also discover that the waste we wash “away” can have harmful effects later on.

Before reading the story, ask the kids to name some of the ways they use water. (for drinking, bathing, brushing teeth, cleaning clothes and dishes, and so on.) Then ask them what happens to the water that drains out of their washing machines and dishwashers or washes down their sinks. (Don’t worry whether the kids know the answer at this point.) You’ll be discussing what happens to household water with them after they hear the story.) Explain that many people never think about what happens to the water they use in their households each day. They also don’t think about what happens to the water that runs off their streets and yards.

Now tell the kids you’re going to read them a story about a town called “Away” and about how people in the town polluted the water in a nearby bay without realizing what was happening. Tell the kids to listen carefully to the story to find out just how the water in the bay became polluted. Also tell them to listen for the word “away.” Each time they hear it they should make a “hitchhiking” motion over their shoulder with their thumb to represent something going away.

After you read the story, discuss it with the kids. Ask them if waste from Away simply disappeared. (No.) What happened to the waste? (It ended up in the bay.) Then go over the verses in the first half of the story to be sure the kids understood what was happening in each one. Use the information under “Where Did It Go?” below to help with the discussion.

Afterward pass out crayons or markers and drawing paper and have the kids draw pictures of the story. They might draw the people in the town, the bay when it was polluted, or the bay when it was cleaned up. If you’re working with older kids, you might want to have them create their own picture books of the story. Pass out copies of page 60 and have the kids draw a picture to go along with each verse of the story. Then have them glue their pictures on sheets of construction paper, copy the words of each verse onto the pages, and staple the pages together.

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WHERE DID IT GO?

Down the Drain: When most people in the U.S. rinse something down their drain, flush their toilet, or do a load of wash, the wastewater goes to sewage treatment plants to be purified. These plants remove dirt, biodegradable material such as food waste, and many other pollutants from the water before the water is dumped into waterways. They also treat the water to kill harmful bacteria and viruses. But most plants can’t remove all the chemical pollutants. For example, chemicals that are used in paint thinners and phosphates that are used in many detergents pass right through some sewage treatment plants.

Off the Streets: Oil, dirt, litter, and anything else that’s on the streets washes into storm drains. In most areas of the country, these drains empty into a series of underground pipes that eventually dump directly into waterways.

Industrial Pollution: Factories that make chemicals, paper, medicines, steel, and many other products can create a lot of pollutants. At one time, industries could legally dump waste into waterways. But pollution-control laws now limit the materials that industries can dump into surface water. These controls have greatly reduced water pollution. However, not all the types of industrial waste are regulated. In addition, some experts feel that some of the regulations are not strict enough to protect aquatic systems.

Trash the Water: When trash gets thrown overboard it can create an ugly mess—both in the water and on shore after it’s washed up. Trash can also harm or even kill wildlife. For example, thousands of sea birds and marine mammals die each year after eating or becoming entangled in plastic debris floating in the ocean.
A WAY ON THE BAY

This is the tale of a town called Away—
A town that was built on the shore of a bay,
A town where the folks didn’t think much about
What they dumped in their water day in and day out.

For one thing, a sink was an excellent place
To get rid of messes and not leave a trace.
Cleansers and cleaners and yesterday’s lunch
Went away down the drain with a gurgly crunch.

At everyone’s house there was laundry to do.
Day after day, how those laundry piles grew!
Load after load was washed, rinsed, and spun
And away went the water when each load was done.

On Main Street each day there were sidewalks to sweep.
The litter and dirt were swept into the street.
And then when it rained, everything washed away
Into drains in the roads that dumped into the bay.

A mill there made “stuff” for the town folks to use.
But a pipe from the mill churned out oodles of ooze.
And the ooze, well it goosed from the pipe to the bay.
Where it bubbled and glubbed as it drifted away.

When the weather was warm, it was always a treat
To sail on the bay and bring picnics to eat.
But when folks were finished, they’d toss all their trash
Overboard and away with a plop and a splash.

Then folks started seeing that things weren’t quite right.
The bay had become an unbearable sight.
Beaches were covered with garbage and glop
That rolled in with the waves—and the waves didn’t stop.

The fish in the bay all seemed sluggish and sick,
The algae was everywhere—slimy and thick.
The birds near Away were all suffering too,
’Cause the fish they were eating were covered with goo.

So a meeting was called to discuss the sick bay.
And townspeople came from all parts of Away.
And during the meeting one person proclaimed,
“I know who’s at fault: We all should be blamed.”

“For years we’ve washed chemicals, dirt, and debris
Down our sinks, off our streets, and out pipes—
so you see.
Although we all thought that our waste went away,
It all ended up going into the bay.

“Now the bay is a mess—full of trash, soap, and goop.
The water’s turned green—like a bowl of pea soup.
And our wildlife is sick from the garbage and grime;
The bay needs our help, right now while there’s time.”

The folks were all silent—they knew it was true.
And they realized now what they all had to do.
It was time to get busy—the bay couldn’t wait.
If they didn’t act now, it might soon be too late.

So they signed an agreement that very same minute
To care for the bay and to stop putting in it
The stuff that had made the bay icky and ill.
Like soaps that pollute and the ooze from the mill.

They also agreed to stop dumping their trash
Overboard and away with a plop and a splash.
And all of their efforts have been a success:
Today the bay’s clean and no longer a mess.

And that is the tale of the town called Away—
A town where the people, to this very day,
Remember a saying that’s simple and plain:
Nothing just goes away when it’s washed down the drain.
Away with Waste

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