

## COMPOSTING

**Age:** 2.6 and up.

### **Aims of the Exercise:**

Practical Aims:

Care of the environment. To make luscious, rich, healthy compost for Spring planting and seal the waste loop.

Developmental Aims:

Introduce the concept of the cycle of life and decomposition, confidence in contribution to that cycle, instillation of consciousness around waste production and how to curb it.

### **Preparation of the Child:**

Knowledge of the concepts of trash and recycling as well as worms and fungi, some food preparation, ideally introduced at the beginning of the school year but also an excellent activity leading up to Earth Day.

### **List of Materials:**

*Compost Stew* book by Mary McKenna Siddals and illustrated by Ashley Wolff to first introduce the concept of composting, as well as some possible ingredients to compost; a compost bin/tumbler/vermiculture enclosure in the garden; a sealable container with which to transport classroom food scraps; food scraps; a shovel or equivalent tool for mixing the compost to keep it aerated; some wood shavings/regular brown cardboard nearby to the outdoor compost; possibly some red wiggler worms and a good nitrogen source like urine.

### **Presentation:**

1. At circle time, read the story *Compost Stew* and present to the class its very own composting bucket.
2. Ask questions about what is appropriate to put into the compost. “Do we put our plastic wrappers in the compost? Do we put metal in the compost? Do we put anything into the compost that will not easily *decompose*? Does anyone know what decomposition is? It sounds a lot like compost is inside of that word, doesn’t it? Decomposition is when something made from nature breaks down and rots, like if you leave food in the car for too long and it gets stinky. The stinkyness is nature’s way of letting you know that you shouldn’t eat your sandwich anymore because it is too old and now other tiny animals like insects and things that can make you sick are eating it. Some fungi can help the process along. The earth appreciates it when we compost, and our garden does too.”
3. Then the next line of inquiry. “Have you ever heard of waste? Waste is something that people do when they don’t eat all of something or share it with someone else. Sometimes its also the parts you can’t eat.”
4. After food preparation works and lunchtime, ask “Have you been putting your food scraps in the compost?” “You have? Well, let’s look and see what’s in there.” “Oh, that looks full enough. We had better take it outside to the compost bin when we go out to play.”

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5. When leaving the classroom to go outside with the class, bring the compost bucket with you.
6. Show the children where the compost pile/heap/tumbler is. Say “That’s where our compost goes.”
7. Point to the garden and say “Our compost has lots of healthy things in it from our food, that once it has rotted can be food for plants and help them grow. We can use some of our finished compost in the spring when we plant in the garden.”
8. Carry the compost bucket to the compost bin and show melodramatically how you take off the lid.
9. Dump the compost into the bin.
10. Have the children look into the compost. Ask them what they see, hear, and smell.
11. Point to the container of wood shavings or cardboard strips nearby and put them on top of the newly added food scraps.
12. Pick up the shovel and mix the compost, or close the lid and twist the tumbler.
13. Say, with your fingers pinching your nose “We need to remember to add the wood shavings and turn the compost or else it gets *even stinkier*.”
14. Take the compost bucket from the classroom and rinse it under a hose. Say “We have to always remember to rinse the compost bucket when we’re done emptying it or else our classroom will get *very stinky*.”
15. Ask at the end of the lesson if children would like to be able to do this job.
16. Bring the bucket back inside and designate that the first volunteer who is at the top of the list will also clean the bucket as if it were a dish and let it dry out before any more scraps are placed inside.
17. Once back inside, make a rotating list so that everyone in the class gets a turn every month, as with other classroom chores. This could also be a two person job.
18. Perhaps also add the job of compost reminder, so that it gets taken out every day and all of the children doing food prep works in the Practical Life area remember to put their scraps into the bucket.



**Control of Error:**

Has the compost made it from one receptacle to the other? The child's eye.

**Points of Interest:**

The appearance and smell of the compost, the life teeming from within the compost, participation in the lifecycle.

**Language:**

"De-compostion", "compost", "worms", "fungi", "castings", "shovel", "scraps", "the cycle of life", "waste"

**Variations:**

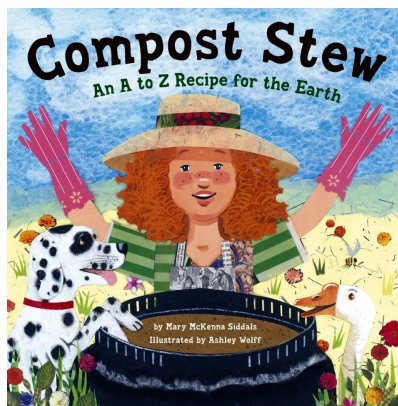
Trash and recycling chores can be introduced in a similar way.

**Extensions:**

Vermiculture (introducing a worm environment), organic gardening. Works in other areas of the classroom like a play about compost, a story about compost, a song about compost, a puppet show about compost, three-part-cards about items that go into the compost vs. items that belong in trash and recycling.

**Size of Group:** The whole class, ideally.

**Source of Exercise:** My brain. And the book



And an assignment that I was given by the administration at my last school to post these guidelines, which should be posted near the compost for adults and older children at all times, attached.

**Source of Material:** Food preparation works, local hardware or landscaping stores.

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**Additional Resources:** More age appropriate reading material on the topic can be found at <http://books.growingwithscience.com/2016/03/26/list-of-childrens-books-about-decomposition-and-composting/>

Vermont's in-school composting guide  
[http://www.cvsamd.org/uploads/6/1/2/6/6126179/do\\_the\\_rot\\_thing\\_cvsamd1.pdf](http://www.cvsamd.org/uploads/6/1/2/6/6126179/do_the_rot_thing_cvsamd1.pdf)

The book *Low Carbon Diet: A 30 Day Program to Lose 5,000 Pounds* by David Gershon.