

Reading Selection

Anita's Amazing Compost Pile

Do you recycle? Anita does. She and her family recycle old cans and glass. They recycle lots of plastic and paper. One day Anita found out that nature recycles, too!

Anita was reading a book at school. The book was about taking good care of the earth. It said that a compost pile is very good for the earth. Anita had never heard of compost piles before. The book said that a compost pile is a heap of old food, plants, and leaves that people mix with soil. A compost pile lets nature recycle old plants and old food.

Worms, insects, and other little animals help. They eat the old things in the pile. They turn the old things into new soil. People can help, too. They help nature every time they make a compost pile.

Anita was excited. That night she told her family all about compost. Then she asked if they could make a pile in their backyard. Her father said, "It sounds like a lot of work." Anita said, "Daddy, it's easy as pie!" Her father smiled and rubbed his chin. Then he said, "Let's try it. And you can be in charge." You should have seen the smile on Anita's face!



Anita saved things for her pile. She saved lots of dry things. She found twigs and straw and leaves. Anita knew that the little animals in the pile like to eat dry things. Dry things also keep air in the pile. The air helps the little animals. They need air to breathe.

Anita knew that the little animals in the pile like to eat fresh things, too. The day before she made her pile, she saved scraps of food in a covered pot.

It was a fine day in April. Anita and her family woke up early. They were ready to make their compost pile! Anita chose a place near the garden. Then she took a stick and drew a big square on the ground. The pile would go right there.

First her mother dug up the soil. Then the family covered the soil with lots of hay and straw. Anita added branches. Even her little brother helped. Joey carried one dry leaf in each hand. He let out a squeal each time he threw a leaf on the pile.

Anita got her pot of food from the house. The pot was full of apple peels, old salad, and other scraps of food. There was no meat or cheese. Anita knew that meat and cheese make the pile smell bad. Her mom added some weeds from the garden. Her father spread the food and weeds on the pile. "Hurray!" shouted Joey, who threw in some hair and a feather.

Anita covered the pile with soil. Then she watered it. She knew that the animals in the pile need water to stay alive.

Now the family waited. Worms and sow bugs and other animals went to work in the pile. On sunny days Anita and Joey sat on the grass near the pile. They could see the little animals. Anita loved to watch the ants hurrying this way and that. Joey liked the millipedes best. He pointed each time he saw one in the pile.

Anita helped the pile. Every week she and her father turned it over with a big fork. Anita watered the pile so it did not get dry. The family added scraps of food every day or two. They always covered the pile with soil.

Soon Anita saw amazing changes in the pile. The scraps of food were gone! So were the leaves and the weeds. Now there was rich dark compost with lots of humus in it! Anita's mother and father mixed the compost in the garden. Soon the garden was growing even better than before.

Now Anita's family makes compost all the time. They do not throw out food in the trash. They use most of it in their compost pile.

“Compost” is a very old word. It comes from an old English word for “stew.” Anita told her mother and father, “Every day we put new food in our compost stew. That is what I like about compost. We can make our own recipe. And it always works!”

Record Sheet 13–A



Name: _____

Date: _____

What Is in My Compost Bag Now?

What is in your bag now? Write and draw what you see.

Which things still look the same?

Which things look different? How have they changed?

