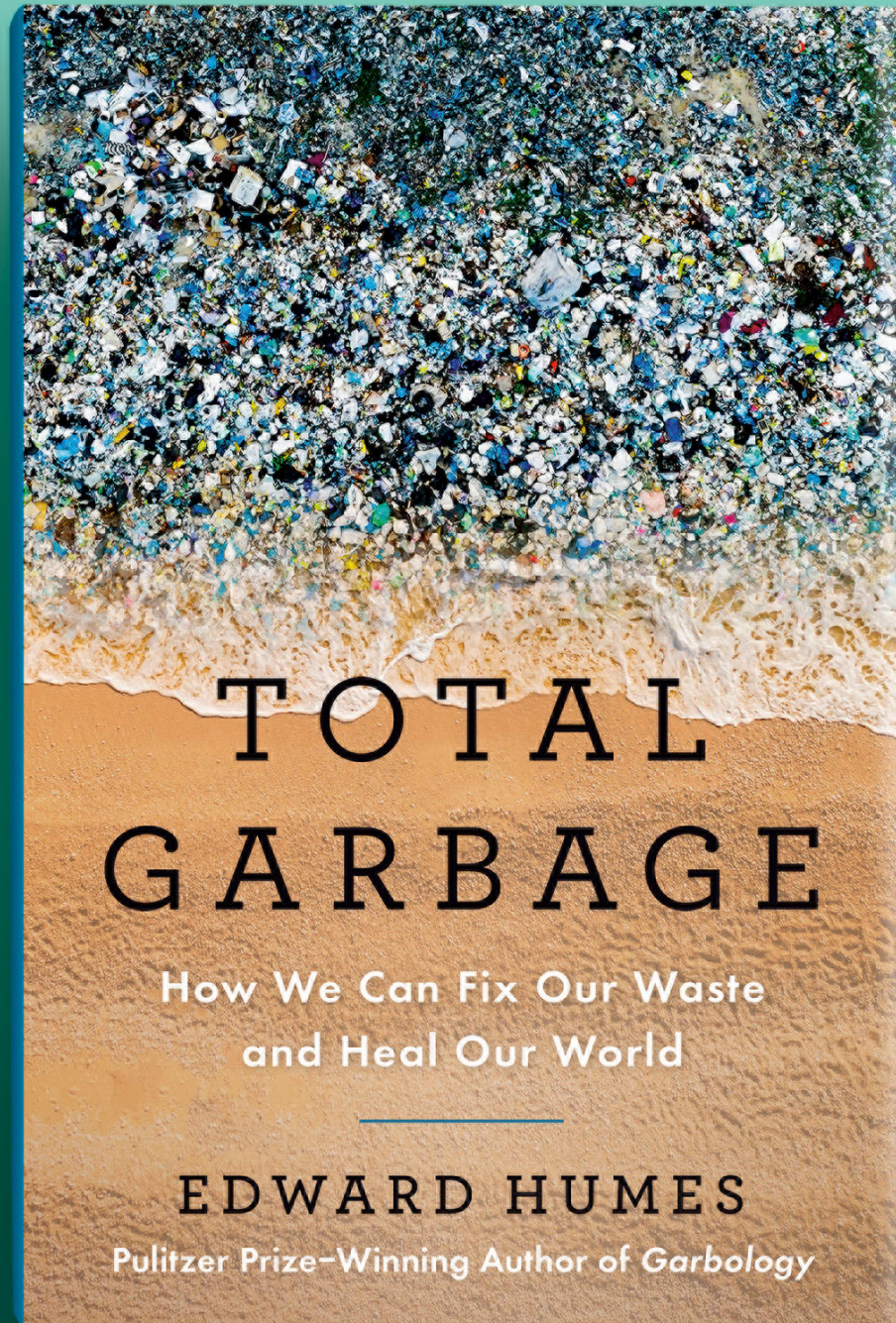


READER'S DISCUSSION GUIDE



TOTAL GARBAGE

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- What drew you to this title, and what were your assumptions about what the content within would be? How big of a problem did you know our waste on a human scale to be? What were you hoping to learn from this book?
- “You swallowed 285 pieces of plastic today” (xiii). Were you startled by this number and the weekly sum of up to five grams (which is enough to constitute a credit card)? In what ways?
- When you break down your daily routines, using the simple Starbucks cup of coffee example (xv), is it easy to see where waste and plastic enter our lives at every sip?
- What are the new “8 Rs” — Rethink, Repower, Refuse, Reduce, Reuse, Repair, Recycle, Rot (xxiii)? Did any of these upgrades surprise you? Why has it become necessary to expand the initial list of themes in our current age (from the “Reduce, Reuse, Recycle” mantra of decades ago)?
- How did “Owen’s List” serve as a messaging “link between what their neighbors thought was waste and the businesses that saw it as a valuable resource” (5)? What business model did it create?
- How has plastic powered our scientific, military, medical, and technological wins and everyday world (9)?
- How did disposability go from being a “strange and possibly wicked” idea to a “desirable and inevitable” habit (12)? What were the results of these inventions, stemming from the 1960s to the 1990s to today, when we generate a staggering 400 million tons of this kind of trash a year?
- Why is Jenna Jambeck called the “Trash Genius” (21)? How does she help communities figure out their plastic waste problems and how to deal with them?
- How did outsourcing and offshoring in the 1990s impact recycling efforts (27)? How did trash become the United States’ largest export?
- Describe Sarah Nichols’s and the state of Maine’s strategy to fix the state’s broken recycling system (41). What is an EPR (extended producer responsibility) law, and what are its goals? Is it likely to be effective? Why or why not? Do you think it’s an equitable or unfair approach, and why? Who do you believe should ultimately pay for the costs of cleaning up and repurposing single-use packaging and container waste?

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- Discuss the history of the glass bottle and how its value and ownership have fluctuated over time as our first recyclable (43). How did the advent of seltzers and sodas reshape the destiny of the glass bottle?
- How does charging container deposits to consumers prevent waste and contribute to a circular low-waste economy (47)? Why didn't we keep, or shift back to, reusable containers and packaging?
- Before reading *Total Garbage*, were you familiar with Keep America Beautiful's "Crying Indian" advertisement (48)? Why did the beverage and packaging industries finance and push anti-litter messaging and the idea that "People start pollution. People can stop it"? Do you agree that advertisement and its underlying message constitute greenwashing? Explain why or why not.
- How does induction cooking work and why is that type of stove different from other cooking devices (68)? How does it compare to other technologies, and would you choose it for your own kitchen? Why or why not?
- What are the dangers of gas stoves (80–82)? What pollutants, particulates, and chemicals are released, and what health risks do they pose? Does learning about these emissions cause you to question your use of and feelings about cooking with gas?
- Describe the influence of the 1893 world's fair in Chicago and the "City of Light" on the American imagination for an electric future (92). What influences stood in the way of turning the demo into widespread urban reality?
- How do heat pumps work and how are they a win for "pocketbooks, pollution, and climate" (97)?
- What is the Passive House movement (106)? What are the goals of this sustainability standard, and what are its roots? How does it banish indoor pollution? How could it create new affordability standards for all families and income levels?
- What are the opportunities and roadblocks right now to shifting to an America powered primarily by renewables? What role does America's aging power grid play in rolling out investments in renewable energy (123)?
- According to Jamiah Hargins, "our green lawns may be the most senseless and wasteful inventions in history" (134). What does he mean by this? Do you agree, or do you see value in green grass lawns? Explain.

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- What did the Crouches' legal battle with their homeowners' association over their native plant and pollinator garden (144) accomplish? Would you support or oppose a similar outcome in your state?
- How does industrially grown produce vary from homegrown and heirloom varieties (151)?
- What are regenerative agriculture and no-till farming? What are the benefits, and what are the goals in concert with restoring soil health (160)?
- Why do cars and their current design ethos and capabilities have such a hold on our habits and emotions? Could you anticipate making a complete swap to alternate modes of transport, such as some kind of electric vehicle (EV)? What would hold you back or be simple to implement?
- How has the city of Peachtree, Georgia, embraced the benefits of golf cart travel and structured their city and pathways around it (179)? How has this intentional process set up the city for success, access, and affordability for residents?
- If you could design a car for maximum affordability that would suit your needs as you actually drive and use your vehicle, would it differ from the predominant designs offered today by major carmakers? How so?
- Do you have access to or own an EV? What are the perks (or hiccups) you find or think could exist with ownership? How has this vehicle—whether car, bike, or cart—impacted your travels, your lifestyle, and your finances?
- How does shopping at a low-waste store such as GoGo Refill work (189)? What benefits does a consumer obtain there—to their wallet, health, lifestyle, and the planet? What are the drawbacks?
- How has fast fashion (and the aggressive cycle of buying, replacing, and tossing it) become a major environmental issue, from waste to plastic pollution (197)? How are clothing resale, upcycling, and thrifting meaningful solutions?
- “Our shopping choices are the low-hanging fruit of sustainability” (203). How do we “vote with our wallets”? How has this idea also been turned against consumers in the past (for example, not-ready-for-market products or Exxon's research)?

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- Who are the “Montana 16” and Nalleli Cobo (215), and what did they accomplish in 2023? How will their work and legal wins set precedents across the world? How is showing up, asking questions, and petitioning for change still the best way forward?
- “Taking action is, in fact, an act of hope” (218). What does the author mean by this? Al Gore has also said, “The will to act is itself a renewable resource.” In what ways is this true?
- How will you push yourself as an activist, citizen, or organizer on the issue of waste?
- Would you consider any of your shopping or lifestyle habits a challenge to break? How will you plan to attack your thinking around this after reading this book and the suggestions the author sets out? What choices will be easier to on-ramp into your schedule and lifestyle?
- Is our wastefulness a grave environmental, health, and economic problem? Or do you believe it is the inevitable price of and tradeoff for our modern lifestyle and economy? Explain.
- Can you envision a less wasteful world that is also more prosperous, healthy, and green? Explain.
- What would you be willing to do to fix our waste and heal our world? List at least five concrete steps you will undertake.