

The Mess that We Made

A Guide for Teachers and Parents



Written by Michelle Lord

Illustrated by Katherine Blattman

SUB-THEMES

Ocean pollution

Cause and effect

Reduce, Reuse, Recycle

Hope and agency in children

Story Discussion Guide

- Understand the link between human behavior and ocean pollution.
- Learn how small individual actions can make a difference to marine life.
- Gain vocabulary around ocean health and sustainability.
- Feel empowered to make better choices about waste.

Lesson plan

Use this story to introduce ocean ecosystems and pollution. Spark discussion on where trash goes and how to reduce plastic use. Ideal for Earth Day, World Oceans Day or World Environment Day

Learning Outcome

Before Reading:

- What do you know about life in the oceans?
- Have you ever seen litter on a beach or near water?

During Reading :

- How does the trash get into the ocean?
- What do the sea animals feel or do?
- How does marine life get affected?

After Reading:

- What is one thing you can do at home to reduce plastic?
- What part of the story made you feel hopeful?
- Who else can help clean up the mess?

Activities:

- Plastic Hunt: Ask children to find plastic items at home/school and sort which ones can be reused or recycled.
- Verse Writing: Let students create their own short poem about caring for nature.
- Ocean Poster: Create awareness posters about protecting marine life.

Expected Outcomes

Children will become more conscious of their daily plastic use and recognize the power of their choices. They'll feel capable of being part of the solution to ocean pollution.

Applicable SDGs

- SDG 12 – Responsible Consumption and Production
- SDG 13 – Climate Action
- SDG 14 – Life Below Water

SDG Explanation

- SDG 12: Encourages more thoughtful consumption and better waste disposal.
- SDG 13: Tackling plastic pollution is part of climate-related environmental action.
- SDG 14: The story directly shows how plastic pollution threatens ocean ecosystems and marine life.

ABOUT ZAMASAMA

Zamasama is a nonprofit initiative that curates children's stories from diverse cultures and lived experiences around the world. It gives children a window into other communities—and a mirror that affirms their own, helping children recognize the shared humanity that connects us across differences. Through narratives that gently challenge biases and broaden worldviews, Zamasama helps children see difference not as a barrier but as a bridge. Through the power of stories, we sow the seeds of pluralism that can grow into a more harmonious world for all.