

Sorting Smarter

Blue Bin Inspector Challenge

THEME	Materials & Sorting	MATERIALS (Minimal Prep)
GRADE LEVEL(S)	5 – 6	3 sample Blue Bin Posters (e.g. 'Blue Bin Shuffle', 'Blue Bin Confusion', 'Blue Bin Mayhem'). Each of these represents a blue bin with 5 items showing different situations: Bin A – mostly correct Bin B – contains some contamination Bin C – almost all wrong - One Bin Inspector Worksheet per group: includes a checklist and notes to evaluate the bin contents - Pens, highlighters, or stickers - Recyclepedia access or recycling guide Optional: projector or board for discussion prompts
ESTIMATED TIME	45 – 50 minutes	
KEY TERMS	Contamination Incorrect items put into the blue bin. Accepted items What your local program allows. Rejected items Things that shouldn't be there. Sorting Putting waste in the correct bin. Material Recovery Facility (MRF) Facility that sorts recycling by material type.	

Why This Lesson Matters

Sorting mistakes can contaminate some recyclables. Students at this level are ready to think critically, question assumptions, and take responsibility. This lesson builds leadership and awareness by turning them into bin inspectors.

Learning Objectives

- Analyze the contents of a recycling, garbage, or compost bin.
- Identify sorting mistakes and explain why they matter.
- Apply knowledge of local sorting rules.
- Collaborate to develop and communicate solutions.

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Lesson Sequence

1. Hook (5 – 7 min)

Pose this question on the board: 'What's worse: throwing a recyclable in the garbage, or putting garbage in the recycling?' Let students vote, then reveal that contamination in recycling can spoil other recyclables, damage equipment at recycling facilities and cause bigger problems than missing one recyclable.

2. Mini Lesson (5 – 8 min)

Review local recycling rules using examples. Show *Recyclepedia* or a recycling guide briefly.

Explain why greasy, dirty, or incorrect items create problems:

Contamination happens when things that don't belong – like food scraps, plastic bags, or containers with leftovers – end up in the blue bin. Even though MRFs can sort out many of these mistakes, too much contamination can spoil paper and cardboard or make it harder to sort materials properly.

3. Main Activity – Blue Bin Inspector Challenge (25 – 30 min)

1. Divide students into small groups.
2. Give each a Blue Bin Poster and Inspector Worksheet.
3. Groups analyze the poster, identifying what's right, wrong, and how to fix it.
4. Students record their findings and present one or two key issues to the class.

Optional: Give a 'score' to each bin or group.

For variety, you can rotate groups through stations if space or time allows.

4. Wrap-Up (5 – 10 min)

Discuss what surprised students.

Make a class Top 3 Sorting Rules list. Ask: 'How could we help others sort better?'

Assessment / Understanding Check

- Completed worksheets
- Verbal participation during group discussion
- Class presentation or explanation of key items



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The logo for Recycle Manitoba, featuring the text "Recycle Manitoba" in white, stacked vertically, next to a light blue silhouette of the province of Manitoba.

Optional Extensions

POSTER CREATION	Students design 'Top Sorting Tips' to display by class bins.
HOME AUDIT	Students analyze their home blue bin and report back.
SCHOOL CHALLENGE	Propose improvements to the school sorting system.

Inspector Notes for Teachers:

Poster A: "Blue Bin Shuffle"

- Yogurt container, juice box, cereal box = recyclable.
- Plastic fork = garbage (not recyclable in Manitoba).
- Banana peel = compost (or garbage if composting is not available).
- This bin is "almost awesome" because most items are correct, but a couple don't belong.

Poster B: "Blue Bin Confusion"

- Empty milk jug and clean paper = recyclable.
- Pizza box greasy part = contamination (clean parts can be recycled).
- Glass jar must be empty; with food it's contamination.
- Candy wrappers = garbage.
- This bin looks like recycling but has several contaminants mixed in.

Poster C: "Blue Bin Mayhem"

- Metal can = recyclable.
- Plastic bags = garbage (bags get tangled in sorting machinery).
- Orange peel = compost, not recycling.
- Crayon = garbage.
- Styrofoam = garbage.
- This bin is a "disaster" because only one item is correct (metal can).

Blue Bin Inspector Challenge : A

Blue Bin Shuffle



Blue Bin Inspector Challenge : B

Blue Bin Confusion



Blue Bin Inspector Challenge : C

Blue Bin Mayhem



Bin Inspector Worksheet

Names:

Date:

Bin Name:

Instructions:

1. Look carefully at the bin poster.
2. Decide which items are sorted correctly and which are not.
3. Write down why incorrect items don't belong.
4. Suggest where incorrect items should be instead.

Item Review

ITEM	CORRECT OR INCORRECT?	WHY OR WHY NOT?	SUGGESTED BIN

Group Reflection

1. What was the trickiest item to decide on, and why?

2. What advice would you give to help others sort better?
