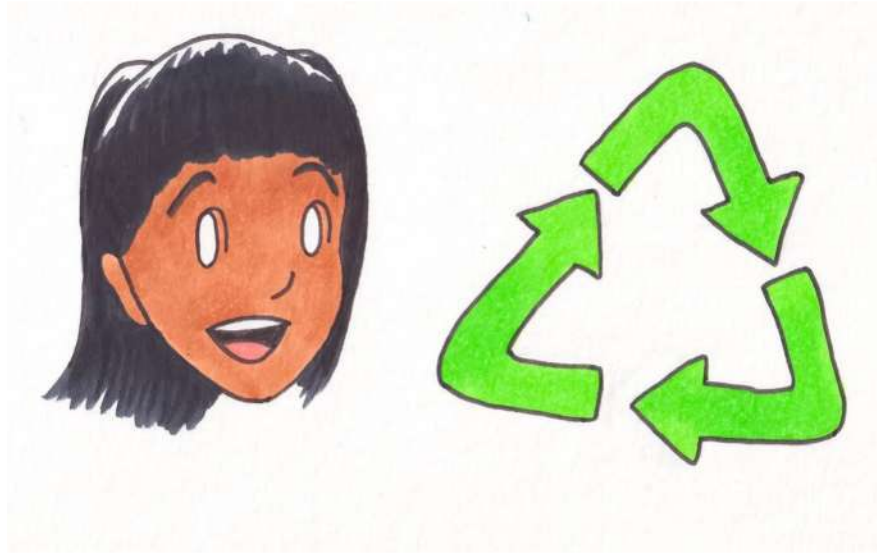


LUCY RECYCLES



WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED BY SHANE McDONOUGH

Lucy was very curious. She loved to learn new things and was eager to solve problems.

One day her curiosity led her to a very complicated problem





“Mom,” Lucy asked, “why does our apartment have two dumpsters? I know one’s for recycling but what’s the difference?”

“The recycling dumpster is for things to be reused and made into something new,” her mother replied.

“Your tía Rosa actually works at a recycling center, a MRF (pronounced: merf).”

Lucy loved her tía Rosa. She imagined her making all sorts of new things with the recycled items in the dumpster





“Garbage can’t be used again,” said Lucy’s mother. “Things we throw in the garbage get buried in a place called a landfill where they stay forever. Some items like this plastic bottle end up there instead of getting recycled. It’s very wasteful and bad for the Earth.”

Lucy’s mother removed a plastic bottle from the garbage dumpster.

“How is garbage bad for the Earth?” asked Lucy.

“The stuff we buy at the store and throw away doesn’t appear out of nowhere,” her mother explained. “People make things in factories using materials they take from the Earth. Then they send those things to stores using ships, planes, and trucks. Every step of that journey releases greenhouse gas pollution into the air.”





“This pollution is causing climate change, which means the Earth is getting hotter. That’s creating dangerous weather for plants, animals, people.

Each time a new item like this plastic bottle is made, climate change gets a little bit worse because of all the pollution that comes with it. It’d be much better to reuse the materials we’ve already made than make new ones all the time. That’s why recycling is important.”

Lucy had never wondered about where her garbage went before, but now it was all she could think of. She imagined the mountain of trash she'd created her whole life.

“From now on I will recycle everything...” she decided as she fell asleep.





The next day, Lucy started recycling everything she could.

“Can I recycle this cereal box?”

“Yes!” said her mother

“What about this juice carton?”



“Yes as long as it’s clean and dry,” said her father.

“And this paper egg carton?”

“Yep!”



“And this empty detergent bottle?”

“Yes.”



“And this empty glass jar?”

“You got it!”



Lucy was on a roll.

MONDAY



At school, Lucy was eager to share what she'd learned.

On Monday when her classmates cut out shapes for a math project, Lucy recycled everyone's paper scraps.

TUESDAY



On Tuesday, she reminded her friends to recycle their plastic water bottles at lunch.

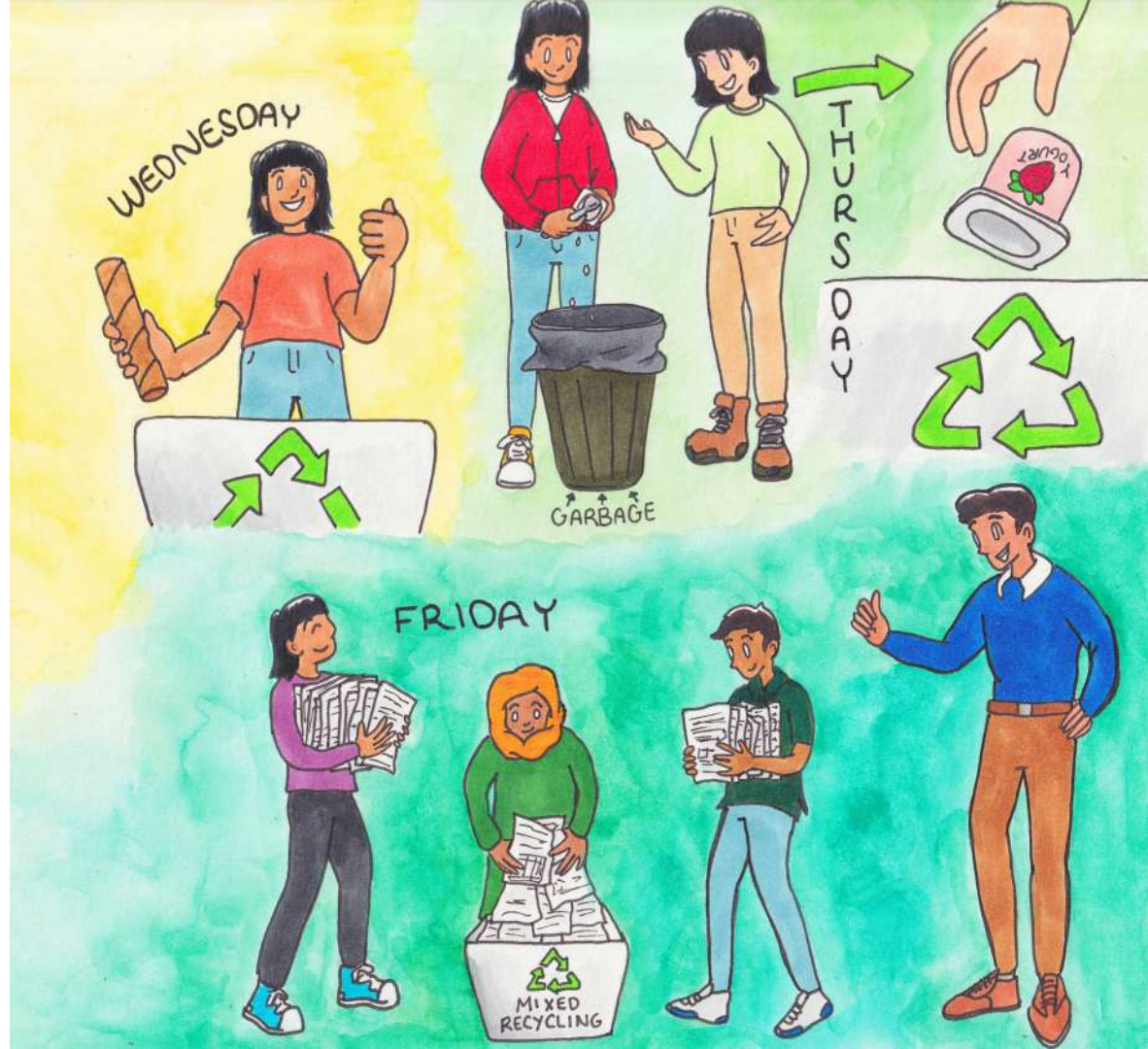
On Wednesday, Lucy was quick to recycle the cardboard from Mr. Ponce's paper towel roll when it ran out of paper towels.

Thursday, she showed her friend Hana how to empty and scrape out her yogurt container before recycling it.

On Friday, Lucy helped her classmates recycle old papers from their Friday folders.

"You're a recycling expert!" said Mr. Ponce.

Lucy felt like she was making a big difference.



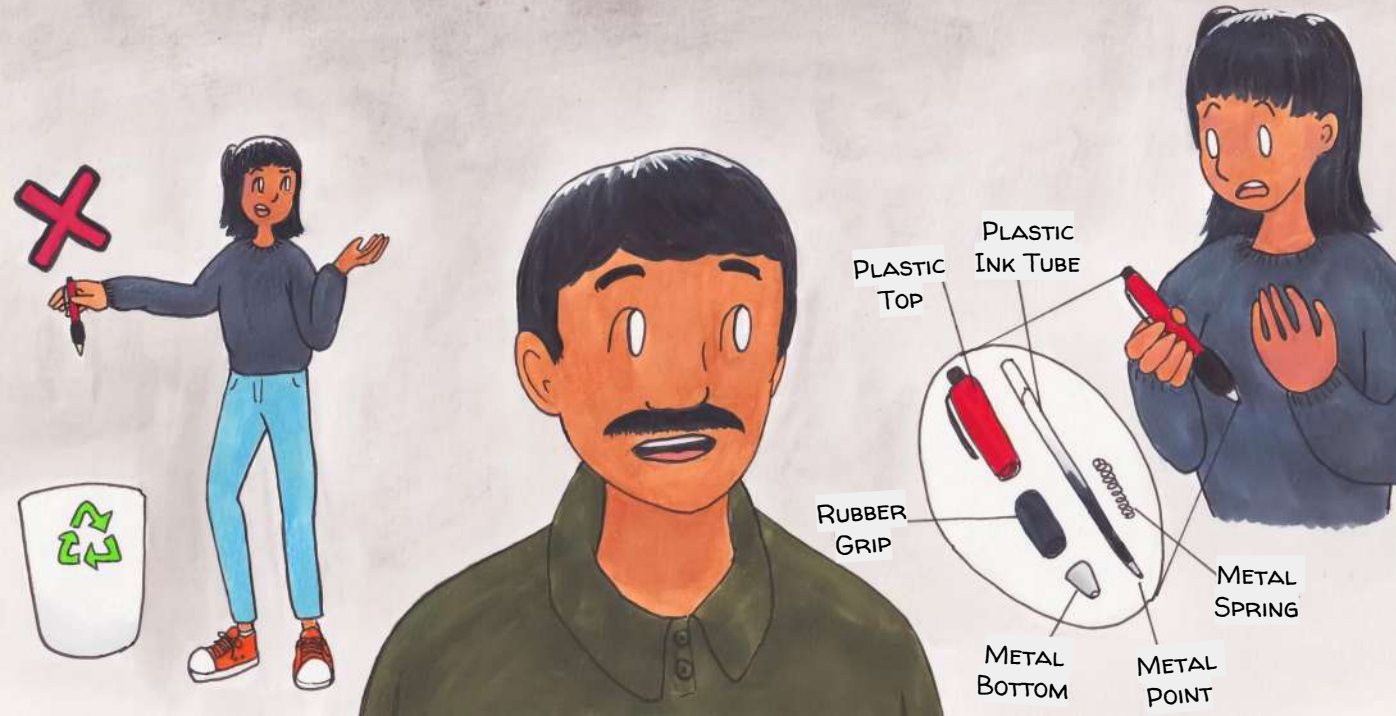
Then, Lucy ran into a problem.

“This pen is out of ink, can I recycle it?” Lucy asked.

“Nope.” said her father

Lucy was shocked, this had to be a mistake. “But...it’s made of plastic!” Lucy insisted.

“It’s made of many different types of plastic and metal that are too tiny to separate, so it would actually go in the garbage,” Lucy’s dad explained.



Things only got more complicated from there.

“Can I recycle this juice pouch?”



“No...”

“What about this paper plate?!”



“Nope, it’s too greasy, recyclables need to be clean and dry”

“This foam cup has to be recyclable right?!”



“Sorry, it isn’t.”

“This plastic bag?”



“No mija”



Lightbulbs

Pens & Markers



Tape

Candy Wrappers



Batteries

Electronics



Crayons

Pencils



Straws

Chip & Snack Bags

Lucy was panicking. Her mountain of trash was growing.

“All of these things feel like they should be recyclable though!”

Lucy whined.

“Here,” her mother said. “This website shows you what is recyclable in our city.”

Lucy scrolled through the webpage. So many things were not recyclable.



LUCY'S TRASH



Lucy had been trying to recycle everything, but so many things couldn't be recycled.

Now, everywhere she looked she saw garbage.

At school, Lucy could hardly focus. She was so worried about all of her trash.

Just before recess, she saw her friend Hana trying to toss a food wrapper into the recycling bin.

“STOP!” Lucy exclaimed.

She snatched the wrapper right out of Hana’s hand.





Hana was very confused,
“I’m just trying to
recycle...I thought you
cared about that?”

Lucy became very angry.

“This wrapper is NOT
RECYCLABLE!” she yelled.

Everyone in class gasped.

Hana started crying.

Lucy was in trouble.

Mr. Ponce said he’d be
calling her parents.

At home Lucy didn't know how to explain what had happened or how upset she was feeling.

Her parents didn't say anything about it.

"Maybe Mr. Ponce forgot to call home..." Lucy thought.

Then, during dinner, the phone rang.

Lucy gulped.





“It’s for you, it’s tía Rosa!” said Lucy’s father. Lucy was relieved.

“Lucy!” said tía Rosa. “I heard you’ve been working on recycling just like your favorite tía?”

“Yeah...” Lucy replied.

“I also heard you got into some trouble today,” said tía Rosa.

Lucy was shocked. “How did you find out!?”

“Your dad called me, and I called your teacher.” said tía Rosa. “Tell me what happened.”

Lucy explained everything. “I thought I was making a difference by recycling but it’s such a big complicated problem...” said Lucy.

“Lucy, everything you do makes a difference, no matter how small,” said tía Rosa.

“I spoke to Mr. Ponce and next month your class is visiting the MRF where I work for a field trip. That way everyone can learn more about recycling!”

Lucy was so excited!





The next day, Lucy apologized to Hana for yelling and not explaining calmly.

Then, Mr. Ponce let Lucy announce the field trip.

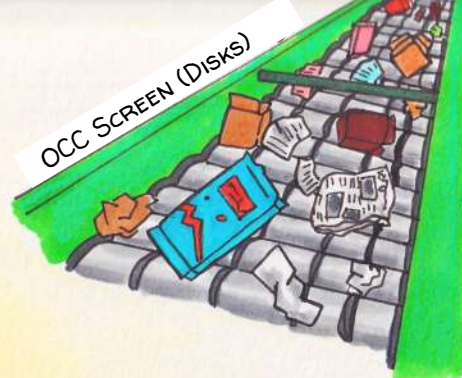
On the day of the field trip, tía Rosa led Lucy's class through the MRF, the Materials Recovery Facility.

"Everything you put in your recycling bins ends up here," she explained.





BUCKET LOADER



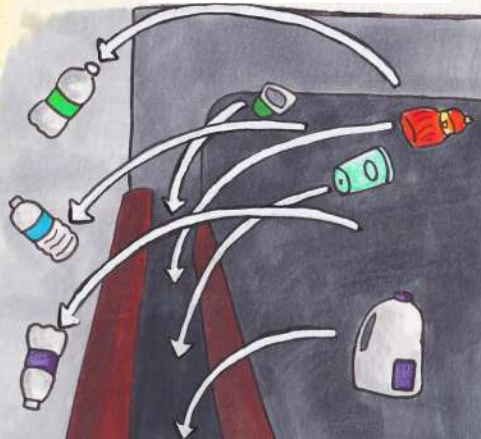
OCC SCREEN (Disks)



ELECTROMAGNETIC SEPARATOR (MAGNETS)



OPTICAL SORTER (COMPUTER SENSOR)



Lucy and her classmates watched bucket loaders lift materials onto machines.

They watched the machines use spinning disks, magnets, and computer sensors to sort paper, cardboard, aluminum, glass, and different types of plastic.

They also saw how workers had to remove trash from the machines.

“As you can see, garbage slows down our recycling process and can ruin our recycling materials,” said tía Rosa.

“Now I get why you didn’t want me to throw that wrapper in the recycling bin,” said Hana. Lucy nodded.





At the end of the MRF tour, the students watched the recycled materials get squashed into giant cubes called bales. The bales would be sold and turned into new things.

“Remember, not everything can be recycled,” said tía Rosa. “It’s important to recycle what we can, correctly, and to create less garbage in the first place.”

Lucy and her classmates had learned a lot!

“How will you use what you’ve learned here today?” tía Rosa asked the students.

Lucy had some ideas.





Back at school, Lucy and her classmates started a recycling club.

They helped teachers monitor their recycling bins and remove garbage.

They made posters about what could be recycled and ways to reduce waste.

They shared the posters all over the school and in the neighborhood.

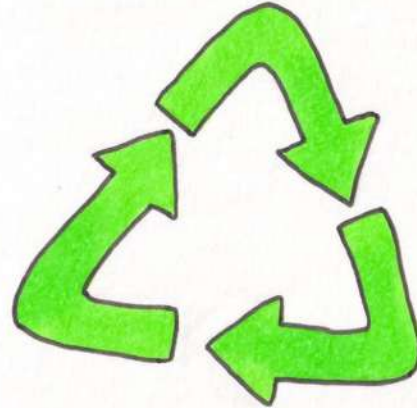
Lucy watched as people started to notice and care about where their garbage went.

She saw kids and adults making choices to reduce, reuse, and recycle in new ways.

These changes were small at first, but Lucy knew they were making a difference.



Everything you do makes difference, no matter how small.



THE END

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I'd like to thank:

- All my students past, present, and future
- The entire Wipro Science Education Fellowship Team for their support
- My husband, for encouraging me to undertake a project like this in the first place!

QUICK NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

I hope you enjoyed this story, it's free and yours to share widely!

The climate crisis we face is truly a complex, multifaceted problem. We can begin to tackle it by making more sustainable choices in our day-to-day lives (which is what this book is about).

At the same time it's important that we continue to push for more sustainable policies on a local and global level that prioritize the future of our planet over profit.

I encourage you to continue to engage with this issue, to make changes in your own life where you can, and to use your voice, vote, and wallet to push for a more sustainable future. Remember, everything you do makes a difference, no matter how small.

