

THE HISTORY CHANNEL CLASSROOM STUDY GUIDES

Modern Marvels

Garbage

It is what we throw away and discard, what we no longer need or find useful. But garbage is more than just our discarded refuse. It is a guide to our culture, lifestyle, economics and technology. It is also the bane of our existence, for as our society becomes more high-tech and disposable, we face the never-ending problem of what to do with our garbage. How can we protect ourselves and future generations from the by-products of nuclear energy? This episode of *Modern Marvels* takes a candid look at our garbage and our lifestyles that generate it, some of the past solutions, and some of the possibilities in the future. *Garbage* would be useful for classes on American History, American culture, Ecology, Archeology, and Anthropology. It is appropriate for middle school and high school.

OBJECTIVES

Students will learn how garbage has evolved alongside society and how it is an indicator of a society's lifestyle. They will explore the problems our society faces in eliminating and storing garbage, as well as the technologies of recycling. They will also understand how decisions made today about garbage disposal will affect future generations.

NATIONAL HISTORY STANDARDS

Garbage fulfills the following National Standards for History for grades 5-12: chronological thinking, historical comprehension, historical analysis and interpretations, and historical research capabilities for era 10.

- [aesthetic](#)
- [correlation](#)
- [edict](#)
- [intermediary](#)
- [methane](#)
- [noxious](#)
- [ordinance](#)
- [salutary](#)
- [scavenge](#)
- [superlative](#)
- [toxic](#)

Discussion Questions

1. We all know what garbage is when we see it. But how would you define garbage? How might different cultures have different definitions of garbage?
2. The United States produces more garbage per capita than any other country. What does per capita mean?
3. What are some of the current methods we use to dispose of our garbage?
4. Much of our garbage ends up in a landfill. What is a landfill? What precautions are taken so landfills do not pollute the surrounding environment?
5. Humans have always created some form of garbage. When did garbage become a nuisance and a threat to public health?
6. The "sanitary idea" changed the way societies dealt with garbage. What is the sanitary idea and what caused this revolution?
7. World War II changed many things about American society, even how we deal with garbage. How and why did World War II change our methods of dealing with our refuse?

8. How does the relative affluence of the United States compound disposal problems?
9. How does garbage reveal information about a society? How do archeologists use garbage to research different cultures?
10. In 1962, Rachel Carson published her book, *Silent Spring*. How did this book change the ways in which we deal with our refuse and industrial by-products? Why was this book so revolutionary.
11. Discuss the problems of nuclear waste.
12. What is orbital debris? How does this debris create problems for spacecrafts?

Extended Activities

1. Design a plan to recycle garbage more efficiently in your community. How can you help to reduce the amount of waste our society produces?
2. Go through your garbage!! Imagine that you are an archeologist and "study" your garbage to construct a story of your lifestyle.
3. Research Rachel Carson and her book, *Silent Spring* on the Internet. Use your data to write an essay about her influence on today's' environmental activism.