



Young Reporters  
for the environment



# YRE CANADA

Classroom Guide



environmental  
defence

[youngreporters.ca](http://youngreporters.ca)



This guide provides tools and resources to help teachers incorporate the YRE Canada Program into their classrooms.

## BACKGROUND

### What is YRE Canada?

YRE Canada is a national environmental education program that gives youth the opportunity to be part of the solution by producing creative and engaging environmental journalism. Participants (ages 11-14 and 15-18) investigate and report on environmental issues, and propose solutions, by using video, photography or writing.

YRE Canada is an Environmental Defence program and is part of Young Reporters for the Environment (YRE)—an international program by the Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE) which operates in 30 countries around the world. The program has been in Canada since 2008.





environmental  
defence

### ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENCE

Environmental Defence has been working since 1984 to protect Canadians' environment and human health. We are Canada's most effective environmental action organization. We challenge and inspire change in government, business and people to ensure a greener, healthier and prosperous life for all. Our vision is to create a world Canadians are proud to pass on to their children.

#### Main issues we work on

- Fighting climate change by slowing the expansion of the tar sands and transitioning Canada to a clean economy
- Reducing Canadians' exposure to toxic chemicals at home and work
- Safeguarding Canada's water and shorelines
- Expanding Ontario's Greenbelt
- And inspiring and educating youth to help create the next generation of green leaders

To learn more about our work, visit [environmentaldefence.ca](http://environmentaldefence.ca) or watch our Meet The Team video at: [youtube.com/environmentaldefence](http://youtube.com/environmentaldefence)



### FOUNDATION FOR ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

The Foundation for Environmental Education is a non-government, non-profit organization promoting sustainable development through environmental education.

FEE is mainly active through its five environmental education programs: Blue Flag, Eco-Schools, Young Reporters for the Environment, Learning about Forests and Green Key.

To learn more about FEE visit [fee-international.org/en](http://fee-international.org/en).

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



## 1. What are the goals of YRE?

- To raise awareness of the effect of litter and waste on the local environment and wider community
- To increase student knowledge and practical skills and improve behaviour in preventing and managing litter and waste
- To give youth the opportunity to develop their communication, presentation, team work, and leadership skills
- To share students' work through multimedia and other channels

Litter is a great place to start when exploring environmental issues. Not only is it visible, it is easy to see improvements in the community and is an approachable topic for youth. Waste affects all communities, and without proper management and sustainable solutions, future generations will be left to deal with the consequences.

Visit pg. 9 to learn more about this year's theme: Your Solution to Plastic Pollution.

**Teachers are provided training and support to help them implement the program into their classrooms.**

***To request a free training session, please contact [yre@environmentaldefence.ca](mailto:yre@environmentaldefence.ca).***



## 2. Can we collaborate with a school from another country?

Yes. If interested, Environmental Defence will help you to connect with a YRE partner school from another country. For the collaboration, students can contact each other about their assignments or they can also present their work to each other by way of Skype or another online communications tool.



## 3. How do students enter their work into the national competition?

Students are invited to submit their work into the YRE Canada Eco-journalism Competition to be judged by a national jury. Students can enter their work before the competition deadline at [youngreporters.ca](http://youngreporters.ca).



## 4. When can my class participate in the program?

YRE can be incorporated into the curriculum during semester 1 or 2 depending on what works best for the school and/or teacher. Depending on the semester, there will be different timelines for schools involved.



**2014 FIRST PLACE WINNER:**  
**Connie Le**

**CATEGORY:** PHOTOGRAPHY 15-18

Below are examples of possible timelines for the program based on typical semester schedules for Canadian schools (Semester 1 from September-January and Semester 2 from February-June).

## **SEMESTER 1 – Key tasks and timelines**

### **September**

- Teachers receive training either in-person, on the phone or online to introduce them to Environmental Defence and to help them incorporate the program into their curriculum.

### **October – November**

- Students work on their assignments (see example curriculum for more info).

### **December**

- Teachers have a mid-point check-in call with Environmental Defence to discuss how the program is coming along/any challenges.

### **January**

- Students submit their projects into the national competition at [youngreporters.ca](http://youngreporters.ca) (see rules for more information).
- Students present their findings to their peers (see example curriculum for more info).

### **April**

- YRE Canada Jury judges entries in national competition.
- Winning entries forwarded to FEE for international competition.

### **June**

- International YRE jury announces international winners.

## SEMESTER 2 – Key tasks and timelines

### January

- Teachers receive training either in-person, on the phone or online to introduce them to Environmental Defence and to help them incorporate the program into their curriculum.

### February

- Students begin to work on their assignments (see example curriculum for more info).

### March

- Early in the month, teachers have a mid-point check-in call with Environmental Defence to discuss how the program is coming along/any challenges.
- Students submit their projects into the national competition at [youngreporters.ca](http://youngreporters.ca) (see rules for more information).
- Students present their findings to their peers (see example curriculum for more info).

### April

- YRE Canada Jury judges entries in national competition.
- Winning entries forwarded to FEE for international competition.

### June

- International YRE jury announces international winners.







# THE PROBLEM OF PLASTIC POLLUTION

All around us, we're surrounded by millions of plastic items—such as household goods, toys, computers, and smartphones to name only a few. Every day, many plastic items are only used once and then are thrown into the trash, creating one of the fastest growing problems on the planet.

## Turning waters into a sea of plastic

Where does all this plastic go when we're done with it? A large amount ends up in our waterways. Most marine litter, about 80 per cent, is plastic that comes from the land<sup>1</sup> and scientists estimate that there are 5 trillion pieces of plastic our oceans.<sup>2</sup> The Great Pacific Garbage Patch, the largest marine trash vortex in the world, is full of plastic waste.

For wildlife that lives in and around coastal areas, the impact of all this plastic waste is severe. Marine life, like seabirds, whales and turtles, can get injured by getting entangled in the plastic or can mistake it for food which can cause choking, intestinal blockages and starvation. For example: a 2012 University of British Columbia study found that 93 per cent of beached fulmars' (migratory seabirds) stomachs contained plastic.<sup>3</sup>

Some of this plastic is very small pieces. Plastic microbeads (which are added as exfoliants to personal care products like body wash) end up going down drains and eventually into our waterways. Larger plastics can also break down into smaller pieces in water. In both cases, there can be big problems. Fish can mistake tiny bits of plastic for food. The plastic can also absorb toxic pollutants in the water, which can end up in the food chain if it's consumed by fish. That's bad news for human health.<sup>4</sup>

## Filling up landfills with water bottles

Despite the fact that most Canadians have access to safe and clean drinking water, bottled water is a very popular beverage of choice. According to Statistics Canada, three out of every 10 households drink bottled water.<sup>5</sup>

In Toronto alone,  
100 million  
plastic bottles are  
consumed every year.<sup>6</sup>

However, there's an environmental cost to all of this. A lot of resources, in particular fossil fuels, are needed to make and transport plastic bottles. To give you an idea: if you fill a plastic bottle with 25 per cent liquid, that's how much oil it took to produce it.<sup>7</sup>

Despite all the resources needed to make a plastic bottle, many of them — approximately one billion each year in Ontario — don't get recycled.<sup>8</sup> If they end up in a landfill, they can take hundreds of years to decompose, and can leak pollutants into the ground and water. Many bottles don't go to the landfill and instead end up in our rivers, lakes and oceans.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.nrdc.org/oceans/plastic-ocean/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0111913>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0025326X12001828>

<sup>4</sup> <http://environmentaldefence.ca/issues/safeguarding-canadas-water/glossary/microbeads>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.cbc.ca/news/health/bottle-vs-tap-7-things-to-know-about-drinking-water-1.2774182>

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.yorku.ca/susweb/resources/documents/Bottled\\_water\\_facts\\_002.pdf](http://www.yorku.ca/susweb/resources/documents/Bottled_water_facts_002.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.onegreenplanet.org/animalsandnature/whats-the-problem-with-plastic-bottles/>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.environmentaldefence.ca/turntheplastictide>

# SOLUTIONS TO HELP KICK THE PLASTIC HABIT

Here are some tips to help reduce plastic pollution at school or home:

1

Take action to ban the beads: Support Environmental Defence's work to have microbeads banned from products in Canada.

2

Litter Less lunches: start a program at your school to encourage your students and colleagues to pack their lunches using reusable containers to reduce the amount of waste at lunch time.

3

Refills, not landfills: Get back to using the tap and use refillable water bottles instead of bottled water. If your school doesn't have a water bottle refill station, see if one can get one installed.

4

Become a recycling pro: Check with your municipality to see what kinds of plastic can and cannot be recycled.

5

Use reusable shopping bags: when you are grocery shopping or doing other errands.

6

Shop smart: avoid products with excessive packaging and that contain plastic microbeads. Shop at bulk or second hand stores. Buy less—ask yourself if you really need that item when you purchase it.

7

Hold the straw: every year, millions of plastic straws are used once and then are thrown away. Next time you eat out, say "No straw, please." If you love drinking from a straw, you can purchase a reusable one made of glass, bamboo or stainless steel.

8

Ask companies to use less packaging: contact companies and let them know your concerns about the amount of plastic packaging they use in products.





## WHAT ARE SOME COMMUNITIES DOING?

Here are a few examples:



1. Water bottle and bag bans: some Canadian cities and schools have banned selling bottled water in municipal buildings and/or parks and on campus to encourage people to use refillable water bottles.

South of the border, San Francisco and Mexico City have banned single-use plastic bags in stores, and there are also bans in place in India, Rwanda, Myanmar, and Bangladesh.



2. Beach cleanups: some community groups organize shoreline cleanups, which help reduce plastic and microplastic pollution.



3. Deposit refund programs: many Canadian provinces, including British Columbia and New Brunswick, have set up deposit refund programs to reduce

the amount of waste going to landfills and/or being littered. How it works: When consumers purchase a beverage, a small deposit fee is added. When they return the container for reuse or recycling, they get all or a portion of the fee back. These programs work well and make sure that bottles are recycled.

## WHAT ARE SOME INDUSTRIES DOING?

Here are a few examples:



1. Transforming trash: to help reduce existing plastic pollution, some companies are making fabric, rope, and other goods out of plastic water bottles and other plastic waste. For example: sportswear company Adidas has made a line of footwear made of recycled ocean waste.



2. Getting rid of the beads: Loblaws, Unilever, The Body Shop and Johnson & Johnson have all committed to phasing out plastic microbeads from their products.



3. Recycling parts: some companies will take your old products back for recycling. For example: Apple will disassemble the products and a majority of the plastics are pelletized into raw secondary material.

# RULES FOR YRE CANADA ECO-JOURNALISM COMPETITION

Submissions for the YRE Canada Eco-journalism Competition can be entered online at [youngreporters.ca](http://youngreporters.ca).

In order for your students to submit their article, photo or video into the competition, there are a few criteria they should adhere to:

1

Your piece must investigate a local plastic pollution issue, propose possible solutions, and report your findings through writing, photos, or video.

2

Students may work individually or in a group of two to three people and may submit more than one piece.

3

Articles should be no more than 1,000 words and can include illustrations and photos.

4

For the photo category, only one image can be submitted per entry. Photos should have a title and description of no more than 150 words to explain the link with environmental sustainability and/or a solution to the problem/issue.

5

Videos should be no more than 3 minutes long and should be in a documentary, reporter/interview style or PSA format. Videos should have a title and description and should be compatible with YouTube.



## Example Class Curriculum and Resources

Below is an example of how the YRE Canada program can be incorporated into the curriculum.

Week	Topic/Content	Activities and Teacher Notes	Resources*
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction to YRE</li> <li>• Introduction to Plastic Pollution</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students are given information on the assignment and are divided into groups (see sample hand-out).</li> </ul> <p><b>NOTES</b></p> <p>Questions to spark a discussion in class are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What are some causes of plastic pollution?</li> <li>2. What are some plastic items that are commonly littered? Thrown away?</li> <li>3. How does plastic pollution affect land and water ways?</li> <li>4. What are you doing to reduce your plastic footprint?</li> </ol>	<p><b>WEB RESOURCES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">YRE Canada website</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">NRDC – Solutions to Plastic Pollution in our Oceans</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">UNEP – Marine Litter</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">The Jellyfish Project – Plastics Resources</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Environmental Defence – information on microbeads</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">York University – Bottled Water Facts</a></li> </ul> <p><b>VIDEOS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">The Water Brothers – Bottle Gate</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">The Water Brothers – Plastic Ocean</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">The Story of Stuff Project – The Story of Bottled Water</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">The Story of Stuff Project – Microbeads</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">UNEP – Two Minutes on Oceans</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">TEDxGreatPacificGarbagePatch – talk by Beth Terry on Living Plastic Free</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">What happens to the plastic you throw away – Emma Bryce</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Plastic Pollution Coalition – Plastic Pollution Travel Solutions</a></li> </ul>
2	<p><b>What is Journalism?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students are introduced to what journalism is and what is considered newsworthy.</li> <li>• The importance of deadlines and interviews are reviewed.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student groups decide on their story topics; start to work on their projects.</li> </ul> <p><b>NOTES</b></p> <p>To practice their interview skills, students can be divided into pairs, and can ask each other questions, like a journalist would if they were writing a feature story.</p> <p>Afterwards, there can be a class discussion about how the interviews went, what were some of the challenges etc.</p>	<p><b>WEB RESOURCES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">BBC News – What is news?</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">American Press Institute – What is Journalism?</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Columbia University: Interviewing Principles</a></li> </ul> <p><b>VIDEOS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Katie Couric – How to conduct a good interview</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Democracy Voice – What makes a good journalist?</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Atlantic Monthly – The most important element of a good story?</a></li> </ul>

\* Online version with links to resources available at [youngreporters.ca](http://youngreporters.ca)

Week	Topic/Content	Activities and Teacher Notes	Resources*
3	<b>Writing articles that are fit to print</b>  Objectives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students learn the differences between news writing and essay writing.</li> <li>Provide an introduction to the inverted pyramid and how to write a lead.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Student groups have a chance to meet to check-in about their projects.</li> </ul> <b>NOTES</b> To practice their news writing skills, students can write a 500 word feature story based on the interview they did with their classmate the previous week.	<b>WEB RESOURCES</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">YRE Canada handbook</a></li> <li><a href="#">How to write a lead – Purdue University</a></li> <li><a href="#">Inverted Pyramid – Purdue University</a></li> <li><a href="#">News writing vs. essay writing</a></li> <li><a href="#">Writing for the web – Dalhousie University</a></li> <li><a href="#">A day in the life of... An Evening Standard journalist</a></li> </ul> <b>VIDEOS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">YRE Writing 101</a></li> <li><a href="#">BBC News – Principles for writing for the news</a></li> </ul>
4	<b>Pro-photo tips</b>  Objectives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students learn basic photography tips and gain an understanding of the fundamentals of photojournalism.</li> </ul>	<b>NOTES</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students can practice taking photographs to get used to using all the features of their camera. Students can use their own cameras or cameras owned by the school.</li> <li>Teachers can review the YRE Canada Photography Handbook with their class, which has helpful photography tips and examples of good photos.</li> </ul>	<b>WEB RESOURCES</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">YRE Canada handbook</a></li> <li><a href="#">The Guardian – Photography: A Master Class</a></li> </ul> <b>VIDEOS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">YRE Photography 101</a></li> <li><a href="#">Thomson Reuters Foundation – 7 Photojournalism Tips by Reuters Photographer Damir Sagolj</a></li> <li><a href="#">Meet Mary F. Calvert – Pulitzer finalist and photojournalist</a></li> <li><a href="#">Photojournalism – WPO Photography Conversations</a></li> </ul>
5	<b>How to use video to tell your story</b>  Objectives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students learn basic videography tips and gain an understanding of how to use video to tell a story.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Student groups begin to edit their journalism projects.</li> </ul> <b>NOTES</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students can practice their video skills by dividing themselves into groups and creating short 30 second practice video “news” stories by using their own cameras or cameras owned by the school.</li> <li>The stories can be viewed afterwards by the entire class and discussed.</li> </ul>	<b>WEB RESOURCES</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">YRE Canada handbook</a></li> <li><a href="#">BBC News – Teacher Essentials</a></li> </ul> <b>VIDEOS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">YRE Videography 101</a></li> <li><a href="#">Pulitzer Center – Tips for Journalists: How to Create Awesome Documentary Videos for Your Story</a></li> <li><a href="#">Video journalism tutorial: Basic video shooting tips   lynda.com</a></li> </ul>

\* Online version with links to resources available at [youngreporters.ca](http://youngreporters.ca)



Week	Topic/Content	Activities and Teacher Notes	Resources
6	Editing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students work on their projects</li> </ul>	
7	Presentations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students share what they learned during their assignments with their peers.</li> </ul> <p><b>EXAMPLES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Student groups do short class presentations about their project. To be discussed: what was the topic, who did they interview, what did they learn as a result of their work?</li> <li>Students can also share their findings during presentations to their school's eco-club or during school assemblies.</li> <li>Other possibilities to share information learned with rest of the school: create a website to post the projects, create an online newspaper, have a photo exhibition at school, create a TV show on the subject of litter and waste management, or share information by way of student media already at the school (i.e. school newspaper or email).</li> </ul>	
8	National competition submission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students submit their work into the national competition.</li> </ul>	

### Questions? Comments? Feedback?

Thank you for taking the time to read this guide. We would be happy to speak with you further about the YRE Canada program and how you can incorporate it into your course curriculum this year. We also appreciate any comments and feedback on any of our classroom materials.

To learn more about YRE Canada, please visit [youngreporters.ca](http://youngreporters.ca) or email [yre@environmentaldefence.ca](mailto:yre@environmentaldefence.ca).

# APPENDIX 1

## **Example Assignment Handout Sheet**

### **Deadline:**

### **General instructions**

- In a group, report on plastic pollution issues in the community by writing an article, taking a photograph, or creating a video
- Once you have completed your project, share your findings with your peers

### **Part 1 – Reporting Project**

- You can work alone or in a group of up to three people
- All members of your group are required to actively participate
- Choose a plastic pollution topic that your team would like to report on and a medium (print, photography or video) to tell your story
- You are encouraged to interview people for your project
- Projects must adhere to the national YRE Canada Eco-journalism Competition rules (see below)

### **Part 2 –Presentations**

- Following the completion of the project, each individual or group will present (5-10 minute presentation) their findings to the rest of the class. To be discussed: what was the topic, who did they interview, what did they learn as a result of their work?
- Each group will also share their findings with the rest of the student body by: 1) presenting to the eco-club or during a school assembly, 2) creating a website to post the projects, 3) creating an online newspaper, 4) hosting a photo exhibition at school, 5) creating a TV show on the subject of plastic pollution, 6) sharing information by way of student media already at the school (i.e. school newspaper), or 7) sharing on social media.

### **Part 3 – Enter national Litter Less competition**

- You can enter your final work into the national YRE Canada Eco-journalism Competition (hosted by Environmental Defence).

## APPENDIX 2

### Competition rules

Submissions for the national YRE Canada Eco-journalism Competition can be entered online at **[youngreporters.ca](http://youngreporters.ca)**.

In order to submit your article, photo or video to the YRE Canada Eco-journalism Competition, there are a few criteria you should adhere to:

1. Your piece should investigate a local environmental issue/problem, propose possible solutions, and then report through writing, photos, or video.
2. Articles should be no more than 1,000 words and can include illustrations and photos.
3. For the photo category, only one image can be submitted per entry. Photos should have a title and description of no more than 150 words to explain the link with environmental sustainability and/or a solution to the problem/issue.
4. Videos should be no more than 3 minutes long and should be in a documentary, reporter/interview style or PSA format. Videos should have a title and description and should be compatible with YouTube.
5. Students may submit more than one entry.

### Assignment schedule

Week	Tasks
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Students are given information on the assignment.</li></ul>
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Students decide on their story topics; start to work on their projects.</li></ul>
3-4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Students go out into the field to do their research for their stories.</li></ul>
5-6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Students edit their projects.</li></ul>
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Class presentations—students share what they learned during their assignments with their peers.</li></ul>
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Students submit their work into the YRE Canada Eco-journalism Competition.</li></ul>





PHOTO: YINH LE



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