



LITTER & ROAD SAFETY: WHY IT'S EVERYONE'S PROBLEM

Grades 9-12 | Lesson 11



In the Street Smart video, a car throws a fast-food bag out the window — and Austin says, "It's just a little trash."

Jenna isn't having it: "Have some pride in where you live. Don't junk it up."

LITTER causes more than 50,000 crashes per year, carries hundreds of dollars in fines and costs communities millions to clean up.

This lesson connects a behavior most people dismiss to real crash risk, real legal consequences and real civic responsibility.

Lesson

Overview



A close-up photograph of a person's hand dropping a white disposable cup onto a paved surface. The cup is lying on its side, and the hand is just above it. The background is a blurred outdoor setting.

BY THE END OF THIS LESSON, YOU WILL BE ABLE TO:

Explain how road litter and debris cause crashes — **MORE THAN 50,000 PER YEAR** in the U.S.

Identify road debris types by crash hazard level and describe the **CORRECT DRIVER RESPONSE**.

Describe **ARKANSAS' LITTER LAWS** and the penalties involved, including fines reaching hundreds of dollars.

Distinguish littering from **FAILING TO SECURE A VEHICLE LOAD** and explain the legal consequences of each.

Learning Objectives

Apply **CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY** to litter behavior, connecting individual choices to collective road safety.

Key Vocabulary

ROAD DEBRIS:

Any object on a roadway not placed there intentionally. Causes 50,000+ crashes annually — not just an eyesore.

UNSECURED LOAD:

Cargo not properly tied down or covered. Illegal in Arkansas — criminal liability applies if it causes injury.

LITTERING:

Illegal disposal of waste on public or private property. Arkansas fines can reach hundreds of dollars.

CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY:

Individual duty to contribute to community safety and well-being through responsible behavior and action.

DIFFUSION OF RESPONSIBILITY:

The psychological reason people justify littering — "someone else will handle it" — when responsibility feels shared.

Road Litter Is a Crash Cause, Not Just an Eyesore

In the video, Jenna says stuff like that bag "can hit someone, or make drivers swerve." The data proves her right: **LITTER ON ROADS CAUSES MORE THAN 50,000 CRASHES EVERY YEAR.**

LIGHTWEIGHT DEBRIS: Bags and cups. Can startle drivers, obstruct vision and enter engine intakes on motorcycles.

HEAVY DEBRIS: Furniture, tires and construction materials. Can disable vehicles or cause fatal crashes.

FLYING OBJECTS FROM UNSECURED LOADS: Items that leave a vehicle become projectiles at highway speed.



DRIVER RESPONSE TO DEBRIS

creates secondary hazards.
Sudden swerving and emergency
braking cause more crashes.

SAFEST RESPONSE TO ROAD DEBRIS:

Hold your lane, reduce speed gradually
— **do not swerve unless collision**
is unavoidable.

Litter doesn't disappear on its own.

SOMEONE HAS TO PICK IT UP, often
while working near moving traffic, which
can put them at risk of injury.





The Law: Littering Isn't a Minor Offense

Jenna to Austin in the video:
"You'll get a ticket — and
that's another piece of trash
you have to worry about.
One that costs money."

SHE'S RIGHT.

LITTERING IS ILLEGAL IN ARKANSAS:

Fines can reach **HUNDREDS OF DOLLARS** for a single offense. Repeat violations carry increased penalties — littering is not a "first offense is free" situation.

UNSECURED LOAD LAWS ARE SEPARATE:

If cargo falls from your vehicle, you are responsible. If an unsecured load causes injury or death, **CRIMINAL LIABILITY CAN APPLY** — beyond just a fine.

ROADSIDE CLEANUP

IN ARKANSAS COSTS

APPROXIMATELY

\$4 MILLION PER YEAR

— PAID BY TAXPAYERS.



Civic Responsibility: "One Nasty Bag at a Time"

Austin goes from **"IT'S JUST A LITTLE TRASH"** to picking up a stranger's bag. That behavioral arc is the whole point — someone has to go first.

Jenna's principle: "Have some pride in where you live. Don't junk it up." — a personal standard applied in public.

DIFFUSION OF RESPONSIBILITY:

Everyone assumes someone else will handle it — which means no one does.

ROAD SAFETY IS A COLLECTIVE SYSTEM:

It only works if individuals make responsible choices.

BYSTANDER ACTION MATTERS:

Austin's willingness to pick up litter is the same instinct that makes roads safer.

"Wanna save the world real quick?"

Small actions add up; one bag, one choice, one standard at a time.



Class Discussion

1

Austin went from "It's just a little trash" to picking up the bag. What changed? What does it take for a person to go from dismissing a problem to doing something about it?

2

If litter causes 50,000 crashes a year and cleanup costs millions, why do you think this issue isn't treated as urgently as distracted driving or speeding?

3

Jenna frames litter as a pride issue — "Have some pride in where you live." Is pride a more effective motivator than laws and fines? What actually changes behavior?

Key Takeaways

- Road litter causes **MORE THAN 50,000 CRASHES PER YEAR.** It is a documented safety hazard, not just an eyesore.
- **IF DEBRIS APPEARS ON THE ROAD AHEAD:** Hold your lane and reduce speed gradually — swerving causes more crashes.
- **LITTERING IS ILLEGAL IN ARKANSAS** — Fines can reach hundreds of dollars; unsecured loads carry criminal liability.
- "Have some pride in where you live. **DON'T JUNK IT UP.**"
— Jenna, Street Smart
- **DIFFUSION OF RESPONSIBILITY** is why litter spreads — someone has to decide to be Austin at the end of the video.



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