



## 4H Essay Contest

Grades 9-12

Sponsored by: **KEEP SEVIER BEAUTIFUL**

Your essay is due at your February 4H meeting. On your essay include your name, address, grade, school and the name of your teacher.

Winning essays will be announced on March 31, 2020.

### INSTRUCTIONS

Write an informative essay in which you compare and contrast the author's views on "Refusing" and Reducing", from the two sections below, taken from "Zero Waste Home, The Ultimate Guide to Simplifying Your Life by Reducing Your Waste" by Bea Johnson. Include information from the sections to write about the subject knowledgeably. Use details from the passages to help you write your essay. Remember to use correct grammar, capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing your essay.

**REFUSING:** *"When my family embarked on the Zero Waste journey, it quickly became apparent that implementing Zero Waste in the home really starts with our behavior outside the home."*

*Curbing consumption is a major aspect of reducing waste (what we do not consume ultimately will not need to be discarded), but consumption does not occur solely through the obvious act of shopping. In our society, we start consuming the moment we step out the door and pick up a dry cleaning ad hanging on the knob or a plastic bag stuffed with a leaflet promoting landscaping services in the front yard. At work, business cards get handed out left and right and we leave the meeting with a handful. At a conference, we take one of the goody bags. We check the contents, and although we already have enough pens at home to last us a lifetime, we think: "Cool, a pen!"*

*Zero Waste takes into consideration both direct and indirect forms of consumption. The first R (refuse) addresses the indirect type, the handouts and marketing materials that creep into our lives. We might be able to recycle most of them, but Zero Waste is not about recycling more; it's about acting on needless waste and stopping it from coming into our homes in the first place.*

*In a consumer-driven society, refusing opportunities abound, and here are two areas worth considering:*

- 1. Single-use plastics (SUPs): Disposable plastic bags, bottles, cups, lids, straws, and flatware. The intentional thirty-second use of a plastic product endorses toxic industrial processes; supports harmful chemicals leaching into our soil, food chain, and bodies; and subsidizes the manufacturing of materials that often do not or cannot get recycled and will never biodegrade. These products are the source of ocean pollution as found in the Great Pacific Garbage Patch and as seen daily around us, on roadsides, in our cities, and in parks and forests. This problem is monumentally overwhelming, but you can channel your frustration into action by simply refusing SUPs and by vowing never to use another again-the discipline of "vowing" can be extremely effective at achieving goals. SUPs can easily be avoided with a little planning and reusing.*
- 2. Unsustainable practices: These include bringing individually wrapped snacks to kids' sporting events because it's the "tradition," accepting receipts or business cards that we will never consult, buying excessing packaging and discarding it without urging the manufacturer to change. These examples show where our individual actions can have a tremendous effect in changing the way things are done, as they offer opportunities to speak up and get involved. Consumers can change wasteful processes if they let manufacturers and retailers know what they*

want. For example, the collective act of refusing receipts creates a need for offering alternatives, such as not printing and/or emailing them instead.

You might find that refusing is the most difficult to achieve socially, especially for household with children. Nobody wants to go against the grain or be rude when something is offered with no ill will. But a little practice and short justifications make it easy for us to decline the politest entreaties. All you have to say is, "I am sorry, but I don't have a trash can," "I am sorry, but I have gone paperless," "I am sorry, but I am trying to simplify my life," or "I am sorry, but we have too much at home already." People usually understand or respect a personal choice and will not insist. In some cases, we found that proactivity-such as taking our name off mailing lists before junk mail is sent out-works best.

Refusing is not aimed at making us feel inadequate in social situations; it is intended to cause us to reflect on our everyday decisions, the indirect consumption in which we partake, and the power that we hold as a collective community. While the individual act of refusing does not actually make the waste disappear, it creates a demand for alternatives.

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**REDUCING:** Reducing is an immediate aid to our environmental crisis. It addresses the core issues of our waste problem and takes into consideration the imminent environmental consequences of population growth, associated consumption, and the finite planetary resources that cannot support the world's needs. Reducing also results in a simplified lifestyle that allows you to focus on quality versus quantity and experiences versus stuff. It encourages questioning the need and use of past, present, and future purchases. The things you own, you own because you need them.

Here are practices we have implemented to actively reduce in our home:

1. **Evaluate past consumption:** Assess the true use and need for everything in the home and let go of the unnecessary through the process of paring down. Challenge yourself to consider letting go of things you always thought you had to have. For example through this process, we found out that we did not need a salad spinner. Question everything in your home, and you'll make many discoveries.
  - **Paring down forms better shopping habits:** The time and work invested in evaluating previous purchases lead us to think twice before bringing anything new into the home. Through the process, we learn to restrain resource-depleting accumulation and choose (repairable) quality over (disposable) quantity.
  - **Paring down supports sharing with others:** Donating or selling previous purchases supports the secondhand market and community. It fosters collective generosity through sharing resources already consumed and increases used inventory (therefore making it easier to buy used).
  - **Paring down makes Zero Waste manageable:** Simplifying makes it easy to plan and organize the logistics of Zero Waste. Less means less to worry about, clean, store, repair, or dispose of later.
2. **Curb current and future consumption in amount and in size:** Restraining shopping activity (new or used) clearly conserves valuable resources. It saves the resources needed to make new things and makes used items available to others. Areas to consider include: reducing packaging (Can I buy in bulk instead?); car usage (Can I bike more?); home size (Can I downsize?); personal effects (Do I need it?); technology (Can I do without?); and paper load (Do I need to print it?). Can I buy a lesser amount (maybe in a concentrated form)? Is the amount or size fitted to my needs? Question potential purchases, consider their life cycle, and choose products you can at best reuse or at least recycle.