Spread the Word...Recycle!

Recommended grade level: 4 – 12
Presentation time: 3 – 5 50 minute class periods

Background
Once your paper-recycling program is off the ground, an important issue is increasing participation. Increased participation means more people are “thinking resource, not trash”. In this lesson, students will produce an informative and persuasive article on your recycling program that is ready for publication. By combining this real-world motivation with a communication arts lesson, students and your school are sure to benefit in many ways.

Goals
By the end of this activity, students will understand:
- The purpose of a written article can be to inform or to persuade
- Surveying is a method used to gather information
- Effective communication can improve the results of a project

Objectives
By the end of this activity, students will be able to:
- Identify whether an article was written to inform or to persuade
- List paper-recycling issues in your building
- Collect and quantify data to evaluate the current status of your recycling project
- Incorporate statistics into their article

Materials
Pre-Activity:
- Paper collection totals for your school for the previous 4 – 6 months
- Graph paper
- Calculators

Activity:
- Editorial sections, letters to the editor and advertisements from various newspapers and magazines
- Chart paper or chalkboard

Procedure
Pre-Activity
- Using the data, how many tons of paper are you collecting each month. Graph your results for each month and then calculate your average tonnage. Look for trends. What could be causing these trends?
  - Investigate the following:
    - How does recycling work at your school?
    - Who is involved?

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How did you find out about the program?
What do you know about it?
Help students to brainstorm:
- Why would people not recycle?
- How could the program be made more convenient/simple at home and at school?
- What other obstacles might stand in the way?
- What incentives might encourage participation?

Create a survey that includes the following types of questions:
- Who are you surveying? (students, parents, teachers, staff, community members)
- What do you want to know? Do they recycle? If yes, what do they recycle? What motivates them?
- How do they participate?
- Why? If they do not recycle through your school, why not? Do they recycle paper another way? Are they aware of your program? Do they feel recycling is important? Do they know what types of paper are acceptable? What might motivate them to get involved?

Discuss how you will conduct your survey. Look at sample surveys on overhead to get students started.
- Select a random group of students, staff and parents to survey. How many will be in each sample surveyed?
- Perhaps different groups of students could survey for different information. For example, one group only surveys students or one group only asks about paper.
- Consider ways to make your data collection more environmentally friendly: small pieces of paper, collect them right away, go into classes and take head counts, set up tables/stations and do oral surveys, use laptops. Do you need to provide incentives to get a large number of responses?

Conduct the survey. Tally the responses on chart paper or a chalkboard. Calculate percentages of common answers. Graph if possible. What trends do you see? Does this match the monthly tonnage numbers you are collecting?

Activity
- Select a variety of editorials, letters to the editor and ads from newspapers and/or magazines. Hand out several to each group of students. Ask them to read them with these questions in mind:
  - What are the elements of these types of writing? (What makes this persuasive?)
  - What opinion is being expressed? What facts are presented?
  - What words or techniques do the authors use to convince you of their opinion?
- Record answers to the questions on the chalkboard or chart paper. Look for patterns/groupings.
- Pass out the results from the survey and the graph of the monthly paper collection. Ask the students: “How can we improve our paper recycling participation?” Record all ideas on paper or board. Then ask: “What is holding us back?” Record suggestions.

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• Now ask the students to individually write an editorial (opinion article) or letter to the school community on the topic of increasing paper recycling at your school. Remind students of the following process:

1. Create a web or outline of the opinions and facts you wish to include.
2. Do you need any facts to support your position that you do not have? Conduct research, if necessary.
3. Write a rough draft.
4. Individually revise. (Look at clarity of ideas ONLY.)
5. Peer revise.
6. Re-write.
7. Individually edit. (Now look at mechanics, spelling, etc.)
8. Peer edit.
9. Create a final copy. (Word process.)

• Help students move through the writing process. Remembering that it is not linear, but circular. This means a student may revisit any of the first six steps in any order. Editing and creating a final copy are the LAST steps. Encourage students to appeal to emotions, use logical arguments, play the devil’s advocate, use persuasive language, and address objections in their writing.

Extension Activities

• Publish the results of your graph and survey in the school newspaper or create a bulletin board at the school.
• Submit your articles to your school newsletter, local journal or city paper.
• Create an ad based on your article to post in and around your school. Contact local businesses about displaying your ad.
• Switch articles with a peer. Read. Write a response to the article. Do you agree? Are there any “holes” in their arguments? What points were well made?
• Turn your article into a speech. Visit classrooms, public meetings, even the school board to share your views. Discuss how to alter your speech for different audiences.
• Turn your articles into other venues: puppet shows, plays, posters…
• After publication of your article, conduct your survey again. Has there been a change in the amount of paper collected at your school? Has there been a change in attitude or awareness?