NO PREP

Halloween and Plastic Waste

Includes: Student reading, case study, differentiated questions, teacher key

Name: Period: Date:

Halloween and Plastic Waste

The Hidden Costs of Halloween

Halloween is one of the most popular holidays in the United States, celebrated with costumes, candy, and decorations. But behind the fun is a serious environmental issue: plastic waste. From candy wrappers to disposable costumes, Halloween generates millions of pounds of trash each year. Most of this waste ends up in landfills or the ocean, where it contributes to pollution and harms wildlife. Understanding the impact of Halloween plastic waste helps students see how everyday choices affect the planet. Candy wrappers are a major part of the problem. Since most are made of plastic or mixed materials like foil and paper, they cannot be recycled in standard facilities. With billions of pieces of candy handed out each Halloween, the amount of

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The Environmental Impact of Plastic

Plastic is durable, which makes it useful but also dangerous. It does not break down quickly; instead, it turns into tiny particles called microplastics. These microplastics spread through soil, water, and even the air. Animals can mistake them for food, leading to serious health problems. For humans, plastic waste creates indirect risks by contaminating food chains and contributing to climate change through production and disposal processes. Halloween magnifies these issues because it encourages mass consumption in a short period of time. Millions of plastic decorations, candy buckets, and treat bags are purchased each year. When people throw them away after the holiday, the environmental burden grows. This cycle of buying, using, and discarding makes Halloween one of the most environmentally costly holidays.

Building a Greener Halloween

Halloween doesn't have to be an environmental nightmare. By reusing decorations, swapping costumes, and properly recycling or composting when possible, people can cut down on plastic waste. Choosing candy with paper or recyclable packaging also makes a difference. These small changes, when made by many families, can reduce the overall footprint of the holiday. In this way, Halloween can remain a fun celebration while also becoming a model for sustainable practices.

Key Information: Table: Halloween Plastic and Its Problems

Source of Waste	Problem
Candy wrappers	Non-recyclable, billions discarded annually
Costumes	Plastic-based, often single-use
Decorations	Disposable plastics that end up in landfills
Treat bags/buckets	Rarely reused or recycled
Microplastics	Pollute soil, water, and food chains

Case Study: Eco-Friendly Alternatives to Plastic-Heavy Holidays

In several U.S. communities, environmental groups have launched programs to reduce Halloween plastic waste. For example, some schools and neighborhoods have organized "candy wrapper recycling challenges," partnering with companies that specialize in recycling hard-to-process plastics. Others have promoted costume swaps, where families bring gently used costumes to exchange rather than buying new ones. Some even encourage do-it-yourself costumes made from old clothing or natural materials. These programs show that reducing plastic waste is possible without taking away from the fun of Halloween. Families that participate save money, reduce waste, and teach children the importance of sustainability. The case of eco-friendly Halloween practices demonstrates how communities can balance tradition with responsibility, making the holiday less wasteful and more environmentally friendly.

1. What are two strategies communities have used to reduce plastic waste during Halloween?

_____

_____

2. How do costume swaps or DIY costumes help both families and the environment?

_____

_____

Multiple Choice

1. Why are candy wrappers such a problem for the environment?
    a) They are biodegradable
    b) They are fully recyclable everywhere without issues
    c) They dissolve in water
    d) They cannot be recycled in most facilities

2. What are microplastics?
    a) Small particles formed when plastic breaks down
    b) Insects that live in polluted water
    c) A type of recyclable material made for plastics
    d) Tiny candies given at Halloween

3. What is one eco-friendly way to celebrate Halloween?
    a) Using disposable decorations
    b) Throwing away treat bags after one use
    c) Organizing costume swaps
    d) Buying new costumes every year

Matching

Write the letter of the correct definition on the line next to each term.

Term	Definition
1. ___ Candy wrappers	A) Single-use plastic-based clothing
2. ___ Costumes	B) Billions thrown away, non-recyclable
3. ___ Decorations	C) Break into microplastics over time
4. ___ Treat bags/buckets	D) Often disposable and landfill-bound
5. ___ Plastic waste overall	E) Rarely reused or recycled

Fill-in-the-Blank

1. Plastic breaks down into tiny particles called _____.

2. Halloween generates millions of pounds of _____ waste.

3. One sustainable alternative to buying new costumes is participating in a _____.

Short Answer

Answer each question in 2-4 complete sentences.

1. Why does Halloween create more plastic waste than many other holidays?

_____

_____

_____

2. How do microplastics affect ecosystems and food chains?

_____

_____

_____

3. What role can schools or communities play in reducing Halloween plastic waste?