Reading About Recycling:

Fibers

If you are reading this in school, chances are you are looking at a piece of paper. The average student uses more than 300 pounds of paper a year! If all of that came from new fiber, every three students would use a full grown tree each year.

Paper is mostly a chemical called cellulose. That's the carbohydrate that is in the cell walls of most plants. It's resistant to chemical breakdown and very few animals can digest it. When trees are cut down the strongest parts of the trunk might be sawed into lumber. Other parts, like smaller twigs and bark, are collected too. These can be made into paper. We can also use the sawdust left when the logs are made into lumber. This requires shredding, dissolving the wood pulp with chemicals, and processing with a lot of water.

Cellulose is ideal for making strong but flexible materials. Paper has been made for thousands of years. Today you might find the same chemical in clothing and even building materials.

We use paper not just for reading and writing, but for packaging products and supplies. When you bought your cereal, your track shoes, your new cell phone or video game, it probably came in a container. That container is almost always made from paper (often along with some plastic inside too).

Today, much of our paper—over a third—comes from re-used fiber. The amount of paper that Americans have recycled and recovered has doubled in just 20 years, and will continue to grow. That percent is highest for cardboard boxes (over 85 percent) and newspapers (about 72 percent).

Recycling paper doesn't just save trees. It saves energy, too. Think of the power needed to plant and grow trees, to cut them down, to transport them and process them to make the paper. Recycling materials save 65 percent of that energy. It's profitable too—an industry that brings over $9 billion a year to its employees and the country.

Materials	How Much Do We Recover?
Paper and paperboard	55.5%
Glass	23.1%
Steel	33.7%
Aluminum	21.1%
Other nonferrous metals †	68.8%
Total metals	**34.6%**
Plastics	7.1%
Rubber and leather	14.3%
Textiles	15.3%
Wood	9.6%

(http://www.epa.gov/osw/nonhaz/municipal/pubs/msw2008rpt.pdf)

Comprehension Questions:

1. What is the biggest source from which we get paper?_____
2. What are the steps to make paper from a tree?_____
3. Name three products in addition to paper that are made from trees?_____
4. Look at the data table. Which product is recycled most?_____
5. Use the chart to graph the percent recovered from the recyclable materials. Then create a slogan that would encourage people to recycle more.