

Lesson Plan: "What a Waste"



Class Level: Senior Primary (5th / 6th Class)

Time: 50–60 minutes (can be done over two shorter sessions)

Primary Curriculum Links

SPHE (Social, Personal & Health Education)

Myself and the wider world

Appreciate how people depend on each other and on the environment.

Develop a sense of responsibility for taking care of their immediate and wider environments.

Myself and the community

Explore how decisions made locally and globally impact people and the environment.

Geography

Human environments

Explore how people interact with, use and care for the environment.

Environmental awareness & care

Recognise that people share the world with many other living things.

Learn how to reduce waste and care for the environment sustainably.

Science

Environmental awareness & care

Identify ways in which science and technology can be used responsibly to conserve resources.

Explore how human activity affects the balance of nature (food, waste, pollution).

English

Oral language: Engage in discussion, share ideas and opinions (reflection, group work).

Writing: Record plans (waste-free lunchbox), persuasive language (pitch activity).

Reading: Use texts and visuals about food waste and SDGs.

Mathematics

Number & Data: Estimate and compare quantities (food wasted locally/globally).

Problem-solving: Apply logical thinking to real-world challenges (No-Waste Lunchbox)

Cross-Curricular / Skills Links

Art: Creative design of lunchboxes/posters.

21st Century Skills: Critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication.

UN SDGs: SDG 12 Responsible Consumption, SDG 2 Zero Hunger, SDG 13 Climate Action.

Lesson Breakdown (50–60 Minutes)

Section

1. Introduction & Starter

2. Global & Local Food Waste Overview

3. SDG & Global Connections

4. Main Activity: "No-Waste Lunchbox Challenge"

5. Reflection & Plenary Wrap-Up

Time

5 mins

10 mins

5 mins

25–30 mins

5–10 mins

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Understand what food waste is and why it matters both globally and locally.
- Identify how food waste connects to climate change, hunger, and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- Take part in a fun, collaborative problem-solving activity to propose solutions.
- Begin to see themselves as active global citizens who can take small actions with big impact.

Materials Needed

Food waste facts (local & global)
SDG icons (2, 12, 13) printed or projected
A4 paper or card (for lunchbox designs)
Colouring supplies (markers, crayons, pencils)
Scissors & glue sticks (optional, if groups want to cut/paste images)
Scrap images of food items from magazines (optional extension)
Small slips of paper or post-its (for "Waste Warriors Wall")
Blu-tack / tape / wall space or large poster sheet

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Lesson Steps

1. Introduction & Starter (5 mins)

Objective: Hook the class and activate curiosity.

Ask: "Have you ever thrown food away? Why?"

Display a striking fact (on board or slide):

"Every year, each person in Ireland throws away as much food as a big farm animal – like a pig, a young cow, or even two big dogs!" (About 120kgs) (see page 5 for more facts on food waste)

Encourage reactions – "Surprised? Why do you think that happens?"

2. Global & Local Food Waste – Explained Simply (10 mins)

Simplified Key Facts:

- Worldwide: 1 out of every 3 bags of food gets thrown away.
- In Ireland: Each family throws away about €700 worth of food a year – that's a holiday's worth!
- Most wasted items: bread, fruits, vegetables, leftovers.
- It's not just wasting food – it wastes water, money, energy, and hurts the planet.

Gently invitation to spark empathy

"Some of you might know places where food is harder to get — where people grow their own, or where leftovers are never thrown away.

In Ireland, we're lucky to have full shops and fridges. But that means we have a big responsibility, too — to use food wisely, and not waste what others would treasure."

Ask students:

"Can you name one food your family might waste sometimes?"

Ask students:

"Why do you think it ends up in the bin?"

3. SDGs & Global Connections (5 mins)

Use simple visuals or printed icons of key SDGs (see page 4):

SDG

How it connects to food waste



SDG 12: Responsible Consumption

Cutting food waste helps save resources



SDG 2: Zero Hunger

Less waste = more for people who need it



SDG 13: Climate Action

Less waste = fewer harmful gases from landfills

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4. Main Activity (25–30 mins):

"No-Waste Lunchbox Challenge"

Type: Creative, problem-solving, and reflective

Goal: Create a lunchbox plan that has zero food waste

Instructions:

1. In pairs or small groups, students design a lunchbox that:
 - Uses no single-use plastic
 - Has no wasted food (e.g. leftovers, smart portion sizes)
 - Includes ideas to use food that might otherwise be binned
2. Provide paper and colouring materials.
Students label foods and add "Top Waste-Saving Tips" to their lunchbox.
3. Encourage creative thinking:
 - "Could you turn yesterday's pasta into a salad?"
 - "What could you do with a bruised banana?"

Optional Extension (if time allows):

Have each group do a 1-minute pitch:

"Why is our lunchbox the best for the planet?"

5. Reflection & Plenary (5–10 mins)

Ask:

- "What did you learn about food waste today?"
- "What's one thing you can do at home this week to waste less food?"
- "Why is this a global problem – not just a local one?"

Quick activity:

Each student writes on a slip:

"One way I'll reduce food waste is..."

Stick these onto a class "Waste Warriors Wall"

Waste Warriors Wall

Differentiation ideas:

Visual vs. Verbal Supports:

Picture cards of food items for emerging readers/EAL learners.

Written waste-saving tips for confident writers.

Choice in Output:

Option A: Draw & label a lunchbox.

Option B: Create a persuasive pitch or poster.

Support & Extension in Discussion:

Use sentence starters and prompts for support.
Ask higher-ability pupils to link food waste to SDGs/climate/hunger.

Assessment for Learning (AfL)

Starter: Thumbs up/middle/down → gauge prior knowledge of waste.

Think–Pair–Share → listen for clear links to hunger/climate.

Main Activity: Observe group work → note creativity, collaboration, SDG links.

Plenary: Exit tickets ("One way I'll reduce food waste...") → check practicality of actions.

Food Waste and the SDG's

2 ZERO HUNGER



2: Zero Hunger No → **No one Goes Hungry**

Description: Help everyone have enough healthy food to eat every day.

Action: Start a school vegetable garden and share the harvest with the community or school meals programme.

Less waste = more for people who need it

12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION



12: Responsible Production and Consumption → **Use Wisely, Waste Less**

Description: Don't waste food or things we use — reuse and recycle instead!

Action: Create a "Waste-Free Wednesday" lunch challenge in school.

Cutting food waste helps save resources

13 CLIMATE ACTION



13: Climate Action → **Protect the Earth**

Description: Help stop climate change by taking care of our planet.

Action: Organise a "Low Carbon Day" with no cars and minimum electricity use.

Less waste = fewer harmful gases from landfills

Food Waste Factsheet



Every household in Ireland is responsible for **117kgs** of food waste per year (MyWaste.ie). That is the same weight of approx. **90 pizzas**, that's a lot of food !!

We throw away almost **one-third** of the food we produce. That is more than 1 billion tons!

The food we waste is responsible for **10% of global greenhouse gas emissions**, way more than all the emissions we generate from flying and producing plastic!

Producing food requires a lot of water. To make **one burger**, we need almost **3,000 litres of water**. This means that when you throw away one burger, you waste as much water as if you would **shower for one and a half hours!**

So many people around the world do not have enough food to eat on a daily basis. In fact, almost **800 million people** are undernourished.

Just one-quarter of the food we currently waste could be enough **to feed all** undernourished people in the world.

Fruit and vegetables are the type of food that is wasted the most. Every year, we throw away nearly **half of the fruit and greens we grow**.

Too often we throw away fresh produce because it looks **"ugly"**. However, a bruise on an apple or a yellow leaf on our salad head does not immediately mean that we cannot eat them!

It might sound surprising but we actually do have **enough food** in the world **to feed everyone!** What is wrong is the way we distribute it and the food choices we make.

Sources: mywaste.ie, kids.earth.org, Bord Bia, EPA.ie
For more information and tips on how to reduce food waste see
<https://greenschoolsireland.org/food-waste-in-your-school/>