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Grade: 10
Topic: Recycling

I first learned about recycling by sorting trash in elementary school. This year I expanded that knowledge when I started taking an environmental science class; we as students have to find solutions for humanity's negative impact on the environment. According to the EPA, "We only recycle about 67.2M tons of a possible 267.8M tons – less than a quarter of total trash." The lack of proper recycling is a major issue that needs to be addressed. One way to do this is by mandating environmental studies classes that start in 9th grade, so more students learn the role we play in preserving the environment.

Recycling offers a huge opportunity to reduce our negative impact on the environment, but unfortunately, we are not doing it enough. According to the Center for International Environmental Law, In 2015, 26,010 thousand tons of plastic went into landfills in the United States. When compared to the 3,140 thousand tons of plastic recycled, it illustrates that much more plastic can be repurposed.

Furthermore, the more plastic that we keep out of landfills, the less carbon that will pollute the atmosphere. Based on research from a UK recycling organization, "Recycling paper takes 73% less air pollution than if it were made from raw materials." Recycled materials use less energy since they only need to be repurposed rather than starting from nothing. Environmental classes could show examples of how recycled materials are reused and the benefits of the recycling process. These classes can teach proper recycling habits because if plastic is not properly recycled it can contaminate other recyclable items and make it garbage.

Some critics of recycling may argue that there is no proof that recycling will positively affect the economy or environment. However, research from the EPA states, "On a national average, there are 1.17 jobs, \$65,230 wages and \$9,420 tax revenues attributable, for every 1,000 (US) tons of recyclables collected and recycled." This proves that recycling does not only help the environment, but also provides jobs and revenue for the economy.

Recycling alone is not as effective as it should be and implementing mandatory environmental studies in high schools will help improve it. Based on observations from The National Environmental Education Foundation, "When students saw that they hold the power to contribute to conservation as a collective, they become motivated to continue to pursue conservation." We all have a duty to protect our environment and now it is time to see if you are doing enough: go to [Zero Waste DC](#) and check your recycling bin. Are you doing your part?

Word Count: 434

