

What Remains at Westcave Today Activity

Read each of the stories below to your class. Have the students write down the items that were left behind at Westcave on the attached sheet of paper. Then using the Decomposition Timeline have the students figure out:

- a) Which of the items left behind have completely biodegraded back into the environment?
- b) Which of the items have partially degraded?
- c) Which of the items would still be found today at Westcave?
- d) Which of the items could be found by a guest visiting 250 years from now? 500 years from now?

Littering Stories

1. In 1925, A family of five from Austin Texas ventured out west for a hike along the Pedernales river. They came across a small tributary and followed it back to an enchanting waterfall with an emerald pool below. They decided to have their lunch in that very spot. The two young children decided to take off their cotton shirts and jump into the water. Their mom changed their baby brothers diaper and set him on a blanket to play. The dad pulled out his fishing pole and threw a line in to test his luck with catching a fish. The mom laid back and watched her children play, while sipping on some Coca-Cola. All of a sudden a thunderstorm rolled in. In a panic, the family raced to the car and back to town, leaving their picnic behind. The items left behind included: a banana peel, glass Coca-Cola bottles, fishing line by the stream, a dirty diaper, and two small cotton shirts.
2. In 1971, A group of three college friends ventured out of Austin for the weekend. They discovered upon a small creek along the Pedernales River. There was a couple of signs that read "Private Property Do Not Enter," but their curiosity overtook them. Past the signs they followed the creek along one of several trails that appeared to have been heavily used. At the end of the various trails they discovered a waterfall oasis complete with pool below. One of the college kids raced back to the car to grab their cooler. The college students splashed around in the pool, ate some snacks, and set up a campfire. When darkness approached they headed back to the car only bringing their cooler. The rest of the items in the cooler remained in the oasis they discovered. Among the items left included: six glass bottles, 4 aluminum cans floating in the pool, 2 plastic bags, 3 cigarettes, and a Styrofoam cup.
3. A month ago, a 3rd grade class was visiting Westcave Preserve. The students were excited to learn and have fun at Westcave. Eager to preserve the place they were visiting all the students in the class followed the two rules from their guide: 1) to stay on the trail and 2) not to collect anything. After hiking down to see the grotto with eyes open wide it was time to head back for lunch. On the hike out of the canyon one of the students had a cold and asked their teacher for a tissue. After blowing their nose a student handed the tissue back to the teacher. In a rush to catch up to her class, the teacher dropped a few unseen items out of her bag. The items that fell out of the teacher's bag included: a used tissue, a Styrofoam coffee cup from that morning, and a banana peel.

What Remains at Westcave Today, _____?

(Today's Date)

Story 1: _____

Item	Time to Break Down	Completely Decomposed?	Partially Decomposed?	Found Today?	250 years from now?	500 years from now?

Story 2: _____

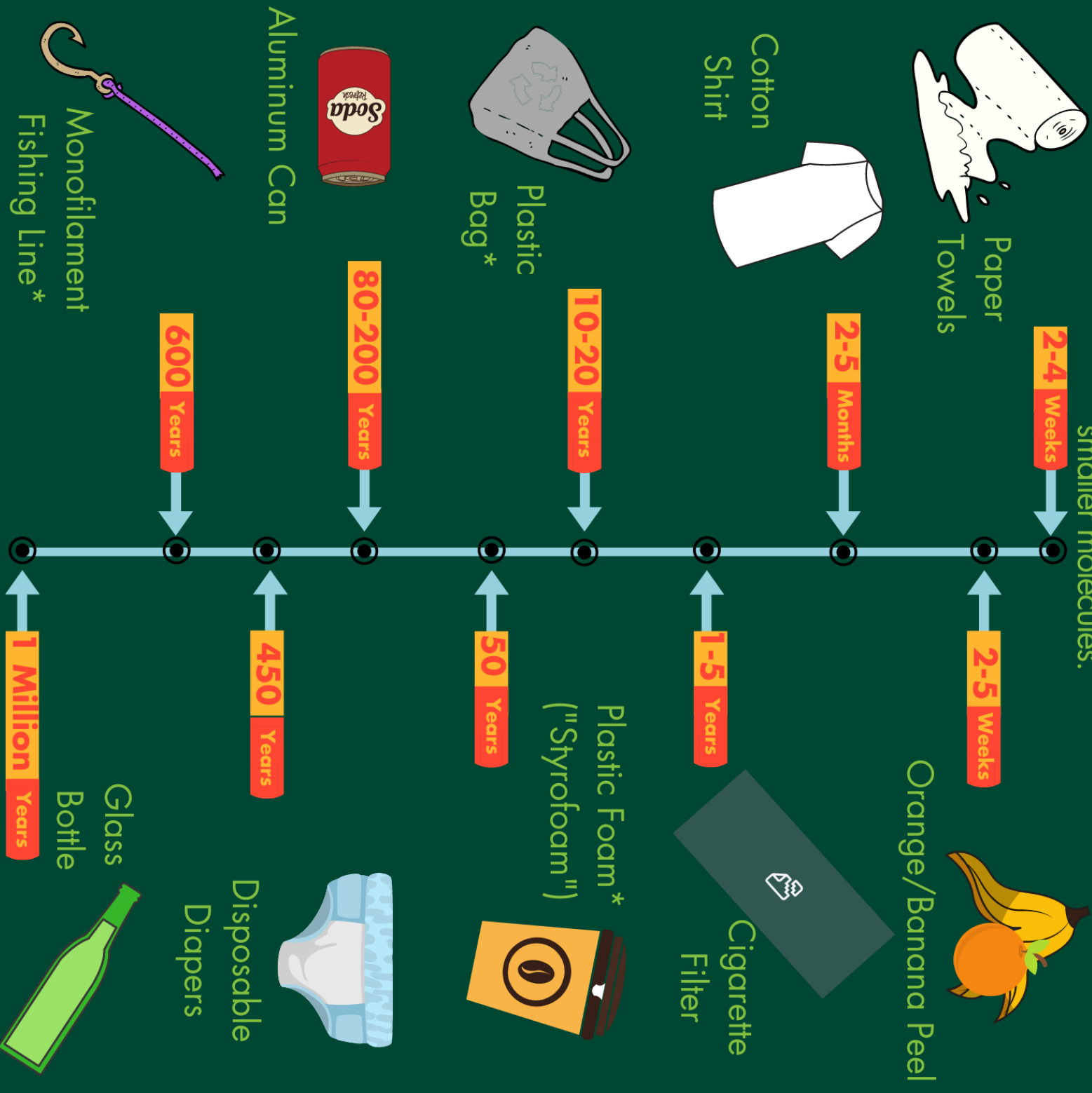
Item	Time to Break Down	Completely Decomposed?	Partially Decomposed?	Found Today?	250 years from now?	500 years from now?

Story 3: _____

Item	Time to Break Down	Completely Decomposed?	Partially Decomposed?	Found Today?	250 years from now?	500 years from now?

Decomposition Timeline

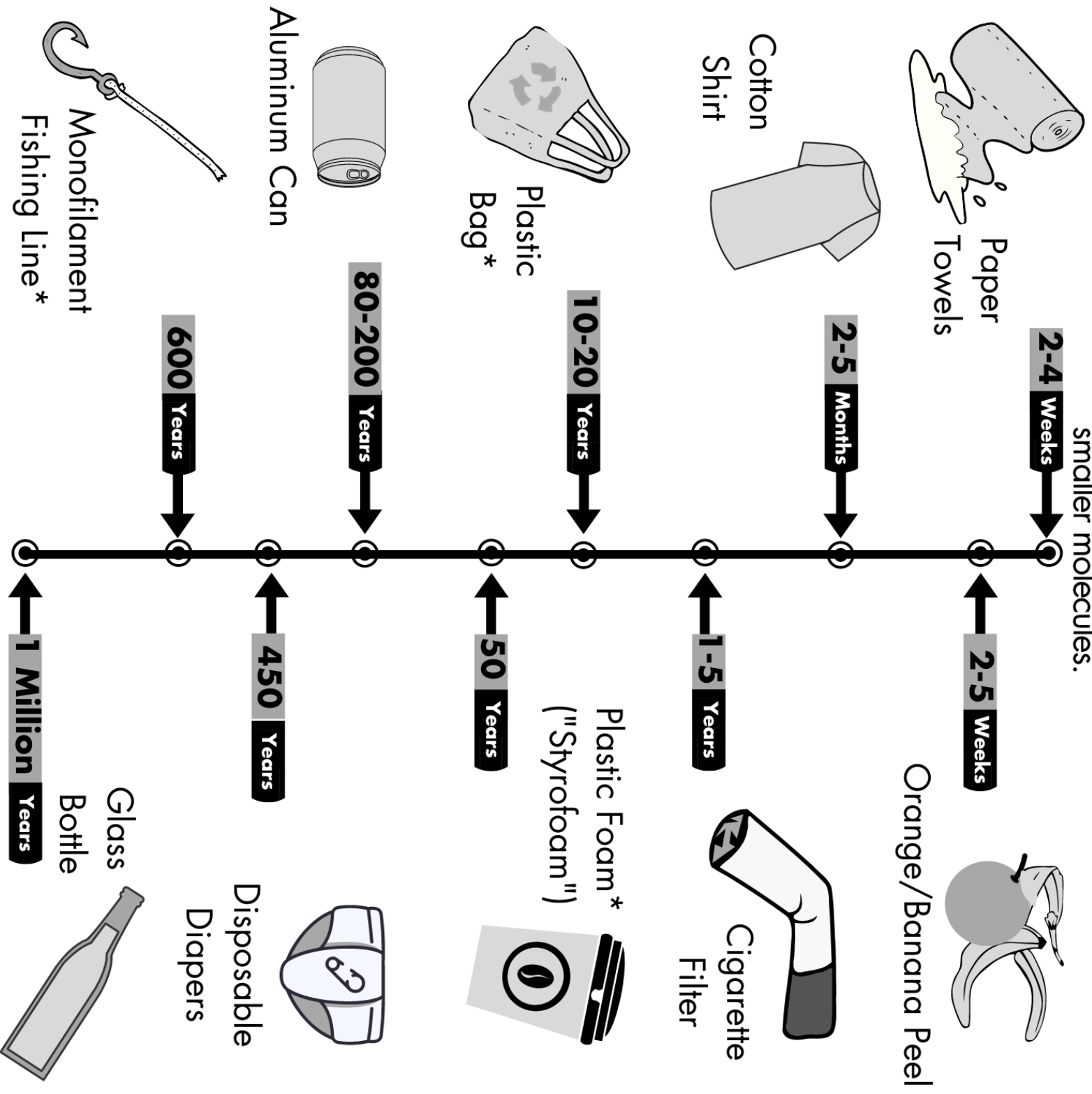
Have you ever wondered how long certain items take to decompose? Decomposition is the process of breaking down organic material into smaller molecules.



*Plastic however never fully biodegrades, but slowly breaks down into particles less than 5mm in diameter, known as "Microplastics," that can still cause problems for wildlife and marine life.

Decomposition Timeline

Have you ever wondered how long certain items take to decompose? Decomposition is the process of breaking down organic material into smaller molecules.



*Plastic however never fully biodegrades, but slowly breaks down into particles less than 5mm in diameter, known as "Microplastics," that can still cause problems for wildlife and marine life.

