



Trashercise: Trash Heroes in Action

Cleanup + Movement for a Cleaner Sevier

Grade: 3–4

Time: 40–50 minutes

Subjects: Science, Physical Education, Environmental Education

Overview

Students investigate how litter impacts ecosystems in Sevier County, especially the Smoky Mountains and the Little Pigeon River watershed. They will examine cause-and-effect relationships between human behavior and environmental health, then participate in a structured Trashercise cleanup activity combining environmental stewardship with physical movement.

Students move from simply identifying litter to understanding environmental impact, responsibility, and prevention strategies.

Local Connection (Expanded for Upper Elementary)

In Sevier County, litter doesn't stay where it lands. Because we live in a mountainous watershed area:

- Rainwater flows downhill into creeks and storm drains.
- Storm drains empty into streams and eventually the Little Pigeon River.
- That river system connects to larger waterways.

This means litter dropped in a parking lot can eventually affect river wildlife.

Wildlife Impact Examples:

- **Black bears** may eat food packaging due to scent.
- **Birds** can ingest plastic pieces or get tangled in fishing line.
- **Fish and turtles** may mistake microplastics for food.
- **Pollutants from trash** can contaminate water sources.

Keep Sevier Beautiful works to reduce litter, educate the community, and protect local ecosystems.

Learning Objectives

Students will:

1. Define litter and pollution using academic vocabulary.
2. Explain how litter travels through a watershed.
3. Describe at least two environmental impacts of litter.
4. Identify prevention strategies (reduce, reuse, recycle).
5. Participate in a structured cleanup using safety procedures.
6. Reflect on how individual actions impact community health.

Tennessee Standards

3rd Grade:

- 3.ESS3.1 – Explain how human activities affect the environment.
- 3.ETS1.1 – Design solutions to reduce environmental impact.

4th Grade:

- 4.ESS2.1 – Collect and analyze data about Earth's systems.
- 4.ESS3.1 – Obtain and communicate information about human impact on ecosystems.

Vocabulary

- **Litter** – Waste that is improperly disposed of.
- **Pollution** – Harmful substances introduced into the environment.
- **Watershed** – An area of land where water drains into the same river or stream.
- **Ecosystem** – Living and nonliving things interacting in an environment.
- **Microplastics** – Tiny plastic pieces that break down from larger plastics.
- **Conservation** – Protecting natural resources.

Lesson Procedure

1. Hook & Discussion (8–10 minutes)

Ask students:

- Where does trash go after it rains?
- Can litter in a parking lot affect a river?
- How might plastic break down over time?
- Who is responsible for keeping our community clean?

Optional quick demo:

- Pour water over a small model (tray with dirt and paper scraps) to show how water carries debris downhill.

Discuss watershed flow in simple but accurate terms.

2. Environmental Impact Investigation (10 minutes)

In small groups, assign each group one local wildlife example:

- Bears
- Birds
- River Fish
- Turtles

Students answer:

- How could litter affect this animal?
- What type of litter would be most harmful?
- What could people do to prevent that harm?

Groups share findings.

Emphasize cause-and-effect relationships.

3. What is Trashercise? (5 minutes)

Trashercise is an interactive program inspired by **Keep America Beautiful** that combines environmental stewardship with physical activity. Each time you collect a piece of litter, you complete a movement exercise—such as jumping jacks, frog hops, or marching in place.

This turns a community cleanup into an active challenge while reinforcing an important idea: small actions can make a big environmental impact. By removing litter, you help protect wildlife, keep rivers clean, and improve local parks.

Big Message:

Healthy bodies + Responsible choices = Strong communities and beautiful places.

Movement Menu (More Challenging for 3–4)

After collecting 2–3 pieces of litter, students complete one:

- 5 jumping jacks
- 5 squats
- 10-second plank

- 5 frog jumps
- 10 mountain climbers
- Bear crawl for 10 seconds

Encourage correct form and teamwork.

4. Cleanup + Data Collection (15–20 minutes)

Setup

- Mark safe boundary area.
- Provide gloves and labeled buckets (Trash / Recycling).
- Optional: Provide tally sheets.

Instructions

Students:

1. Collect litter safely.
2. Sort into correct container.
3. Record type of litter (plastic, paper, metal, etc.).
4. Complete Trashercise movement.

Safety Rules:

- Walk only.
- Do not touch sharp objects.
- Alert an adult if unsure.
- Wash hands afterward.

5. Reflection + Data Discussion (10 minutes)

Bring students together.

Ask:

- What type of litter did we find most often?
- Why do you think that item is common?
- What could reduce that type of litter?
- How does our cleanup help wildlife?

If data was collected, create a quick class tally and discuss patterns.

Extension Options

- Design a “Keep Sevier Beautiful” poster.
- Write a persuasive paragraph about preventing litter.
- Create a class pledge with actionable steps.
- Graph collected litter types (Math integration).
- Discuss decomposition timelines of materials.

Student Understanding Page

Name: _____ **Date:** _____

1. Define litter in your own words.
2. Explain how litter can travel from land to a river.
3. Describe one way litter harms wildlife in Sevier County.

4. Which are ways to prevent litter?
 - Reduce the amount of waste you create
 - Reuse items when possible
 - Recycle correctly
 - Ignore trash on the ground
5. Short Response:
What is one action you can take this week to protect the Smoky Mountains?

Wrap-Up Message

Small actions create large environmental change.

When we reduce litter:

- Wildlife stays safer.
- Rivers stay cleaner.
- Our Smoky Mountains stay beautiful.
- Our community stays healthy.

You are not just Trash Heroes —

You are environmental problem-solvers.