

Timeline

Does litter that ends up on the ground disappear by itself, or does it hang around for 1 year or maybe 100 years? Use a mixed collection of litter including everything from glass to plastic, packaging, metal, newspapers and fruit peel.

1. Lay out a rope as a timeline, or draw a chalk line. Mark out several points of time along the line, showing years or centuries.
2. Work together, ideally in pairs or groups, and place the litter along the timeline according to how long they believe it takes for each item to decompose so that it is no longer visible.
3. Go along the timeline and discuss it. Have they got it right? Work through various points: for instance,

how is it that certain items disappear quicker than others. Also talk about, for example, the fact that plastic can cause harm even when it is no longer visible. Mention that the time it takes for litter to break down is not always that important. The litter is still there long enough to cause harm to the environment and animals.

4. Discuss what we can do to save the Earth's resources and reduce the quantity of litter by reusing more, recycling and making smarter choices when we shop, etc.

APPROXIMATE BREAKDOWN TIMES:

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| Plastic bags | 50–100 years |
| Chewing gum | 20–25 years |
| Cigarette butts | 1–100 years |
| Aluminium cans | 200–500 years |
| Newspapers | 6 weeks |
| Plastic bottles | 450–1,000 years |
| Balloons | 5–100 years |
| Organic material, e.g. apple core | 1 month |

