

## ***HOW NEWPORT SCHOOL GOT GREENER***



*...thanks to help from some children and their parents*



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This is a story about a an eleven year old boy who lived with his parents in Plumland Village where they own a small farm His father, Mr. Hassan, is an organic farmer. This means he protects nature by planting fruits and vegetables without using harmful chemicals. The farm produced apples, cherries, pears, potatoes, onions, eggplants, and many other things. There were also one cow and three goats as well as four white chickens.

Mr. Hassan was very proud of his farm and called it “Eco Farm”. His son was even prouder and went round telling everyone about it. Everyone called him Little Eco. Mrs. Hassan is a nurse. She treats

patients at the small village dispensary where she works. She enjoys cooking and is very good at making pickles, jams and sweets. In front of her kitchen door she grows herbs - parsley, chives, mint and coriander that she sometimes prescribes to her patients.

In his free time after school, "Eco" accompanied his father to the fields. This is how he learnt about plants. He was proud of his nickname. He told his father: "I like seeing small seeds growing into big plants. When I grow up, I want to have my own farm and I will call it Little Eco-Farm".

"Why wait until you grow up?" his father replied, "You can start doing a little agricultural work while you are in school. I will give you a very small plot near the house which you can plant as you wish".

Little Eco was over the moon. Everyday, after his homework was done, he spent an hour gardening. He grew radishes, parsley, thyme and cucumber and took care of Cheeko, the chicken his dad had given him. Twice a week, Mr. Hassan would pass by his son's plot helping and advising. He would also do the jobs which his boy was not able to do because he was not strong enough.

And yes! Little Eco's products were all organic.

Two years on Eco, now 11, was told he would be attending the school in Newport, a city an hour away from Plumland. He would have felt very lonely in the new school if it were not for Tove and Saria, his village friends who joined the school at the same time. But the first day they arrived they found something they were not expecting. The school was big and very neat, with bins everywhere and well cleaned floors but it was all white and grey like a factory

“I don’t see any green space,” said Tove sadly, “not even one tree!” Even the playgrounds were concrete and surrounded by cement walls overlooking the busy streets of Newport.

Eco, Tove and Saria all had a favourite teacher, Mr.Youssuf, the science teacher who liked research projects to be done in groups which took a lot of time. That is why, apart from weekends, Eco could not find enough time to spend in his plot and with Cheeko. But he was happy to do the assignments as those included a lot of field visits as well as library work. Unlike some of the other teachers Mr.Youssuf always listened to children and was interested in their new ideas. He treated them a real people not just as children who must listen and give the right answers to questions.

One day, Mr.Youssuf told his students: “Our next topic will be related to environmental pollution specifically from solid waste. Over the next two weeks I want you to study the solid waste problem in Newport School, and come up with at least one way for solving this problem.”

Little Eco, Tove and Saria as well as Rudy, a new friend they had made, were happy to be part of the same working group. They all liked the topic and decided to immediately start action. “We need to first meet Mr. Mohammed, the caretaker in the school”, said Saria. Mr.Youssuf arranged for a meeting with him during the next day’s recess. They went to see him in his office and found him happy to be part of the science class.

“Paper and food are the two major sources of garbage generated by our school” he started, “the sanitation department has run a recycling project for two years now. After using paper on

both sides we put it into special boxes in all classrooms and offices”.

“And where do these boxes go afterwards?” asked Rudy.

“They are sent every fortnight to the recycling plant on the other side of town. I can probably arrange for you to visit it.”

Then Eco asked: “What happens to the garbage from food sources? Do you recycle them as well?”

Mr. Mohammed was embarrassed. He replied that apart from paper, all school garbage was collected on daily basis and disposed in big municipal bins round the corner.

The weekend after, children gathered for lunch at the Hassan’s home in Plumland.

“We should visit the factory to know more about recycling paper” said Tove, Saria and Rudy, but Eco had had a different opinion:

“Mr. Youssuf asked us to identify problems and suggest solutions. Recycling papers in Newport School is almost solved. We need to focus on garbage from food sources”.

The discussion went on and on over lunch until Mr. Hassan broke in. “You need to collect evidence to show how that you have a problem and how much of a problem it is.”

So the children organised a “bin watch” in the playground even though some of the others laughed at them. They also talked to the cooks in the kitchen. The results were very clear. Large amounts of food were thrown away every day. They also noticed that some big tin and plastic containers were also thrown away.

The four children then started brainstorming on ways to solve the problems raised. Surely, they thought, there was some way that all these food leftovers could be used just like the paper.

Again, they asked for Mr. and Mrs. Hassan's advice. Mr. Hassan took them to the fields and showed them what he did with food leftovers. "The process is scientific and is called composting," he started. "We keep living matter from vegetables, fruit as well as dead leaves and plants and cover them with soil. With a proper combination of elements and good aeration, the resulting product called compost acts as a natural fertilizer for use in organic agriculture."

Children were amazed with the piles of soil they saw in the fields and the way they were sprayed with water. Rudy then asked: "Where does cooked food go then?"

Mrs. Hassan replied: "Well, they feed the animals we have, especially Cheeko and the other chickens! This way nothing is wasted from food leftovers".

"Perhaps we could also do something about to bring some green plants to our grey school", said Saria.

"Of course you can" said Mr. Hassan and he showed them a shed in which he grew many of his seedlings in old tin cans. "If you have big containers, "and I am sure you have", he said, "You can grow many kinds of flowers and vegetables in them."

"So we can use those big containers they are throwing out from the kitchen," said Rudy.

"Of course you can", said Mr. Hassan, "and I will tell you what I'll do, I'll give you some of my compost to fill them with until you make your own."

The children were extremely happy with what they learnt. They took photos of the farm with its composting site, and of Cheeko and the other chickens eating food leftovers. They spent the rest of

the week displaying their findings on a big board using plenty of colors and animation.

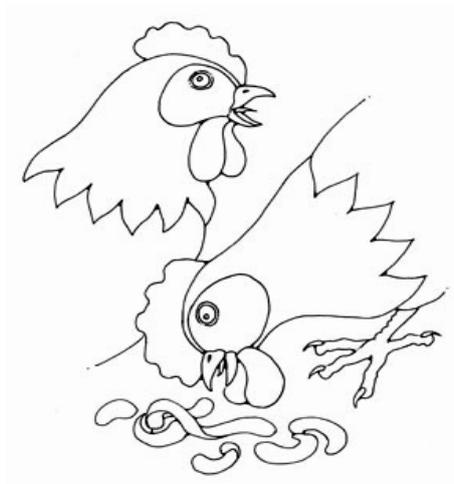
The awaited day came and Mr.Youssuf organized the session in the amphitheatre for other classes and teachers to attend. All groups explained about solid waste problems in Newport School but the others only focused on paper recycling. When it came to Eco's group they said a lot more, not only about what might be done about recycling food waste but even ideas about how this might be combined making the school a pleasanter place. A lot of questions to the group followed to which the children managed to answer very well. Mr.Youssuf, and even the school head, congratulated the group on a very special presentation

A week later, the environment club members met with Eco and his friends to organize an activity on solid waste in the school. "Why not organize a zero food waste day every Friday?" Rudy and Saria suggested. "We can ask students to minimize production of waste as much as possible on these days through avoiding disposable cans and packages."

The idea was great but quite hard to apply. The group made posters explaining ways of minimizing garbage production based on grade six's findings and managed with the help of Mr.Youssuf to give talks (with their posters) in front of all students about the activity.

A year later, Fridays were still known as "zero waste days" at Newport School, rabbits and two chickens were raised on the rooftop and fed from food leftovers under the supervision of Mr. Mohammed. A friend of Mr. Hassan's who had a farm just outside Newport agreed to take some of the food waste from the kitchen and make compost with it. Large numbers of beautiful tomatoes,

beans and aubergines were grown in cans of the roof gardens, tended and watered by the children. There was even a yearly competition between classes of the playground where the 'container garden' for who could grow the best flowers in the corner had been started Newport School was taken as a model for how it recycled solid waste by other schools in the district.



## **A NOTE TO TEACHERS**

### **About the Story**

This story is suitable for upper primary children. It is written based on a comparatively rich context (the Lebanon) but its message is important in nearly every environment. The linking of plots at home and at school makes the teaching of gardening and simple agriculture much more real to children and the concept of growing vegetables in containers has been proved to work even in the most adverse circumstances such as township schools in South Africa and India. The messages about growing vegetables without pesticides and of recycling food waste are for us all.

### **Activities**

Teachers or groups of children can read the story, isolate the important messages and retell it to fit their own needs and environment.

Schools can try growing vegetables in containers and record the results.

Children can plant plots at home and report back to school.

Produce can be used or even sold.

*Source: Written specially for this website by **Jumanah Zabaneh of the Arab Resource Collective, Lebanon***