



LITTER HEROES

EARLY YEARS LESSON PLAN

ABOUT THE LESSON PLAN

Early Years: Age: 3-4

Time: Approx. 45–60 minutes (can be split over multiple sessions)

This lesson introduces 3-4-year-olds to the idea of litter, focusing gently on environmental harm from both everyday waste and smoking-related litter such as cigarette butts and vapes.

The story, discussion and sorting activities include smoking litter as harmful to animals and nature. While health effects are not discussed in detail at this age, children are supported to understand that these items are not safe, not food, and must never be touched.

This supports ASH Wales' work to reduce smoking litter and build early positive attitudes towards clean, smoke-free environments.

1: WHAT IS RUBBISH AND LITTER?

Goal: Help children understand what rubbish and litter are before starting the story.

Warm-up Questions:

- “Do you know what rubbish is?” (Expected answers: “Things we don’t want!” “Food wrappers!” “Old paper!”)
- “Where do we put the rubbish?” (Expected answers: “In the bin!”)
- “What happens if we don’t put the rubbish in the bin?” (Expected answers: “The animals might eat it!” “It makes the ground dirty!”)
- “What is litter?” (Expected answers: “Rubbish on the ground!” “Things people leave on the floor!”)

Teacher Script:

“Rubbish is things we don't need anymore, like food wrappers, old paper, or bottles.

If we don't put rubbish in the bin, it becomes litter. Litter is bad for animals and bad for the Earth.”



2: STORYTIME – SPOTTING THE LITTER

Goal: Introduce different types of litter through story, including cigarette butts and vapes, and help children understand that litter is not safe to touch.

Teacher Script (before reading):

“We’re going to meet three birds who find lots of rubbish, even some really strange things! Some litter is just messy, like plastic or wrappers. But some things, like cigarette ends and vapes, are dangerous rubbish. They can make animals sick, and they’re not safe to touch.”

“If you ever see something like that, what should you do?” (Let children answer - prompt: “Tell a grown-up!” “Don’t touch it!”)

Instructions:

- Download the story presentation. This can be printed as it is or put up as a presentation.
- Read the story aloud with expression.
- Use pictures to show what the characters find (e.g. cigarette butt, vape, plastic bag).
- Emphasise how the birds don’t touch dangerous litter, they tell their teacher.

Teaching Moments to Highlight (during reading):

When Sammy finds the cigarette butt: Pause and ask:

“Do you think that’s food?” (No!)

“Can birds or animals eat it?” (No - it might make them poorly.)

Then say “Cigarette butts are very bad rubbish. They smell, they’re dirty, and they’re not safe.”

When the birds see the vape: Pause and ask:

Then say: “These are called a vapes. Some grown-ups use them, but they don’t belong on the ground. They can leak yucky chemicals and must never be touched.”

Safety Message (after the story):

“If we ever see litter like a vape or a cigarette on the ground, even other rubbish like crisp packets or plastic bottles - we never pick it up.

It goes in the bin, but only using gloves or a litter picker. Can we remember what to do?”

(Children respond: “Tell a grown-up!” “Don’t touch it!”)



3: WHAT'S TREASURE, WHAT'S RUBBISH?

Goal: Help children understand the difference between natural treasure (things that belong in nature and help animals) and rubbish (man-made litter that can hurt animals and the planet).

Teacher Script (before starting the sorting activity):

“Some things we find on the ground are good for animals - we call those things treasure. Treasure is natural, it grows from the Earth, like leaves or sticks. Animals use treasure to build their homes, make their beds, hide, or find food. But some things are not treasure, they're rubbish. Rubbish is made by people and it doesn't belong on the ground. It can hurt animals if they try to eat it, or get stuck in it.”

Instructions:

1. Show printed pictures of items (or real examples).
2. For each one, ask:
3. “Is this good for animals or bad for animals?” OR “Is this treasure or rubbish?” OR “Where does it belong, bin or nature?”

Treasure (good for animals):

- Leaves
- Sticks
- Flower petals
- Acorns
- Pine cones
- Grass
- Sand
- Feathers

Rubbish (bad for animals):

- Plastic bottle
- Plastic bag
- Cigarette butt
- Vape
- Happy Meal box
- Crisp packet
- Can of pop
- Sweet wrappers

Teacher Note: If children ask what a vape or cigarette is, you can say: “It's something some grown-ups use that should always go in the bin. It's not food, not safe, and doesn't belong on the ground.”

4: LITTER PICK ACTIVITY

Goal: Get children actively involved in a safe, supervised litter pick learning the difference between nature's treasure and harmful rubbish.

Before You Start - Equipment Note for Staff:

You will need:

- Litter pickers (child-sized where possible. These can often be borrowed from local councils, Keep Wales Tidy, or nearby schools)
- Gloves (if using)
- Baskets, buckets, or bags for collection (separate for treasure and rubbish)

Instructions:

1. Instructions for the Activity:
2. Split the children into two groups:
 - a. Treasure Hunters: Collect natural items like leaves, petals, pinecones, sticks.
 - b. Litter Heroes: Look for litter like crisp packets, wrappers, bottles - with an adult's help.
3. Head outside to a safe outdoor space (garden, playground, or local park).
4. Give each group a child-friendly collection tray, basket, or tub.
5. Staff or volunteers should help spot and remove any sharp, smoking-related, or unknown items.
6. Children should never be expected to touch things like cigarette butts or vapes.

Safety Script:

"When we go outside to pick up litter, we have to be very careful.

We wear gloves and use litter pickers to keep our hands safe.

If you see something tricky or you're not sure, tell a grown-up straight away.

Some rubbish, like cigarette ends or vapes, is dangerous - we never touch it."



5: CREATE A CLEAN EARTH PICTURE

Goal: Use the treasure to make something beautiful reinforcing what helps nature.

Materials:

- Printed picture of the planet or Earth (one per child or shared sheet)
- Glue sticks, Crayons, felt tips, or pencils
- Natural treasure collected earlier (leaves, petals, twigs, etc.)

Instructions:

1. Place all treasure items in the middle of the table or on sorting trays.
2. Give each child or group a paper planet.
3. Introduce the task: "This is our planet. We want to make it a happy, clean place for animals and people." "You're going to decorate your planet using treasure from nature soft leaves, pretty petals, twigs and more."
4. Children glue their chosen natural treasure onto their Earth picture.
5. Encourage them to choose what makes the planet feel calm, safe, or beautiful.
6. Display the pictures under a title like "Our Happy Earth" or "We Are Litter Heroes!"

Teacher Note:

Encourage children to talk about their pictures:

"This leaf is soft - animals like it!"

"This flower makes the Earth pretty!"

"Why is Earth smiling?" "Would Earth still be happy with a crisp packet stuck to it?"



5. ALT "MAKE A HOME FOR A CREATURE" (ACTIVITY)

Goal: To help children notice that some things don't belong in animal homes, and feel confident choosing natural items instead of rubbish with your support.

Instructions:

1. Set up trays, tuff spots, or boxes as before, filled with the collected treasure:
Leaves, grass, sticks, petals, acorns
2. Optional: 1–2 harmless "rubbish" items like a clean crisp packet, foil wrapper, or plastic lid
3. Say: "We're going to make cosy beds for woodland animals using nature's treasure - things like leaves and petals that animals can snuggle into. But... there might be a few things in there that don't belong. Let's see if you can spot them!"
4. Let them explore and build freely for a few minutes. Then go tray by tray and ask: "What did you use for the bed?" "Do you think this bit (hold up crisp packet) belongs in a hedgehog's bed?" "Would a fox want to sleep on that?"
5. Prompt the group: "Let's take out any rubbish so the animals don't get cold or hurt."

What to watch for:

- Some children will spot the rubbish and remove it straight away - brilliant!
- Others may include it without realising - that's okay too. Once they've finished, come over and say: "Oh wow, look at your cosy nest! What's this bit here?" (Point to the crisp packet) "Do you think a squirrel would like that? Or would it make the bed noisy and uncomfortable?" This gives them a gentle nudge, not a correction. Praise them for noticing or choosing to remove it.

Language you can use:

- "Treasure is soft and natural - rubbish is not!"
- "Let's help the animals stay safe they don't want smelly packets in their bed!"
- "This doesn't belong here where should we put it?" (Prompt: "In the bin!")

6. SONG

Verse

Keep the animals safe today
(Hold hands like you're cuddling an animal)

Keep the Earth clean in every way
(Wave hands back and forth)

Happy animals, happy trees
(Big smile + stretch arms up like tree branches)

Healthy oceans, skies, and seas
(Wave arms from top to the bottom)

Chorus

Make it clean, make it bright
(Sparkle fingers in the air)

Keep the world healthy and right
(Arms make a big circle for the Earth)

Let's be kind, let's be smart
(Tap head for thinking)

Keep the Earth in your heart x 2
(Put hands on heart)

LEAVES



STICKS



FLOWERS



ACORN



PINE CONE



GRASS



FEATHER



SAND



PLASTIC BOTTLE



PLASTIC BAG



CIGARETTE BUTT



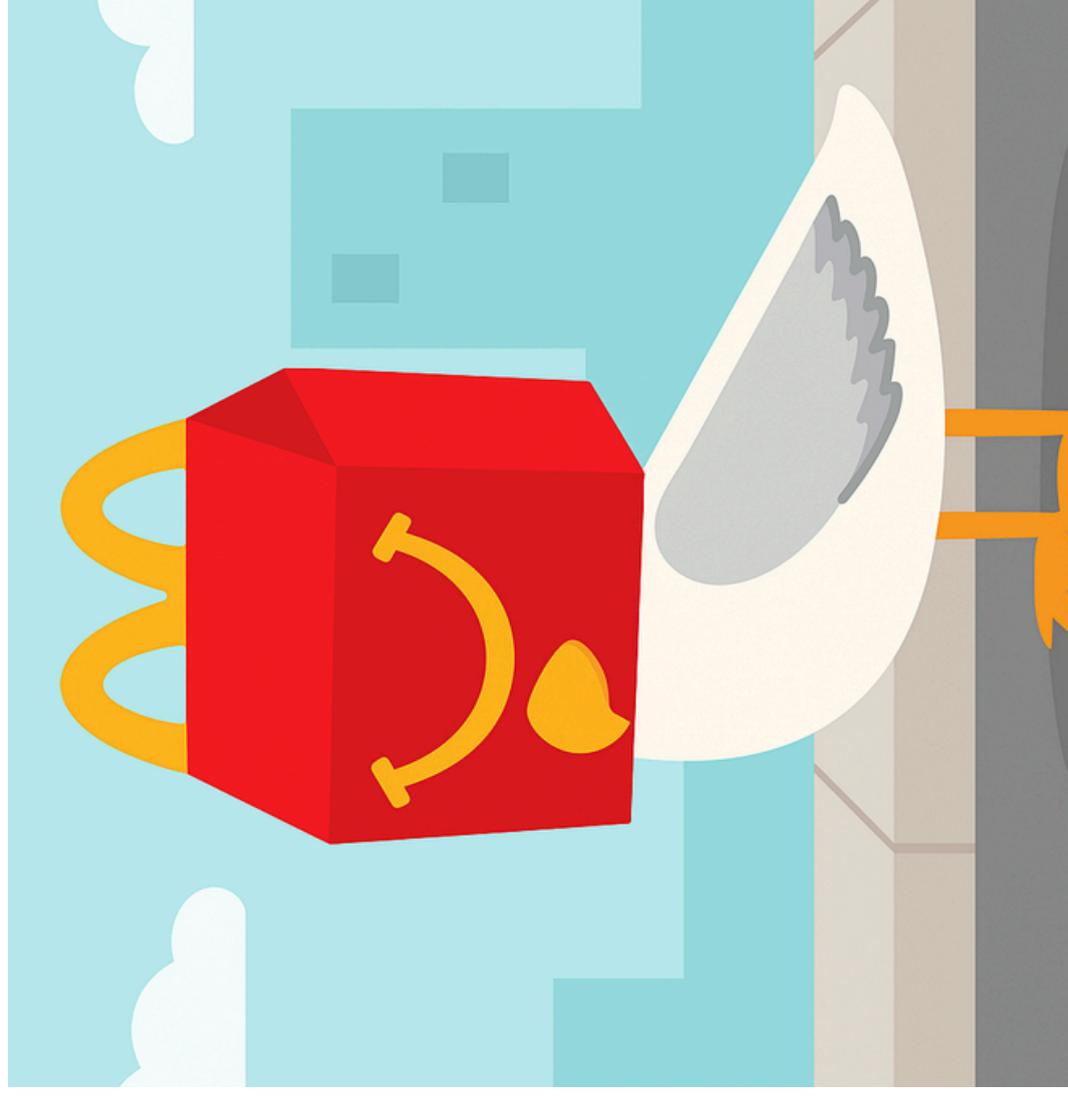
VAPE



CRISP PACKET



HAPPY MEAL BOX

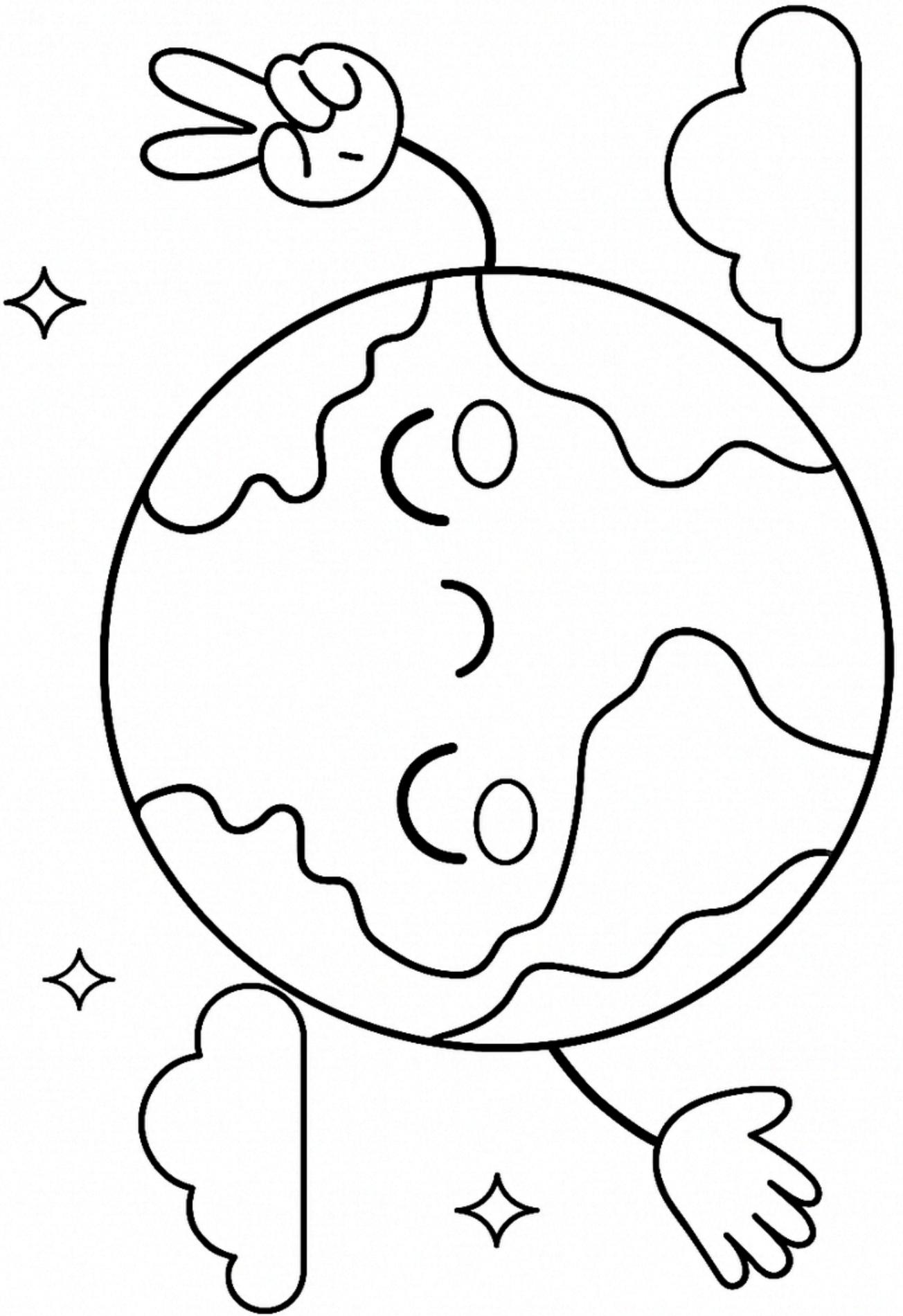


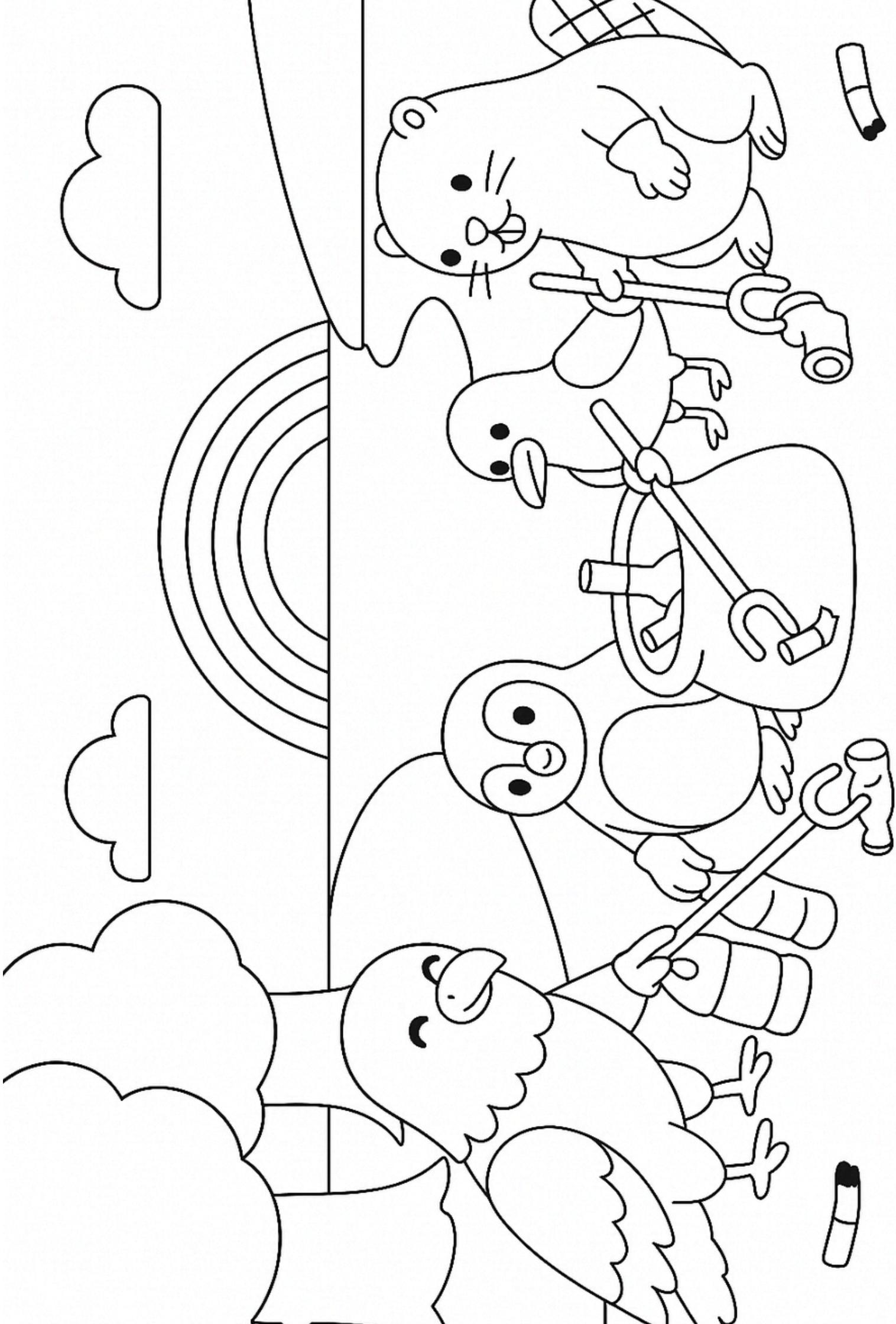
CAN OF POP



SWEETIE WRAPPER









LITTER HERO CERTIFICATE

AWARDED TO:

YOU ARE A BRILLIANT LITTER HERO

You helped nature by spotting rubbish, choosing treasure, and keeping animals safe. Thank you for helping the Earth stay clean and happy.

Suzanne Cass.

Chief Executive Officer - ASH Wales

Teacher

