
Is Recycling Necessary?

Segment Length: 2:35 minutes; 4:37 minutes

Videos:

“Does Recycling Actually Help?”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=osjRUodb7Q>

“Green Tyranny: Recycling”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jWbhhrRBHns>

Guide:

The questions below will help students achieve a better understanding of the arguments made on either side of a contentious topic. Because these questions often touch upon statements made briefly in the videos, we recommend reading the questions before watching each video.

Students are encouraged to take notes during the videos, and it may be helpful for students to break into groups, each taking responsibility for only a few questions, before coming together for discussion.

Analysis Questions:

1. In the first video Seeker reports that plastic bottles are easy to recycle, and recycling is more energy efficient than making a new plastic product from scratch. Based on her comments to John Stossel, how might Holly Fretwell respond to this claim?
2. Holly Fretwell points out that shipping recyclables uses energy – sometimes more energy than is saved by recycling. According to Seeker there are fewer (but larger) landfills in America now than before. How might someone extend Fretwell’s argument about recycling plants to landfills?
3. Recycling, Seeker tells us, can save resources and landfill space. How can Los Angeles demonstrate the cost of recycling?
4. Lauren Singer says she felt empowered when she discovered that she could live without producing trash. How does this relate to the reason, according to Holly Fretwell, why activists like Singer emphasize sustainability?
5. John Stossel tells Lauren Singer that there is no shortage of landfill space. Why does she still feel that living sustainably is important?
6. The Seeker video tells us that plastics, if not recycled, will sit in landfills, of which there is no shortage. Why, then, does Seeker maintain that recycling is important?

7. Seeker reports that Americans send about 40 billion plastic bottles to landfills each year, totaling about \$1 billion in plastic. Couldn't we save a billion dollars by recycling? What would Holly Fretwell say?
8. Why might the effectiveness of recycling depend on where one lives?
9. Despite plenty of landfill space Lauren Singer and Seeker hint at another reason why throwing plastic away is problematic for some. Why do some people believe it is important to reuse whatever we can?