

LESSON: WATERSHEDS & THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO LITTER



Activity 1: What is a Watershed?

OVERVIEW

This activity will introduce participants to the concept of a watershed while placing a focus on their own local watershed.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

After completing this activity, participants will be able to:

- Define what a watershed is and identify what watershed they live in.
- Describe and identify the components of a watershed.
- Understand how litter might interact in a watershed.

SETUP AND MATERIALS

This activity takes approximately
30 minutes.

- Print a copy of the [worksheet](#) (or recreate your own on scrap paper) and grab a pen or pencil.
- Online map of local watersheds
 - If in Toronto, refer to the [Toronto Region Conservation website](#).

INSTRUCTIONS

- Provide participants with a copy of the [worksheet](#).

1. Introduce the concept of a watershed.

- Tell participants they're going to learn about an area that we all live in that also provides habitat for wildlife, both on land and in water. Share that it's called a **watershed**.
- Share definition of a watershed (adapted from [Toronto Region Conservation](#))
 - **Definition: A large area of land that naturally absorbs water from rain and snow before draining into a nearby waterbody like a river, stream or lake.**
- Ask participants to imagine a sink and explain it is similar to a watershed. Ask them to imagine the high parts of the sink are hills and mountains and the drain at the bottom is the river, lake and ocean that all water flows into.
- Ask participants to think about all of the different things that might be found in a watershed and to list these on page 1 of the worksheet.
 - **Prompts: Think of some examples of things that are living (e.g., people, plants, animals) and non-living (e.g., cars, parks, lakes, school, houses, industry, farms, stores, storm drains). What about "things that are big and small" or "things that move and don't move"?**

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INSTRUCTIONS (CONTINUED)

2. Now, help participants locate their local watershed.

- Using an online map, ask participants to locate which watershed they are in and then write their answer on page 1 of the worksheet.
 - If you live in the Toronto region, have a look at the interactive [Toronto Region Conservation watershed map](#).
 - For other regions, try the online search query "[your city name] watershed".
- Remind participants that even though we may not see water when we look outside our windows or walk down the street, we are always in a watershed that is connected to streams and rivers, and often a large lake and/or ocean.
- Ask participants to now draw their own watershed on page 2 of the worksheet. They can refer to the list of things they added to the worksheet for help. Think about local waterways (creeks, rivers, lakes etc), landmarks and other unique areas in their community.

3. Introduce the topic of plastic pollution and litter in watersheds.

- Ask participants to think about the different kinds of plastic they use in their everyday life and to write them down on page 3 of the worksheet.
- Explain to participants that these items can sometimes become litter, which means they can also be found in watersheds.
- On page 3 of the worksheet, ask participants to list some examples of plastic litter they have seen and where they saw it (e.g., sidewalk, street, park, storm drain, creek).
- Now introduce how litter might move within a watershed by asking participants if they've ever noticed what happens during a big rainstorm. Describe that when it rains, litter can get washed away into the street and then eventually reach a storm drain, and then eventually a waterbody such as a river, lake or ocean. Then ask if they've ever noticed what happens on a windy day. Have they ever seen a plastic bag blowing around and travelling to a new location?
- Then ask them to imagine a piece of litter and describe what might happen to it if it stays in the watershed. Write all answers on page 4 of the worksheet.
 - **Prompts: Think back to a rainstorm or a windy day, would it stay in the same spot? Is there something else that might happen?**
- Ask participants to return to their watershed drawing on page 2 of the worksheet and add different examples of litter to it.

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FINAL REFLECTION

Now that you have completed all parts of the activity, it's time to reflect back on what participants have learned.

- Have participants return to the last page of their [worksheet](#) to answer the questions below.
 - What is the nearest waterbody to where you live? This could be a creek, river, lake etc.
 - Where might an item of litter near your home end up if it is blown away by the wind? i.e. the river down the street, a nearby park and then into a storm drain, Lake Ontario, etc.

Coming up next: We'll take a closer look at watersheds and learn more about the different sources of plastic pollution in [Activity 2: Plastic in My Watershed!](#)