

## The Hidden Life of Garbage

- Heather Rogers

On average, each American produces 4.2 pounds of rubbish a day. Most of this is packaging. This staggering statistic starts Heather Rogers' fantastic book on garbage - a book that has lots of numbers, but never seems to let the reader drown in facts and figures. The figures are important, because the scale of the garbage problem is incredible. Rogers tells the historic story of rubbish, but she inevitably concentrates on the last 100 or so years. Before then, people were either so poor that their few belongings were used over and over, or (and this is the most important fact) their belongings were designed to be used, over and over again.

Heather introduces us to the odd roles that developed in a time of low garbage levels - the men and women who collected human waste to sell to farmers, the people who swept roads clear of horse manure to facilitate a easy crossing.

However the central theme of Rogers' book, is the way that modern day capitalism created the garbage problem, and how it has used and abused the solutions.

Finally, the author examines at great length the great recycling swindle. Recycling is of course a good thing, it's often the first step that most people take down the road towards environmental awareness or action. However, it is very much a diversion. Rogers' points out how simply putting "please recycle this product when finished" on the outside of a drinks can, gives the corporation a sheen of green colouring, even though they are producing millions of "use once" tins.

The recycling industry gives people the impression that everything is OK. That "something is being down" and stops people questioning why so much stuff is produced in the first place. Why don't we have re-usable bottles? Why do we need disposable razors?

In a fascinating chapter, Rogers examines how the packaging companies in 50s America were well aware of this. "Keep America Beautiful" is the most famous, and first anti-litter campaigns. It wasn't started by environmentalists, but by the packaging companies who wanted to shift the blame for "waste" onto the individual consumer and avoid the finger being pointed at corporations that were in the process of pushing extra packaging on to the market.

Competing companies soon found that extra-packaging, disposable containers, or every changing marketing materials gave them an edge over competitors who remained with the same old, returnable, reusable bottle or container.

The last century has seen the rise of a consumer society, fueled by manufacturers desperate for us to purchase and purchase again their products. In doing so, they have contributed to a gigantic problem of waste. Where do we put this garbage? What does it do to the environment if we burn it, or dump it?

फोहरमैला थुप्रीनुको वास्तविक कारणको बारेमा हिथर रोजर कुरा गर्छिन । औसत रूपमा एउटा अमेरिकीले ४.२ पाउन्ड फोहोर प्रतिदिन उत्पादन गर्छन् । रोजर फोहोरको ऐतिहासिक घटना, विगत सय वर्षको कुरा सोचिरहन्छिन् । त्यतिबेला मान्छे गरिब हुनाले गर्दा सरसामान, लत्ताकपडा धेरै समयसम्म प्रयोग गर्थे । गरिब भएका कारणले आफ्ना सरसामानहरू धेरै समयसम्म टिक्ने खालको बनाउथे । त्यसैले त्यसबखत थोरै फोहोर मैला हुन्थ्यो । मान्छेहरू रद्दी सामान किसान अनि बाटा बढार्नेलाई बेच्थे । तर अहिले पुँजीवाद संसारमा मान्छेहरू धनी भएर घरमा अत्यधिक फोहोर गर्न थाले । हाल पुनःप्रयोग गर्ने प्रणालीले रद्दी सामानको फोहोर मैला केही हदसम्म रोक्छ तर रिसाइकल उद्योगहरू सबै फोहोर मैला निवारण गरेको ढोगी कुरा गर्दै सब ठिक छ भन्छन् । १९५० ताका समान प्याकेट गर्ने कम्पनीहरूले अमेरिकालाई सुन्दर राम्रो राख्नुपर्छ भन्थे तर यो कुरा वातावरणविदले नभनी प्याकेट कम्पनीहरूले भन्थे किनकि फोहोरमैलाको उत्पादन गर्ने प्याकेट कम्पनीलाई आरोप लाग्न सक्थ्यो ।

## Question Answers

### A. Comprehensive :

**Q.1. According to Rogers, why are landfills "tucked away, on the edge of town, in otherwise untravelled terrain" (3)?**

**ANSWER :** Rogers thinks that "GROWS" is a fitting name because of the way landfills rapidly grow as a result of our overproduction of trash.

Waste Management Inc. likely intended the name to have positive connotations. GROWS is a "mega-fill", which is considered fairly high tech. It is possible that the company intended to

allude to the idea of growth through progress. Rogers, on the other hand, believes that the name alludes to growth of a problem.

**Q.2. What is the landfill's "working face" (4)? How does it compare with other parts of the landfill?**

**ANSWER :** The landfill's "working face" is where waste is dumped, then spread and compacted. This is the active part of the landfill; most of what remains is previously processed trash.

**Q.3. Why does Rogers think that the GROWS landfill is "aptly named" (5)? What connotations do you think Waste Management Inc. intended the name GROWS to have? What connotations does Rogers think the name has?**

**ANSWER :** Rogers thinks that "GROWS" is a fitting name because of the way landfills rapidly grow as a result of our overproduction of trash. Waste Management Inc. likely intended the name to have positive connotations. GROWS is a "mega-fill", which is considered fairly high tech. It is possible that the company intended to allude to the idea of growth through progress. Rogers, on the other hand, believes that the name alludes to growth of a problem

**Q.4. What are the dangers of the "new state-of-the-art landfills"? What point does Rogers make about liners being "expected to last somewhere between thirty and fifty years"?**

**ANSWER :** Seeping into the soil and contaminating the groundwater. These liners, however, have a life expectancy of only 30-50 years, after which the landfill operators are no longer liable for problems caused by their landfills.

**Q.5. According to Rogers, what is the "repressed question" that is not being asked?**

**ANSWER :** The "repressed question" is "What if we didn't have so much trash to get rid of?" She wants us as a society to be more conscious of our waste production.

**B.Purpose and Audience :**

**Q.6. At what point in the essay does Rogers state her thesis? Why do you think she places the thesis where she does?**

**ANSWER :** Rogers states her thesis in the third paragraph: "If people saw what happened to their waste, lived with the stench, witnessed the scale of destruction, they might start asking difficult questions."

She places the thesis near the beginning of the essay so that the reader knows what to expect; the reader is prepared for the process Rogers is about to describe to be horrific. Because she suggests that people might "start asking difficult questions" if they were familiar with this process, the reader becomes prepared to ask themselves questions, and to think about what Rogers offers in the rest of the essay with a critical eye.

**Q.7. What dominant impression does Rogers try to create in her description? Is she successful?**

**ANSWER :** Rogers tries to create a dominant impression of the vastness of the problem with the ways she references the landfills' physical scale as well as the potential they have for environmental destruction. She does this successfully.

**Q.8. What is Rogers's attitude toward waste disposal in general - and toward disposal companies like Waste Management Inc. in particular? Do you share her feelings?**

**ANSWER :** Rogers feels negatively toward waste disposal in general; she believes that the more technology created to help dispose of waste, the more the problem of waste production is pushed to the side.

Rogers feels even more negatively toward companies like Waste Management Inc., however, than she does about waste management as a whole. This is because of the way they function; they are able to make use of solutions that they know are ineffective in the long term but can avoid liability because of how these agencies are regulated. After reading her arguments, I share Rogers' feelings.

**C. Style and Structure :**

**Q.9. Rogers begins her essay with a description of garbage trucks collecting trash. What specific things does she describe? How does this description establish the context for the rest of the essay?**

**ANSWER :** In Rogers' introduction, she describes the trash collection in a way that feels familiar; she mentions the "dark chill of early morning", and how the trash is collected and compressed in the truck. This description feels familiar, the reader has almost certainly witnessed what she is describing before. One of Rogers' main ideas is that even though we as individuals produce a large amount of waste, we don't often think about what happens to it. Rogers helps make the experience feel like a personal and relevant one by creating a scenario the reader can recognize their role in at the start of the essay.

**Q.10. What determines the order in which details are arranged in Rogers's essay?**

**ANSWER :** Rogers structures the details by moving step-by-step through the waste disposal process, starting with the collection of trash all the way to the "capping" a cell, ending with a reflection on the implications of this process.

**Q.11. Is this essay a subjective or objective description of the landfill? Explain.**

**ANSWER :** Her description of the landfill, while she clearly does have opinions about it, is objective. She describes the process using concrete descriptions of how these facilities function, including statistics regarding capacity and daily trash intake.