Small actions for reef care

PHOTO STUDY 1 • Look closely before you explain

Rubbish at the surface





Floating bags, containers and other debris form a layer above the reef.

Discuss: Can we tell where each item entered the water?

Ages 6–8: Find two different shapes of rubbish.

Ages 9–12: Draw two possible routes the waste might have taken. Label them as possibilities.

Photographs: Troy Mayne • _DSC3374.JPG, _DSC3376.JPG

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PHOTO STUDY 2 • Look closely before you explain

Life below floating waste





A blue sea star rests on a coral colony while rubbish floats overhead.

Discuss: Does the presence of living animals show that pollution is harmless?

Ages 6–8: Find the sea star and describe what is above it.

Ages 9–12: Explain why seeing living animals does not prove that pollution is harmless.

Photographs: Troy Mayne • _DSC3378.JPG, _DSC3379a.jpg

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PUPIL WORKSHEET • Write, draw or discuss your answers

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. Choose one item of waste. Draw a possible journey from land or a vessel to the sea.

2. Plan one action for your class: what will you do, who will help, and when?

3. How will you check whether the action helped? Record a starting measure and a follow-up measure.

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TEACHER NOTES • Suggested answers and sources

Learning goal: Connect visible waste with possible pathways to the sea and plan an action whose results can be checked.

Time: 30–40 minutes. **You need:** the photo pages, the worksheet and pencils. Project the photographs or share printed copies; print only page 3 for each pupil.

Teach: Observe quietly, compare ideas in pairs, then discuss as a class. Younger pupils can point, draw or dictate. Older pupils should explain their evidence and identify uncertainties.

Photo discussion

Page 1: No. A photograph shows the debris at this location, not its route. Waste can reach the sea from land or vessels and be moved by water and wind. Ask learners to draw possible pathways, marking each as a hypothesis. Preventing waste at its source complements clean-up work.

Page 2: No. The animal and the rubbish occur in the same scene, but a photograph cannot measure all effects. Separate what is visible from questions about exposure, movement and condition. These images connect a familiar reef inhabitant with the wider habitat it depends on.

Worksheet guidance

Marine debris can enter the sea through drains, littering, weather events or boating and shipping activities. These photographs do not establish the route of any particular item.

A useful plan could reduce disposable items or prevent litter escaping from school bins. Measure the same thing before and after, such as items of a chosen type in a lunch audit. Prevention complements clean-up work.

Check learning: Ask each pupil for one observation, one explanation and one question still to investigate.

Useful words: marine debris: rubbish in the marine environment; pathway: a route something follows; evidence: information used to support an explanation.

For any practical clean-up, an adult should assess the area and equipment. Children should not handle sharp, unknown or hazardous items.

Sources and photograph record

Adapted from Troy Mayne's WRG teacher manuscript, photo studies I10, I11. The original photographs are reproduced in full. Source links checked 1 November 2026.

Reef Authority — Marine debris