



Dear Reader,

Thank you for considering this project! My hope is that this pack will help you set up, organize, and complete an inspired *Catalog Canceling Challenge* with your school or scout troop.

These pages contain a lot of information and many suggestions to help encourage you. You don't have to use all of it; just cut, paste, edit, and use the pages you find helpful in ways that feel easy and right for you and your group. Good luck!

Best wishes,  
Ted Wells

**Website – [www.CatalogCancelingChallenge.com](http://www.CatalogCancelingChallenge.com)**  
**Email – [CatalogCancelingChallenge@gmail.com](mailto:CatalogCancelingChallenge@gmail.com)**



### Kids Rescue Trees by Rejecting Catalogs

Elementary school students take a stand against paper waste.

by Ted Wells

#### Related

- [Go Green: Education for the Ecosystem](#)
- [Taking It to the Class: Green Projects for the Classroom](#)

You know those annoying sales catalogs that show up a little too often in your overcrowded mailbox? The ones that go straight into the recycling bin? At the Park School, in Brookline, Massachusetts, where I teach fourth grade, these catalogs were a problem. We were receiving over 30 per day. Some weekly catalogs were addressed to teachers who had retired years earlier.

So we decided to do something about it.

We held a friendly [Catalog Canceling Challenge](#) among grades 3-5 to see which group of kids could cancel the most catalogs in 30 days. Some took school catalogs home to cancel, others canceled their parents' unwanted catalogs. Thinking the students might cancel a few hundred, I built a small wooden bin in a school hallway with three columns -- one for each grade -- to display their piles of canceled catalogs. This structure served as a physical bar graph showing the contest unfold over the month.



To both my delight and my dismay, all three columns were full in eight days, and the third grade started a wobbly 4-foot pile next to its side of the bin. I had to build additional columns for the kids to drop in more -- hundreds and hundreds more. They got into it and enjoyed doing their small part to help the environment. Some went door-to-door in their neighborhoods offering to cancel neighbors' catalogs; several children canceled more than 100 each.

After 30 days, 145 children in the three grades had opted out of 4,125 catalogs. If stacked, this would be a 31-foot-tall pile! Everyone was stunned by the results of their efforts.

Sounds encouraging, right? Consider, though, that, according to the *Natural Resources Defense Council*, the catalog industry mails out that many catalogs every six seconds. (Nineteen billion catalogs are mailed per year. That's 50 million a day, and, assuming 11 catalogs per inch, that's enough to make a 70-mile-tall stack of catalogs -- 12 times the height of Mount Everest -- each day.)



After some calculation, and assuming one canceled catalog represents at least six future catalogs not showing up, we determined that these students saved 69 trees and 69,000 gallons of water (it takes 3 gallons to make the paper for one catalog) and prevented the release of 44,000 pounds of carbon dioxide (the annual emissions equivalent of a 2.6 cars). These are impressive results that tie a simple kid-friendly action -- canceling catalogs -- to preventing deforestation, conserving water and energy, and slowing global warming.

Allowing children to take action about issues that they hear about and that may worry them helps them gain control over their world and some of its troubles. It gives them reassurance that they can make a difference and that we will solve these problems. As one of my students once said, "Earth is like a human. When the human gets a fever, we get chicken soup and get to watch TV. Then we get all better. When Earth gets a fever, it has no TV or chicken soup. So it doesn't get better as quickly. We need to do everything we can to give something like a TV or something like chicken soup to Earth right now."

In taking on this service-learning work -- like the recycling program the kids run at school, or the green movement and its implied life changes that are now sinking into our societal consciousness -- these children are providing our planet with some relief, helping in its time of need. Giving her some chicken soup! (Oh, and by the way, their parents were thrilled to get rid of those pesky catalogs.)

After our class participated in a live interview on NBC's *Today Show*, other schools, and Girl Scout troops, have joined our project. In fact, as of August 1, 2009, more than 5,356 children in thirteen states have canceled 28,054 catalogs, and we hope that hundreds of other schools, as well as scout troops, church groups, summer camps, soccer teams, community centers, and others will join and help us reach our goal of canceling 100,000 catalogs.

If you know any green teachers or kids who want to make a difference, pass our idea on to them. And thanks!



*Photo of The Shady Hill School 4<sup>th</sup> Grade in Cambridge, MA.*



**Host a *Catalog Canceling Challenge* with your school or scout troop. These steps will help you set up a successful, fun project!**

- 1 - Talk to your school's principal or scout troop leader about this project. Get permission to proceed.
- 2 - Schedule a kick-off assembly for all involved.
- 3 - Build a storage bin to drop canceled catalogs into or turn a bookshelf on its side. Some groups reuse copy paper boxes for storage and display. Put your bin or boxes in a safe, visible place.
- 4 - Edit and print out the parent letter (page 4, below). Prepare for your kick-off assembly.
- 5 - 30 minute kick-off assembly! Watch the helpful introductory slide show and movies from [www.CatalogCancelingChallenge.com](http://www.CatalogCancelingChallenge.com) on a projector. End with an adult and/or child canceling two catalogs by speakerphone! Answer questions. Pass out parent letters to teachers to pass out classes. Get your group pumped up! *"Who wants to save some trees?! Who wants to save some water?! Who wants to save our climate and protect our Earth?!"*
- 6 - For 30 days, have kids cancel catalogs at home and bring them back to put in your bin or boxes.
- 7 - *Optional:* Have the kids research and make posters, poems, or reports about saving trees and other natural resources. You can create math lessons on place value and data. The math sheets (below on pages 6-8) are full of computation practice. Participants could write a song, rap, or make movies. Can you turn your canceled catalog piles into art or a message (like the image on page 3)?
- 8 - Keep it up! Some friendly competition between grades, schools, or scout troops can help, but encourage kids to understand that we're all on the same team (and planet)!
- 9 - Email your results and a photo to **CatalogCancelingChallenge@gmail.com**! Include your school/troop name, location, number of participants, their grade(s), and the number of catalogs canceled. If you or your kids would like to write a blog post with your story for the CCC website, send that along, too!



November 1, 2010

Dear Jane Doe School/Troop Parents,

Today we are excited to announce the start of an exciting green initiative – *The Catalog Canceling Challenge* - that your child has the option to participate in. We hope to make a small dent in the number of unwanted sales catalogs our community receives each day.

It is a pretty simple project that has quite an impact by saving trees, water, and energy! We are joining other schools and scout troops across the country in our efforts. To help your child, consider doing the following:

- 1) Start a pile of unwanted sales catalogs (i.e.: *Lands' End, J. Crew*) for your child to cancel.
- 2) Ask your child if they are aware that 53 million of trees are cut down to make 19 billion catalogs each year\*. Then ask if they'd like to help reduce these numbers to help the planet and to clean out your mailbox.
- 3) Ask your child to help you cancel the catalogs in one of two ways: By calling the catalog companies directly using the 1-800 numbers on the back of each catalog using the script below. OR by helping your child set up a free account at [www.CatalogChoice.org](http://www.CatalogChoice.org) and inputting the catalogs you wish to cancel. Many children find this website fast and fun! And knowing they are making the world a better place is the best lesson of all!
- 4) Finally, make a pile of all the catalogs your child cancelled and bring it into school to drop off in their grade's bin located \_\_\_\_\_.

#### Sample script for phone cancellation:

**Polite Student:** "Hi, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I am calling to take my family's name off your mailing list."

The representative will ask you to look on the back of the catalog and provide the customer number (usually in a blue or yellow box). If they ask why your family wishes to cancel, you could say your family is doing it to save trees, or that you'll use their web for ordering in the future.

**Polite Student:** "Thank you so much!" (*Pats self on back. Picks up phone and calls another company.*)

*\*According to the National Resource Defense Council, 19 billion sales catalogs are made and mailed in the US each year. That's 600 per second. 53 million trees are used in making these catalogs. This paper production also wastes 53 billion gallons of water. 98% of catalogs are unused, eliciting no consumer response. This process uses enough energy to supply 1.2 million homes annually (38 billion BTUs), thus causing CO2 emissions equal to 2 million cars annually (5.2 million tons of CO2).*

***“Mild and Medium” Problems Made by Park School 4<sup>th</sup> Grade Students***  
*(feel free to edit to fit your students’ needs and abilities)*

Name \_\_\_\_\_

1. How many catalogs are in a pile twice as big as the Park School 4<sup>th</sup> grade pile of 1,854?
2. If Park School’s 4<sup>th</sup> grade canceled 1,854 catalogs and BB&N School canceled 1,391 catalogs, how many catalogs did the two schools cancel together last month?
3. If Park cancels 13 catalogs per day, how many do they cancel in 30 days?
4. If 1 catalog uses 3 gallons of water to make, how many gallons do 25 catalogs use?
5. If 11 catalogs are in a 1-inch pile, how many are in 12 inches?
6. If 11 catalogs are in a 1-inch pile, how many are in 13 inches?
7. If 11 catalogs are in a 1-inch pile, how many are in 15 inches?
8. You have to cancel 60 catalogs to save 1 tree (because it stops 360 catalogs from returning). A school saved 3 trees! How many catalogs did they cancel to do this?
9. If canceling 60 catalogs saves 1 tree, how many trees are saved if a school cancels 1,200 catalogs?
10. If 6 boys want to cancel 42 catalogs evenly, how many do they each cancel?
11. If 6 girls want to cancel 66 catalogs evenly, how many do they each cancel?
12. Canceling 1,600 catalogs reduces CO<sub>2</sub> pollution equal to one car for a year. If I cancel 800 catalogs, how many cars worth of pollution am I reducing?
13. If our school cancels 3,200 catalogs, how many cars worth of pollution are we reducing?

***“Spicy Hot” Problems Made by Park School 4<sup>th</sup> Grade Students***  
*(feel free to edit to fit your students’ needs and abilities)*

Name \_\_\_\_\_

1. If making 1 catalog uses 3 gallons of water, making how many catalogs would use 99 gallons?
2. If we divided 1,854 catalogs into 4 equal groups, how many catalogs would be in each group?
3. If 600 catalogs are mailed out per second, how many are mailed out in 21 seconds?
4. If 600 catalogs are mailed out per second, how many are mailed in 1 minute?
5. If 600 catalogs are mailed out per second, how many are mailed in 2 minutes?
6. If 600 catalogs are mailed out per second, how many are mailed out in half a second?
7. If making 1 catalog uses 3 gallons of water and there are 11 catalogs in a 1-inch tall stack, how many gallons of water does a 1-foot pile of catalogs use to make?
8. If 11 catalogs are in a 1-inch pile, how many are in 10 and  $\frac{3}{4}$  foot pile?
9. If canceling 60 catalogs saves 1 tree, then what fraction of a tree do you save when canceling 20 catalogs?
10. Write and solve a new catalog story problem:

---

---

---

**Catalog statistics written on board:**

- 19 billion catalogs are mailed to American families each year.
- That equals 63 catalogs per man, woman, and child in our country of 300 million people.
- It takes 53 million trees to create this paper. That's almost two trees per second.
- It takes 53 billion gallons of water to create this paper.
- It takes the energy equivalent of 1.2 million homes to create this paper.

**Questions to ponder as a class:**

Teacher asks, "*These are massive numbers on the board! Can you imagine how much 1 million is? Or 1 billion is? Can anyone explain ONE BILLION?*" Discuss their ideas. Probe with questions.

*"If I gave you \$1,000 a day, seven days a week, how long would it take you to collect 1 billion dollars?" (Assume that you spend none of the money, and collect no interest on it.)*

**Answer: 2,737.85 years** (2,737 years, 10 months, 7 days). *This means that if the payments had begun on the first day of the Common Era (January 1, year 1 on the Gregorian calendar), it would be November 7, 2738 before the \$1 billion would accumulate.*

To show the magnitude of the difference between one billion and one million that many don't appreciate, have your students figure out how long it would take to accumulate one million dollars following the same rules. **The answer: 2.74 years** (2 years, 8 months, 26 days)

*How many millions are in 1 billion? **1,000 millions**. How many millions in 19 billion? **19,000 millions**.*

*If there are 132 catalogs in a foot tall pile, or about 700,000 catalogs stacked up in one mile, how many miles tall would 1 billion catalogs be? **1,400 miles!***

*How many miles tall is 19-billion catalog pile? **26,000 miles (made and mailed per year!)***

*How many trees are in 19 billion catalogs? **53 million trees***

*Can you draw a picture of any of these statistics? How do you visualize them? Make a poster summing up one of these points.*

**NOTE TO MATH TEACHERS:**

*There is much potential for mathematical connections in this work. Especially with place value, data, and computation. Tinker with these questions so that they fit your school's Challenge and student results. Most importantly, make up other math sheets or activities to encourage their thinking and learning. Good luck!*



**Other Potential Lessons:**

- 1) **Science** - Have students research the paper making process and create *PowerPoint* slide shows or poster projects to share this “tree to truck to mill to truck to printer to truck to catalog to truck to mail center to truck to home to truck to landfill” cycle with your class. Have children consider all the implications, particularly of natural resource use and pollution, of these steps.
  
- 2) **Writing/Civics** – Have older students write letters to local political leaders and/or newspapers about trying to start a *Do No Mail* registry similar to the popular *Do Not Call* registry where people could sign up to get off of junk mailing lists. [www.DoNotMail.org](http://www.DoNotMail.org) has many details about this idea.
  
- 3) **Math** - Create new math sheets for your class. The catalog production statistics, our results data, and other information available for this project is fascinating and can get kids thinking in many interesting ways. This is possible for any grade level. You can also use bar graphs to track your results as they come in. Keep an open eye for such possibilities!
  
- 4) **Drama** – Plan, practice, film, edit, and upload a *YouTube* video about your school or troop’s Catalog Canceling Challenge! Or just make up a skit for your school to present and celebrate when you conclude your project!
  
- 5) **Other** – What else can you come up with to engage your students more deeply with this material? If you think of other lessons and projects, please email them to [CatalogCancelingChallenge@gmail.com](mailto:CatalogCancelingChallenge@gmail.com) and they will be added to the blog for others to consider using.

**The 6th video on this link teaches how to cancel catalogs by phone:**

[http://www.parkschool.org/blogs/ted\\_wells/videos/](http://www.parkschool.org/blogs/ted_wells/videos/)

**Or if written instructions are better for your learning style, read below.**

- 1) Get permission from someone at home that you are allowed to cancel the catalogs.
- 2) Make sure you know where to find the following information for each catalog:
  - a) What is the customer number (usually found in a blue box on the back of the catalog)?
  - b) What is the name that appears on the catalog? They may ask you to spell it.
  - c) What is the address on the catalog?
- 3) Make sure there is an adult in the room with you when you make the call.
- 4) With the catalog next to you, call number on back of the catalog. It's usually a toll-free number starting with 1-800, 1-877, or 1-866.
- 5) Two things may happen at this point:
  - a) A real person may answer your call and ask you how they can help. Tell them you would like to cancel your catalog and give them the information above.  
OR
  - b) You may hear a recorded message that gives you options (like "press 1 for ..., press 2 for ..."). Listen carefully for the option to cancel your catalog. If they don't have that option, listen for the option to speak with a representative. Press the number on your phone that corresponds to the option you want.
- 6) Three things may happen after you select an option:
  - a) You may continue to be presented with options. Continue pressing the numbers on your phone that corresponds to the option you want.  
OR
  - b) You may be connected to a real person who may ask you for the information above.  
OR
  - c) You may be asked to leave a message with the information above.
- 7) At this point, you may be told it will take a few months for the catalogs to stop coming.
- 8) You can also ask to be taken off all lists that rent or sell your name and address.
- 9) When you are done, say, "THANK YOU," hang up the phone, put the catalog in your pack so you can put it in your school or troop's storage bin. Pat yourself on the back!





# Catalog Canceling Challenge

# RESULTS

TROOP #	CITY AND STATE	GRADE/AGE	CATALOG CANCELLED	CATALOG STOPPED	# OF KIDS	CATALOG PER KID	ENTERED PER KID	TIME SAVED	CUSTOMER #	PERCENT OF CATALOG CANCELED	CASH TOOK OFF ROAD
1 - The Park School '87	Boston, Massachusetts	3rd-9th	4,125	24,750	145	28.4	31.3	69.1	69,300	48,550	2.8
2 - St. Leo Catholic School	Weymouth, Massachusetts	2nd	625	3,750	20	22.3	4.7	18.5	10,500	6,750	0.4
3 - Shady Hill School '87	Cambridge, Massachusetts	4th	600	3,600	40	15.0	4.5	18.1	10,000	6,400	0.4
4 - John Eliot School	Needham, Massachusetts	K-5th	2,300	13,800	200	11.5	17.4	38.5	38,640	26,840	1.5
5 - Hutchinson Fawn School	South Falmouth, Virginia	2nd-5th	1,785	10,710	172	19.4	33.5	29.9	29,988	19,270	1.1
6 - Hill House Coon, Center	Boston, Massachusetts	2nd-6th	1,000	6,000	50	20.0	7.6	16.8	16,800	10,800	0.6
7 - Oak Scout Troop 315	San Francisco, California	7th-10th	150	900	6	25.0	1.1	2.5	2,520	1,620	0.1
8 - Oak Street Office KA-900	Topeka, Kansas	4th-8th	111	666	40	2.8	0.8	1.9	1,065	1,199	0.1
9-11 - 6th grade "Tree-O"	Bedford Hills, New York	4th-6th	4,323	25,938	149	29.0	32.0	72.5	72,626	46,638	2.7
12 - The Park School '88	Boston, Massachusetts	3rd-5th	1,619	9,714	106	15.3	32.3	27.1	27,199	17,485	1.0
13 - Providence Elementary	Ray West, Florida	K-5th	481	2,886	20	17.2	3.6	8.1	8,001	5,195	0.3
14 - Oak Scout Troop 1139	Private Village, Kansas	2nd	96	576	4	24.0	0.7	1.6	1,613	1,037	0.1
15 - Elizabeth Lane Elem.	Charlotte, North Carolina	3rd-5th	949	5,694	539	1.8	7.2	15.9	15,943	10,249	0.6
16 - Oak Scout Troop 4911	Cedarville, Pennsylvania	6th	172	1,032	2	86.0	1.3	2.9	2,890	1,858	0.1
17 - Elbe School - Dairy Troop	Farmington, New Hampshire	K-7th	600	3,600	150	4.0	4.5	10.1	10,080	6,480	0.4
18-24 WCF District - 6 Schools	Unionville/Chaddsford, PA	K-12th	3,832	22,992	2,000	1.9	29.0	64.2	64,378	41,386	2.4
19 - Oldover's School	La Jolla, California	2nd-6th	850	5,100	50	17.0	6.4	14.2	14,280	9,180	0.5
20 - John F. Papp School	Mattitohong, Massachusetts	K-6th	458	2,748	48	9.5	3.5	7.7	7,694	4,946	0.3
27 - North Warren Central	Charlottesville, New York	2nd-5th	417	2,502	180	2.3	3.2	7.0	7,006	4,584	0.3
28 - Tenacore Country Day	Wethersfield, Massachusetts	3rd-5th	648	4,008	200	3.3	5.1	11.2	11,222	7,214	0.4
29 - Penhasket Middle School	Wareham, Massachusetts	7th	26	156	100	0.3	0.2	0.4	437	281	0.0
30 - Branwich School	Greenwich, Connecticut	1st-4th	667	4,002	150	4.4	5.1	11.2	11,206	7,284	0.4
31 - Oak Scout Troop 222	Walden, Minnesota	5th	586	3,516	19	30.8	4.4	9.8	9,845	6,329	0.4
32 - Timberlane Middle School	Pennington, New Jersey	6th-8th	1,614	9,684	950	1.7	32.2	27.1	27,115	17,431	1.8

**RUNNING TOTAL** ----->

as of 7/31/09 with new forfeits

**28,054** canceled **168,324** stopped **5,356** kids **19.0** cataloged **213** feet **470** trees **471,307** gallons **302,983** pounds **17.7** cans

