Food Waste and Responsible Choices

Teacher Guide

Australian School Years 3-5, approximately ages 8-11

A lesson for school and camp. 21 teaching slides plus a sources page. Allow approximately 40-45 minutes, with flexibility for discussion.

Learning focus

Students identify choices that can prevent edible food waste, explain when to ask an adult about saving food, and suggest one change a school or camp could make.

Before the lesson

Have the slides, a screen and the student exit ticket ready. Preview the linked video and platform advertising. Confirm local food-safety, allergy, leftovers and bin rules. No food handling or tasting is needed.

A shorter pre-camp chat

For approximately 10-15 minutes, select slides 4, 6, 8, 11, 16, 18 and 20. Adjust the discussion to your group.

Safety and inclusion

Follow individual dietary, medical and sensory needs. Children should eat enough and drink enough. Do not require children to finish their plates or compare lunchboxes. Avoid guilt about food access. Adults decide whether leftovers can safely be saved. Do not encourage food sharing.

Using the exit ticket

Students can write, draw, talk or dictate their answers. Look for one realistic personal choice and one change that needs adult or school support. Use their ideas to plan a small follow-up action.

Slide 01 . Food Waste and Responsible Choices

Allow about 40-45 minutes for the whole lesson.

Today is not about who finishes their food and who does not. We are learning to make thoughtful choices about food and water. Our bodies need both, and we want to prevent safe, edible food from being thrown away without thought.

Never pressure children to eat beyond comfortable fullness. Recognise different medical, sensory, disability-related and dietary needs.

Activities include scenarios, sorting food and scraps, and a food-waste challenge.

Slide 02 . What do you notice?

Allow 2 minutes. Invite children to look before deciding what should happen.

Ask: What can you see? Which items might still be edible or useful?

Which are scraps?

Accept ideas without labelling children or their lunches as good or bad. A half-full bottle may still contain drinking water.

Edibility depends on safe storage, not appearance alone.

Say: Before something goes into the bin, we can stop and think.

Slide 03 . Get ready for your meal

Allow 2 minutes.

Sometimes we have chocolate, sweets, ice cream or some packet of crisps shortly before lunch or dinner and feel less hungry when the meal arrives.

Ask: If I eat a large packet of crisps just before dinner, what might happen?

Where snacks are not part of a planned routine or individual need, consider leaving optional snacks until another time.

The original lesson suggests around half an hour as an example, not a medical rule or a universal waiting period. Children with planned snacks, medical needs or individual dietary plans must follow those plans. Avoid food shame and do not encourage a hungry child to ignore hunger.

Slide 04 . Four choices we can make

Allow 1 minute. Introduce the four decisions: TAKE, EAT, SAVE and SORT. They help us prevent edible food from becoming waste. The order matters: think about preventing waste before deciding which bin to use. These are choices to consider, not a demand that every child can control every step. Return to these words throughout the lesson.

Slide 05 | Take what you need

Allow 2 minutes.

This step applies when children can choose how much food to take, for example at a shared table or when choosing fruit.

Starting with a manageable portion can help. If they remain hungry and more food is available, they can take more.

Ask: Do we always choose our own portion? No. At some camps, staff serve the food. Children are not responsible for the initial amount someone else serves them. Portions must still meet individual needs.

Slide 06 . Give yourself time to eat

Allow 2 minutes.

Eat at a comfortable pace and give yourself time to notice your body. Sometimes distraction or wanting to play interrupts eating while a child is still hungry.

Ask: Have I had enough time to eat? Am I still hungry? Am I comfortably full?

If you are comfortably full, you do not need to force yourself to eat more just to empty your plate. Some children need individual support to notice or communicate hunger and fullness.

Slide 07 . Need a little more time?

Allow 2 minutes.

Imagine dinner time at camp is nearly over, but you are still hungry and have food left. If the camp rules allow, ask the teacher for a few more minutes. Practise the sentence together: Can I have a few more minutes to finish eating? The aim is not to make everyone clear their plate. It is to avoid throwing away edible food simply because eating time ended too quickly. Adults should consider adequate, inclusive eating time.

Slide 08 . Can we save it?

Allow 3 minutes.

If you are comfortably full and food remains, consider saving it before throwing it away.

At home: ask an adult whether and how it can be stored safely.

At school: follow school rules and keep permitted leftovers in the lunchbox for an adult to assess. Perishable food needs appropriate temperature control; a lunchbox alone does not guarantee safety. Ask staff promptly when unsure.

At camp: if food cannot go to cabins, do not take it secretly. Ask staff what to do. Never assume that food is safe just because it looks or smells fine. Do not encourage sharing food without following school allergy and food-safety rules.

Follow school or camp food-safety and allergy rules. Ask an adult.

Slide 09 . Watch & notice

Allow 4-5 minutes, Saving safe leftovers can help prevent edible food waste. Remind students to follow school, camp or home rules and ask an adult if they are unsure whether food can be safely kept.

Video: Make the most of your leftovers. NSW Environment Protection Authority (YouTube). https://youtu.be/8nIBzNyGLDY

Preview the video and any platform advertising before the lesson. Explain that home leftover advice must be adapted to school or camp rules.

Slide 10 . School lunch

Allow 3 minutes.

Scenario 1: school lunch. Mia has eaten most of her lunch and feels comfortably full. Half a sandwich remains. Ask the three questions and give pairs time to discuss. Desired response: she should not force herself to eat, and should not automatically throw the sandwich away. Leftovers can remain in the lunchbox for an adult to assess. Keeping food requires appropriate food-safety conditions, particularly for perishable fillings. If it cannot safely be eaten, an adult can help decide whether the available organics system accepts it.

Follow school or camp food-safety and allergy rules. Ask an adult.

Slide 11 . Camp dinner

Allow 3 minutes.

Scenario 2: camp. Ben cannot control the amount staff initially served him. He cannot create a compost system on his own. He can give himself time to eat, continue if he is hungry, ask for more time if needed, and ask staff where leftovers belong when he is full. Respect camp rules. The amount left does not tell us whether a child has behaved responsibly. Adults and systems share responsibility.

Slide 12 . Choose your portion

Allow 2 minutes.

Scenario 3: choosing a portion. Compare taking a very large first portion with starting with a manageable first helping and returning for more when possible. Ask which choice may reduce waste and why. A small first serving is an option when the child can choose, sufficient food is available, and returning for more is allowed. It is not a rule to eat less than the body needs. Acknowledge that some children do not control packing or serving.

Slide 13 . Food or food scrap?

Allow 3 minutes.

Ask children to name the six items and group them: half a sandwich, whole apple and leftover rice are potentially edible food; banana peel, apple core and orange peel are typical scraps we do not usually eat.

Food-safety conditions still apply, including for rice.

Ask: Which kind of waste should we try to prevent first? Answer: edible food becoming waste. Do not imply that every scrap is universally inedible; food practices differ. These examples support a practical primary-school distinction.

Slide 14 . Sorting comes last

Allow 2 minutes.

Our goal is to prevent food waste before it happens.

Composting edible food is not the first solution. Once scraps remain, use the available food-organics or compost system if it accepts those materials.

Schools and camps use different systems. Do not assume a green bin accepts every type of food, packaging or compostable item. Follow signs and adult instructions. Where there is no suitable system, follow the site's disposal instructions without blaming children.

Slide 15 . From food scraps to compost

Allow 2 minutes.

Explain the illustrated sequence: food scraps go into an appropriate organics collection system, are processed into compost, and can then support soil and plants. This offers an alternative to landfill when that system is available. Not every school or camp has it, and acceptance rules differ. We follow the system at the place we are visiting. Prevention of edible food waste remains the first priority.

Slide 16 . Students AND systems

Allow 2 minutes. Reducing food waste is a shared responsibility. Children make choices within the options available. Schools and camps decide meal times, portion arrangements, safe storage procedures and waste systems. If a camp has only a mixed-waste bin, children cannot create a separate collection system alone. Adults can review waste patterns and consider suitable organics collection or composting where practical. Ask: What would make responsible choices easier here?

Slide 17 . Our big question

Allow 2 minutes.

Once food goes into a bin, the story continues. Ask learners whether they know what happens next: does it go to landfill or an organics processing system? Do not assume the answer for this school or camp. Collect questions and ideas to investigate with staff. Suggestions might include clearer labels, better portion choices, more eating time, or a suitable food-organics system. Children can ask questions; adults are responsible for assessing and implementing changes.

Slide 18 . Drink enough. Use water wisely.

Allow 1 minute.

Your body needs water, so drink enough throughout the day. Saving water means using it thoughtfully.

Avoid tipping drinking water out just for fun. If you want to refill your bottle with fresh water, ask an adult whether you can use the leftover water to water plants. Follow your school’s rules for refilling bottles. If you’re unsure whether water is safe to use or drink, ask an adult.

Slide 19 . Food waste challenge

Allow 3 minutes.

Work backwards from the bin. In pairs, choose one possible cause and suggest a change. Causes include too much packed, too much served, too little eating time, optional snacks close to a meal, missed opportunities to save food safely, and unclear waste instructions.

Separate what children can influence from adult or system decisions.

Ask children to share one realistic suggestion. Avoid judging individual lunchboxes, families, food access or dietary needs. The aim is to understand causes rather than blame.

Slide 20 . One choice. One change.

Allow 2 minutes.

Exit ticket: each learner says or writes one personal choice and one system change. Examples of a personal choice include giving myself enough time to eat or choosing a smaller first portion when I can return for more. School or camp suggestions could include clearer leftovers instructions, enough eating time, reviewing serving sizes, or exploring a suitable food-organics bin. Accept different answers if they are safe, realistic and consistent with the lesson.

Slide 21 . Food is valuable

Allow 1 minute.

Close by saying: We are not trying to make every plate empty. We are learning to think before edible food becomes waste. Sometimes a better choice means taking a manageable first portion. Sometimes it means asking for a few more minutes to eat, saving food safely, or using the right scraps system. Small choices can make a difference, and adults and systems have a role too. Remind children to respect their own hunger and fullness and follow individual dietary plans.

Sources & resource information

ResourceSmart Schools: Waste module

Victorian Government

https://www.environment.vic.gov.au/resourcesmart-schools/modules/waste-module

Food Safety in Canteens and Other Food Services

Victorian Department of Education

https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/food-safety-canteens-other-food-services/policy

Make the most of your leftovers (video)

NSW Environment Protection Authority

https://youtu.be/8nIBzNyGLDY

Prepared by VersaKids editorial team. versakids.com . October 2026

Illustrations created with OpenAI image tools for this resource. The external video and linked resources remain with their respective rights holders. This independent resource does not imply endorsement by the organisations listed.

Publication note: image attribution is not a certificate of exclusive rights or commercial clearance. Before commercial release, confirm applicable tool terms, retain generation records and complete a final visual consistency review.