



America Recycles Day: Recycling in Our Schools

November 15, 2022 by Educator Barnes

Turn it off. Turn it off.

Running water.

Turn it off. Turn it off.

Save the power.

Turn it off. Turn it off.

Running water.

Turn it off. Turn it off.

Save the power, yeah.

Turn it off when you brush.

It's a five-gallon rush.

Get the lights and TVs

Don't forget the CDs

Turn it off.

Above is an excerpt from the song "Turn It Off." Based on the line "Don't forget the CDs," you have probably guessed this is an old song. I learned this song during elementary school in 5th grade as a member of the Harmony Club. The Harmony Club was the club you got to be in if you did not have the talent necessary to make the cut for the Minstrels. Think of us as the good 'ole hearty chorus. We sang this son in the winter musical, "It's Christmas Tree Time of the Year."

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“It’s Christmas
Tree Time of
the Year.”



The focus of the musical was reduce, reuse, and recycle. This musical took place in 1993. During that time, “Captain Planet and the Planeteers” was a popular show. It aired from 1990 until 1996. Captain Planet’s executive producer Barbara Pyle told Grist that the show’s mission was “to inspire and to educate the next generation of environmental activists.” How could millennials who tuned into the show in the 90s not take environmentalism seriously when the theme song had this call to action:

We’re the planeteers,

You can be one too!

‘Cause saving our planet is the thing to do,

Looting and polluting is not the way,

Hear what Captain Planet has to say:

"The power is yours!"

With President Biden declaring November 15 as America Recycles Day, I assert a call to action was launched to our nation to do a better job of taking care of the planet. Schools should be one place where students are taught to take care of the planet.

There is too much waste in our schools whether that is food, paper, or supplies. Principals are not only instructional leaders; they are also operational managers. They need to keep a good inventory of what is in the building so money is not being spent on supplies that are already present.

Teachers should also explicitly talk to students about reusing items. Some teachers put cushions on a few milk crates and set them in a reading area. When teachers teach about the importance of reducing, reusing, and recycling, they can point to this tangible example.

Food waste is also huge. Schools can participate in the food rescue initiative. The K-12 Food Rescue slogan is "Food is not trash." Students put unopened food in an area, and it is given to families who struggle with food security. Composting is another option especially if the school has a garden.

School leaders can also help implement a recycling program. The United States Environmental Protection Agency has released a toolkit organizations such as schools can use to implement recycling. This should be schoolwide. At times recycling get delegated to the students who receive special education services. Although it is great that these students are involved, recycling, reducing waste, and reusing materials should be an initiative that all students and teachers participate in.

As it is with any special day or month, it is a time to reflect, learn, and do better.