

RECYCLE MICHAEL THE NEW FRIEND

Written by
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The circular economy

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THE NEW FRIEND

“He’s late... As usual. We’ll be late... I bet he’s stopped another garbage truck heading for the dump, to pick out stuff that can be recycled so that less rubbish ends up in the landfill,” said Cycle Michael, the curious electricity meter, forever worried about using too much electricity, while waiting for his brother. Minutes seemed like hours, when at last he heard the familiar voice,

“Allo bro, wassup?”

“Hi at last! I did ask you to be punctual, we’re going out,” Cycle Michael scolded his brother.

“I know, but I simply couldn’t allow the truck to pour all that valuable material in the landfill.”

“If only I could guess the lottery numbers like that,” Cycle Michael smiled to himself.

“And anyway, I did text you.”

“Er, yes, you wrote ‘S lat f5, hrr’...”

“Exactly. ‘Sorry, will be 15 minutes late, I’ll hurry.’ What’s so complicated about that?”

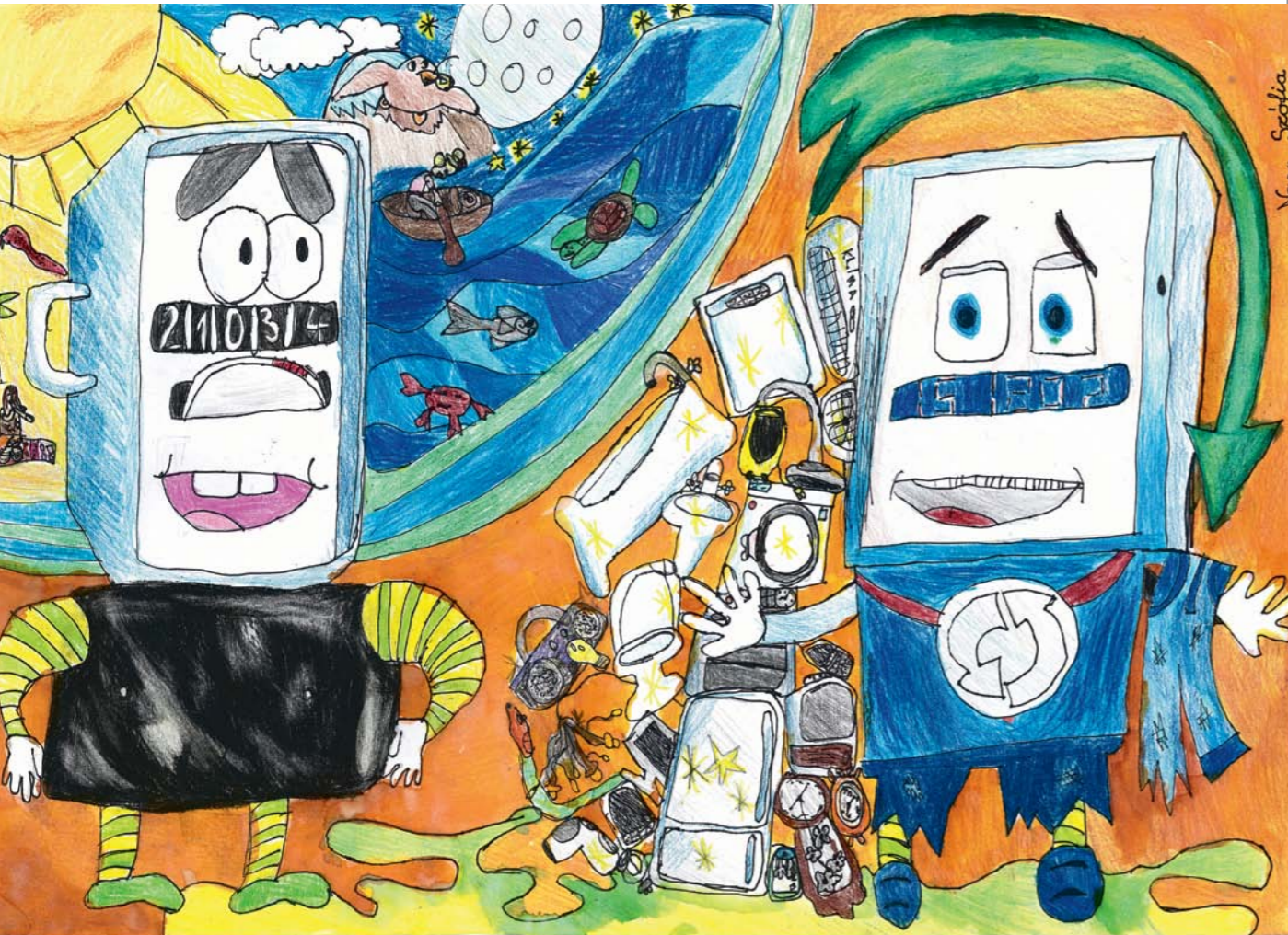
“Okay. I probably need a decoder for your texts. So, what’re these trousers? We’ve got our own trousers, why wear another one on top? Anyway, it’s full of holes. Did you tear it when selecting the rubbish?” Cycle Michael asked.

“Of course not. It’s called fashion, bro. Cool, innit? Our stripy trousers have long gone out of fashion.”

“They’ll be back. In any case, you’re the last person I need to remind what the quick changes of fashion lead to. Everyone wants new stuff all the time and people keep chucking out clothes.”

“Even though they’re perfectly fine to wear. I know. Which is why I made these trousers. From an old pair of jeans. Rather than buying a new one I altered the old ones. I’m rather proud of them.”





“I’d like to see what he does with them when torn jeans go out fashion again,” Cycle Michael smiled to himself.

“I know why you’re smirking. You’re wondering if I’ll alter them back into proper trousers when torn jeans go out of fashion. But I have a plan. I’m going to cut off the torn bits and I’ll have a great pair of shorts. Shorts never go out of fashion.”

“But if they do, you can still invent denim underwear,” Cycle Michael interrupted. “Come on, you’re talking too much, brother. We’ll never get there.”

Emily and Jack were on tenterhooks waiting for their special friend, Cycle Michael. Many weeks had passed since they’d been on holiday by the sea. They laid the table for Sunday lunch and asked Mummy and Daddy every minute, “What’s the time?” When’s Cycle Michael coming?”

“Calm down. I’m sure they... he’ll be here any minute now,” said Daddy.

Mummy had made him promise not to tell the children that Cycle Michael was bringing along a special guest.

When eventually the doorbell rang, Emily and Jack raced to the front door.

“Cycle Michael! How wonderful of you to come. We’ve missed you so much!” they said, flinging their arms around their friend.

“Wow, haven’t you grown! It’s been just a few weeks. I’m so happy to see you too. I’d like you to meet someone,” he said, stepping back after their embraces.

The children curiously looked at the surprise guest.

“This is Recycle Michael. My brother,” said Cycle Michael, introducing his brother.

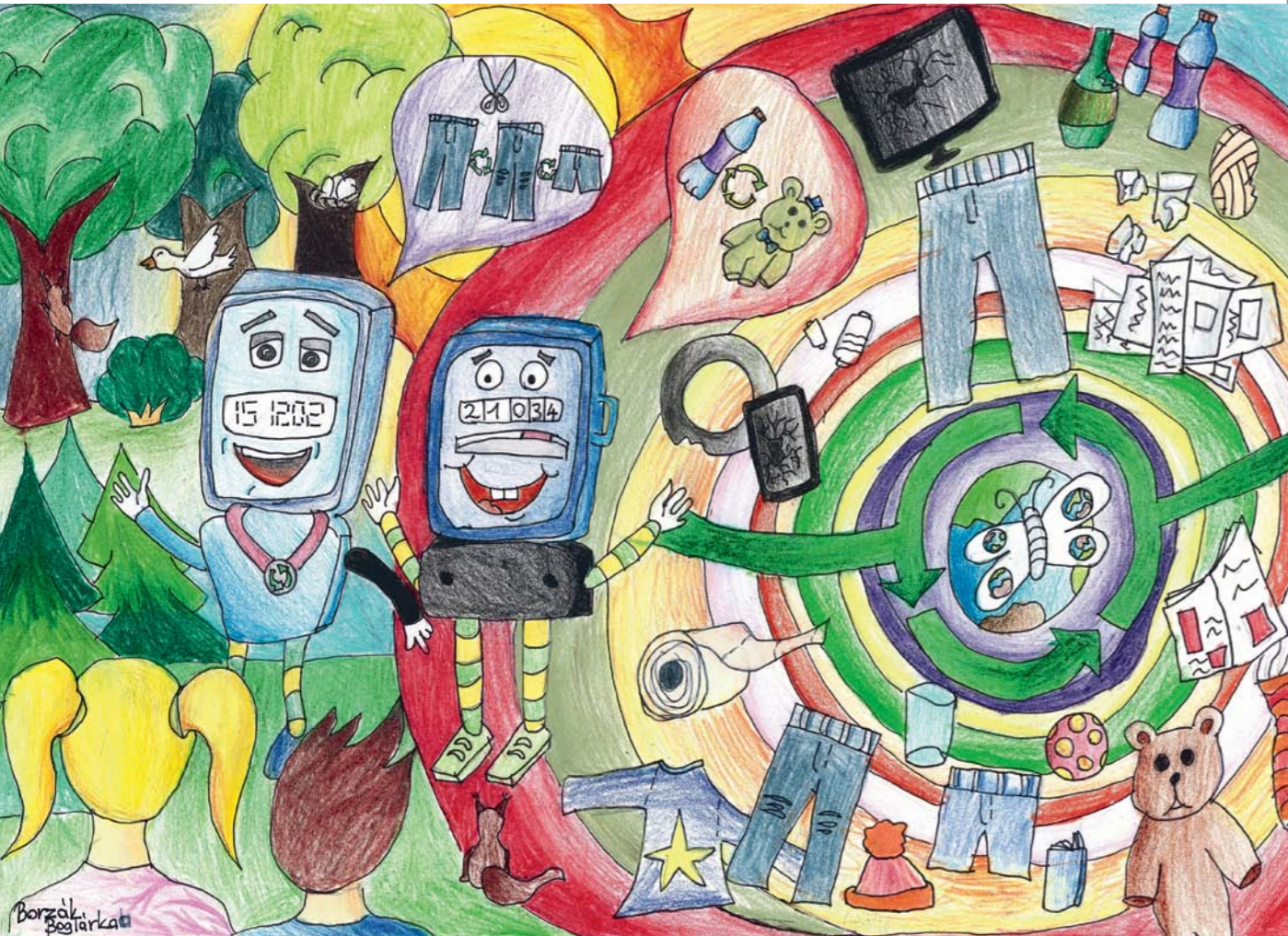
“Wow. Cool jeans. I’d like one of those myself,” Jack enthused.

“See, brother, some people understand all about fashion,” said Recycle Michael, turning to his older brother, and then winked at Jack.

He then turned to the children.

“Hi guys. I’ve heard a lot about you. My brother’s told me everything. I’m happy to meet.”





“Can we call you Recyke?” Emily asked. “Recycle Michael is a wonderful name, only it’s a tad long,” she added shyly.

“Recyke, Recyke, Recyke,” said Jack, running around, yelling his new name. “Cool- I like it. Do you, Recyke?” he said, taking his new friend by the hand and pulling him inside. “Let me show you my room.”

“Wait a mo,” Mummy said. “The soup’s been served, so let’s first have lunch. You can play with the Michaels all afternoon or until they’ve got time.”

“C’mon, I’m starving,” Daddy added.

There was a small argument over who should sit where at the table. Mummy took out a place setting she had secretly prepared. Eventually – with mediation from the parents – they came to an agreement. It was decided that Cycle Michael and Recycle Michael would sit at either end of the table; Jack next to Recycle Michael, and Emily next to Cycle Michael. The parents, as usual, would have the choice of the leftover two chairs.

“Sorrdryou ‘ike the naymRecoike,” Jack asked with his mouth full.

“Sorrerrrdyou ‘ike the nayyyyymRecoike,” Emily said, exaggeratingly mocking his brother with her mouth empty.

Jack didn’t think his sister’s mocking was funny. He turned to her and, opening his mouth even wider to better reveal the pulp of chewed chicken and carrots, he pretended to empty it all in Emily’s lap.

“Yuuuck, that’s gross! I’m going to puke,” Emily yelled. “Give me your plate,” Emily said, reaching over to take Jack’s soup, imitating vomiting.

“That’s enough,” Mummy said, slapping her hand on the table. “No talking with your mouth full and no mocking either. And especially nothing disgusting while eating lunch. A fine introduction to the new guests, I say.”

At Mummy’s raised voice – and catching Cycle Michael’s stern look – Recycle Michael changed his mind and swallowed his food. He had wanted to join the game with his variation that included a parsnip, but instead he said,

“I think Recyke is cool. Awesome. Feel free to call me Recyke.”





After lunch the children took Cycle Michael and Recyke to their room.

“Can we show you our summer photos?” Emily asked enthusiastically.

“I’d love to see them,” Cycle Michael said.

“Me too,” Recyke said. I hope there are pictures of diving. My brother told me how clever you were.”

“We do actually. See this one for instance,” he said and was about to take the album out of his sister’s hand, but she wouldn’t let him.

“I’m showing the album! It was my idea,” Emily said, pulling away the album.

“Children, children. Calm down. You’ll just tear this lovely album and then nobody will be able to show it,” said Cycle Michael, trying to mediate.

“How about me turning the pages and you sitting on either side and telling me about the pictures,” Recycle Michael suggested.

“Okay, good idea,” Jack enthused.

“But then how will Cycle Michael see the pictures?” Emily worried.

“I’ll cuddle up behind you. Best view from here,” smiled Cycle Michael, who was happy his brother was beginning to tune into the situation and warm to the children.

They looked at all of the photographs at length and recalled the wonderful time they’d had together, including the diving, the expedition and even cleaning the bay.

“See Recyke, how much rubbish gets washed up on the beach? We collected all of these,” said Jack, pointing at one of the photographs.

“I’m well aware of the problem all this rubbish means. Which is why it is high time we shifted to a circular economy,” said Recycle Michael, closing the album.

“Brace yourselves for an endless spiel,” Cycle Michael smiled, knowing they’d entered his territory, so to speak. “I’ll go and have a chat with Mummy and Daddy,” he said, closing the nursery door behind him.





“What is a circular economy?,” Emily asked.

“Circular economy means that people try to model their lives on nature as best as they can, according to the laws of nature. In nature, there is no such thing as rubbish. Everything is reused in a way that everything is in circulation. Can you give examples of this? Have you learnt about it in school yet?”

“Like the circulation of water,” Emily said after giving the matter some thought. “Water from, for instance, the sea or other surface waters, evaporates, enters the atmosphere in the form of water vapour, where sooner or later it becomes a cloud, and returns to the earth in the form of rainfall. There it seeps into the soil, sooner or later reaches a stream and then a larger river.”

“Yeah, yeah, and then on to the sea and it all starts all over again,” said Jack, sulking. “She only knows because they just learnt about it at school. I haven’t learnt it yet, How would I know?” Jack grumbled.

“At least now you too know”, Emily said comfortingly. “You can show off tomorrow to your friends,” she continued encouragingly.

Recycle Michael smiled, seeing that in spite of all the bickering and fooling, they loved each other really.

“I’m sure that even if you didn’t learn about it at school, you can think of similar natural circulation, Jack,” said Recyke to his sniffing new friend. “What happens to the plants in the fields?”

“Well, plants are eaten by plant-eating animals. Like the field mouse. I know now! And the field mouse is eaten by another animal, like a fawn. Or do fawns eat plants?” said Jack, unsure about himself now.

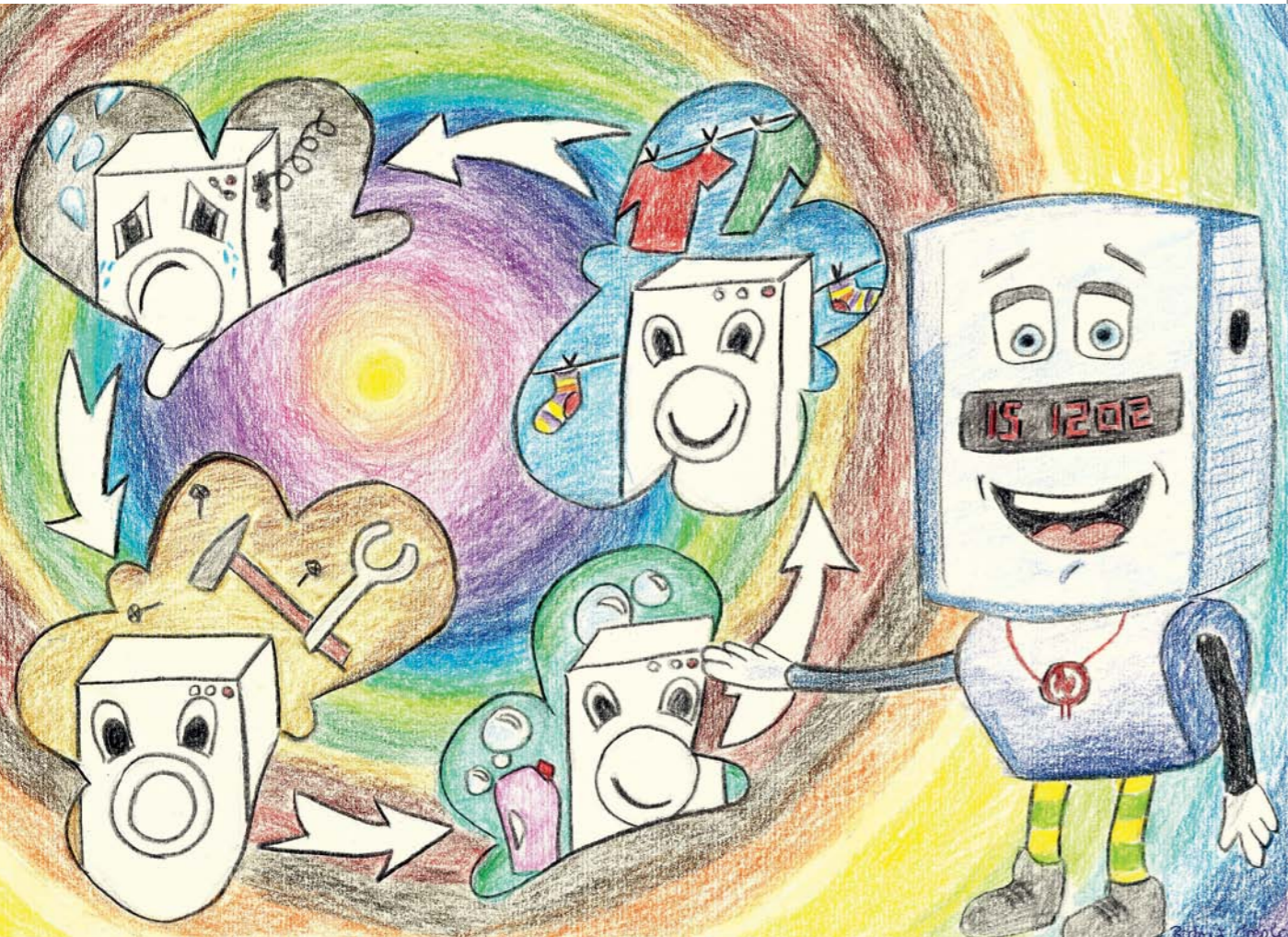
“Fawns are plant-eaters,” said Emily helpfully.

“Foxes then,” Jack said.

“Yep, foxes are predators. But what about animals that don’t get eaten by other animals?” said Emily thoughtfully.

“They’ll be eaten by those thingies... micro-thingies. I saw a film on NatGeo the other day,” said Jack, thinking loudly. “What’re they called?”



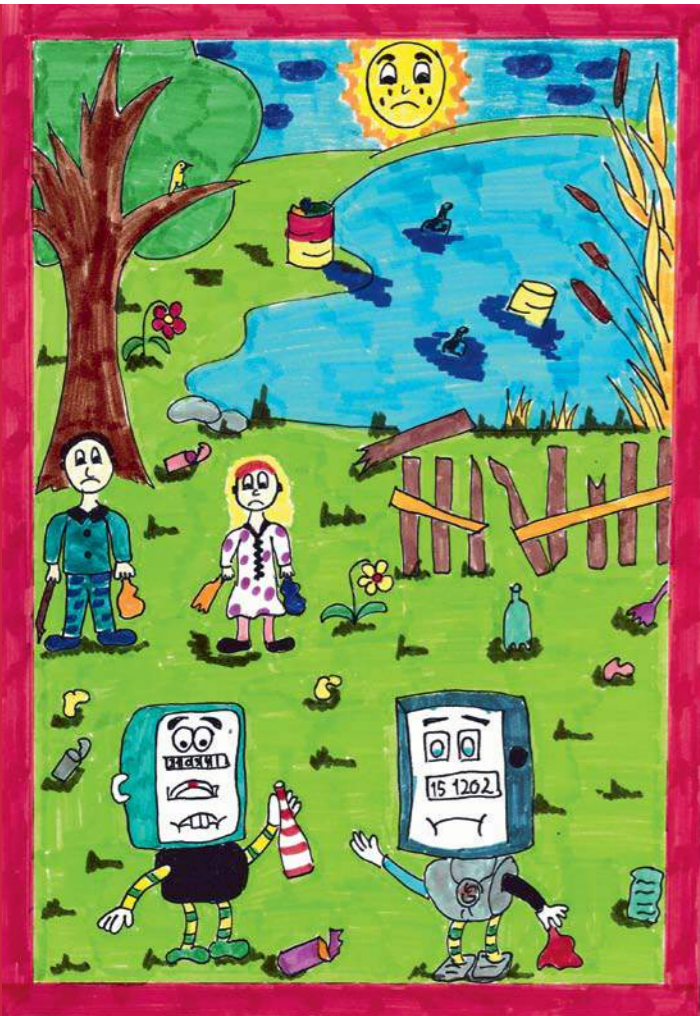


Those tiny, invisible creatures are called microbes, also known as micro-organisms. Like bacteria and fungi, which help decompose dead organic matter. Whatever other “consuming” beings don’t eat will be transformed by the “decomposing” creatures into simpler substances that can re-enter the circulation of matter. Plants, for example, can absorb them from the earth.”

“I see, so decomposing creatures are in fact waste processors. And they do a perfect job at that, because they make stuff which consumers no longer need in their original form,” said Jack, summing up the idea. “That way it will never become waste.”

“Well that was a smart summary of the situation,” Recyke praised Jack. “Ideally people should be able to do that and reuse everything in one way or another. After products become waste they’d be turned into secondary raw materials which the same industry, or a different one, could use to make its own products.”

“But Recycle Michael... I mean Recyke... oh... I just realised why that’s your name! So you’re saying that recycling is not something new at all. Cycle Michael taught us that we need to collect rubbish separately – like paper, plastic and metal and glass and e-waste – so it can be recycled. To allow them to be returned to the production processes as secondary raw material,” Emily said enthusiastically.

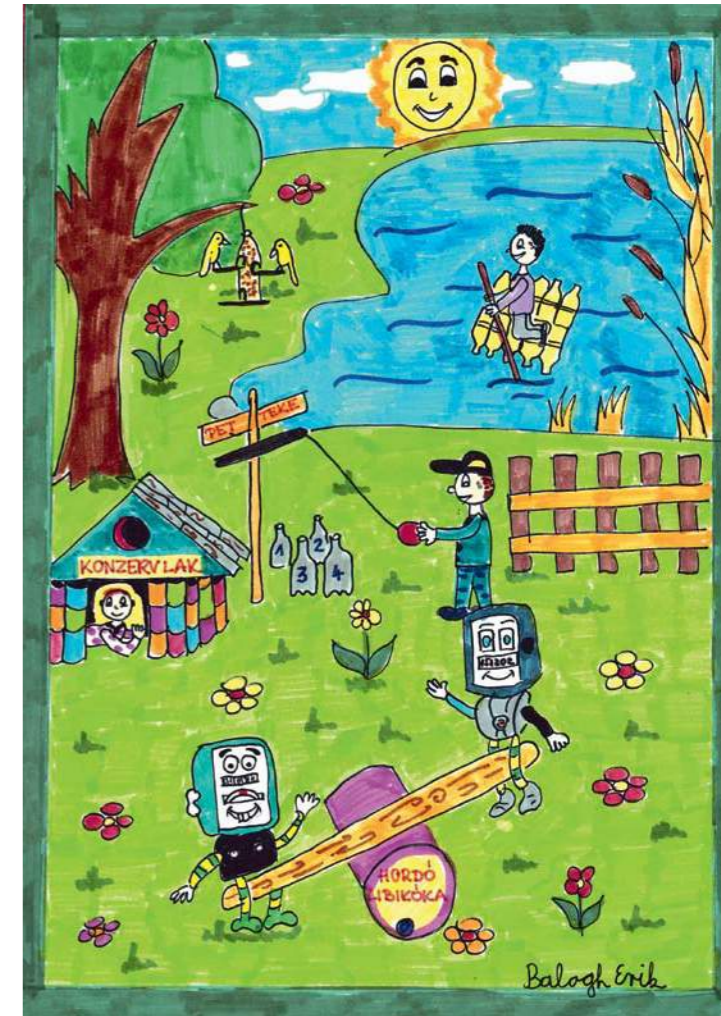


“Indeed,” Recycle Michael said. “Unfortunately, however, we’re not efficient enough yet. Unfortunately, there’s still a lot of valuable, recyclable stuff out there that ends up in landfills or gets burnt in incinerators. In doing so we lose loads of secondary material, which could be used instead of primary raw materials. That way we wouldn’t have to take those raw materials out of nature. Circular economy is a new concept showing the way forward. We need to work together to follow that course.”

“What does that mean, Recyke?” Jack enquired.

It means that in a circular economy everybody has their own task. Manufacturers need to bear in mind

even as they are designing their products that these need to be long-lasting and easy to repair, so they become waste as late as possible in their life cycle. When products do become waste, they need to be easy to disassemble, take to pieces and process. No matter what product we’re talking about – clothes, furniture or electronic devices. Recyclers need to do their job as efficiently as possible. And most importantly, manufacturers and recyclers are not the only players in the circular economy, but also, we consumers too. After all, we are the ones ‘consuming’ the products. We have at least as important a role in this co-operation as the manufacturers and the recyclers to. Do you know why?”



Balogh Erik



Recycle Michael waited for the children to give the matter consideration.

“I think we can help by looking after our stuff so they become rubbish as late as possible. For instance, we keep our toys, household appliances in good repair and use them according to the instruction manuals, which will give them a longer life,” said Emily.

“And by buying good-quality stuff. They may be more expensive, but will last longer. So we can help by being conscious consumers,” Jack added.

“Absolutely brilliant ideas,” Recycle Michael praised the two children. “Absolutely, we consumers have a really important role in preventing waste in the first place.”

“Best not to buy anything at all,” Jack interrupted.

“Just what I was about to say, Jack,” Recycle Michael smiled. “We have several options. Best not to buy, of course. If we have to, because we need something, it’s better to buy used things. If we need something new, we should go for long-lasting, good-quality stuff. But we need to be conscious consumers. Think about the circular economy. Good shopping decisions can contribute to less waste.”

“Which is why we need to collect waste separately,” Emily added. “So that as little rubbish goes to municipal waste, the rubbish bin in other words. Because everything we throw there ends up in an incinerator or a landfill.”

“Absolutely,” Recycle Michael agreed. “Reusing and upcycling are solutions we personally can do as players in the circular economy. To illustrate the difference between the two solutions, let’s take the computer monitor as an example. Reuse means that if you no longer need it, you can sell it on eBay or other online marketplaces, and it won’t become waste, but rather, its lifespan can be prolonged by someone else using it for a year or two, instead of buying a new one. But you could also give it a way to someone who might still need it. Now upcycling is different in that the monitor is not used as a monitor anymore, but as something else.”

“How else could you use a monitor?” Jack wondered.

“Well, I knew a family that kept the plastic case of the screen and used it as a house for their cat.”

“Ha-ha and the evening movie was called ‘Sweet Dreams, Pussycat,’” Jack said jokingly.





They all laughed at that.

“So our job is then to prevent waste, conscious consumption and to use our stuff for as long as possible, and make an effort to reuse things. For example, if something breaks, have it repaired instead of binning it straight away. Or recover our stuff. Like your old jeans. Or is that reuse? Well, whatever. You made a fashionable new pair of jeans from the old ones instead of buying a new pair,” Emily joked.

Recycle Michael pretended to look sad.

“Is it that obvious? Cycle Michael never noticed I made them. True, he did think I’d accidentally torn them...”

Jack started dragging out one of his trousers from the cupboard.

“Recyke, I’d like to make a pair of torn jeans like yours. Here’s one of my jeans. Can you show me how you did it?”

“Of course. Give me a pair of scissors. So here we go...”

He was about cut the trousers when Cycle Michael popped in.

“What’re you doing with those trousers?” he yelled at the gentleman’s tailors.

Emily, Jack and Recyke looked at each other and they said in chorus,

“We’re upcycling!”

At this point Mummy peeked in the door.

“Good Lord. We only just bought those. Don’t you cut it up!” she said and stormed out of the room.

The three mischief-makers looked puzzled. What should they do? Mummy returned as fast as she had left.

“Here, these are the trousers you tore in the playground last time. ‘Recover’ them instead.” she said, handing them Jack’s old trousers.

“I thought you’d thrown them away” Jack said in surprise.



“I decided to patch them instead. But I don’t mind if you turn them into ‘fashionable’ jeans. I’m not going to stop you,” she smiled and pulled a funny face at Recycle Michael.

Jack was thrilled. By the evening, together they made a new pair of trousers. Of course, they had to take some joint pictures of the duo with the torn trousers. Emily and Cycle Michael found this very entertaining.

“Lovely to see you again, Cycle Michael,” Emily said at the end of the day.

“And thanks for bringing along your brother,” Jack added. “He’s awesome.” Both children smiled. “When’re you coming again?” they asked at once.

“Soon. But don’t forget that you’re important players in the circular economy. Next time I’ll tell you about...”

“Come on bro, don’t get started, otherwise we’ll never get home,” said Cycle Michael dragging his brother from the door. “You’ll tell them next time.”

ILLUSTRATIONS

The illustrations were selected from submissions for a children’s drawing competition published by CECED Hungary Society in 2016

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