

Handling controversial issues

Plastic packaging



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Introduction

This booklet has been produced to help young people:

- Learn about environmental problems with packaging
- Judge the bias and reliability of different sources of information
- Draw their own conclusions having analysed and reflected on their own current views
- Make informed decisions

When handling controversial issues teachers will need to employ approaches that meet the need for balance and objectivity and to ensure avoiding bias. The Oxfam Global Citizenship Guide on Teaching Controversial Issues (2006) <https://goo.gl/HGNhvs> contains helpful suggestions on appropriate ways of introducing controversial issues and of managing the responses that result.

These include:

- Setting ground rules e.g. showing respect for the views of others, using appropriate language and giving reasons for having a particular view
- Role of the teacher e.g. objective, devil's advocate or declared interest
- Teaching approaches e.g. group discussion, role-play and community of enquiry

The activities in this booklet can form part of a whole programme or, at the teacher's discretion, specific activities can be selected for use in class.

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1. What's the problem?

Over the next quarter of a century the government will crack down on plastics by eliminating all avoidable plastic waste.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-42264788>

Copy the table on the next page, enlarge, print out and cut into sections.

Divide the students into groups or pairs and see if they can match the questions and answers.

All answers can be found in the link above.

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For how long have we had plastic?	<i>60 -70 years</i>
Why can plastic be a problem in the environment?	<i>Designed to last for a long time</i>
How much plastic waste is estimated to be in landfill or the natural environment by 2050?	<i>12bn tonnes</i>
What is one of the most common types of plastic waste?	<i>Plastic bottles</i>
How many plastic bottles are bought every second?	<i>20,000</i>
What's the name for whirlpools of water which trap collections of waste in their currents?	<i>Gyres</i>
How long does it take a plastic bottle to degrade?	<i>450 years</i>
Rubbish from food and drink constituted what percentage of litter in a survey of 339 beaches in the UK?	<i>20%</i>
Which species of marine life is particularly damaged by plastic bags?	<i>Turtles</i>
What was found in a third of UK-caught fish?	<i>Plastic</i>

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2. Attitudes to plastic food packaging

Aim

Use photographs to explore students' viewpoints

Activity

Have available a selection of photographs connected to the food packaging debate. (Some examples are provided on the following pages).

Divide the class into groups.

Place a selection of photographs on large sheets of paper (one sheet for each group).

Provide the groups with two colours of sticky notes, one for positive and one for negative comments.

Ask the students to write comments about the photos on the sticky notes deciding first if their comment is a positive or a negative one in relation to plastic packaging. (You may wish to provide some examples to get started).

Students add comments to the appropriate picture.

Display the work and discuss the reasons why the different pictures created different responses.

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Attitudes to plastic packaging



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3. Get them thinking!

Use this quiz as another starter activity

1. In 2014, how much packaging waste was generated per inhabitant of the EU?
a) 70.3kg b) 294.8kg c) 162.9kg
2. Which is the most common type of packaging waste in the EU?
a) paper and cardboard b) wood c) plastic
3. Of the 1.5 million tonnes of plastic waste used by consumers in Britain in 2015, how much was recycled?
a) 1 million tonnes b) 250,000 tonnes c) 500,000 tonnes
4. What percentage of recyclable goods are actually recycled in the UK?
a) 45% b) 90% c) 25%
5. About how many plastic pots, tubs and trays are recycled by consumers in the UK?
a) 20% b) 30% c) 80%
6. Of 13bn plastic bottles used in the UK, how many are recycled?
a) 4.8bn b) 2bn c) 7.5bn

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4. Get them thinking - answers

1. In 2014, how much packaging waste was generated per inhabitant of the EU?
a) 70.3kg b) 294.8kg c) **162.9kg**

2. Which is the most common type of packaging waste in the EU?
a) **paper and cardboard** b) wood c) plastic

3. Of the 1.5 million tonnes of plastic waste used by consumers in Britain in 2015, how much was recycled?
a) 1 million tonnes b) 250,000 tonnes c) **500,000 tonnes**

4. What percentage of recyclable goods are actually recycled in the UK?
a) **45%** b) 90% c) 25%

5. About how many plastic pots, tubs and trays are recycled by consumers in the UK?
a) 20% b) **30%** c) 80%

6. Of 13bn plastic bottles used in the UK, how many are recycled?
a) 4.8bn b) 2bn c) **7.5bn**

Data taken from

http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Packaging_waste_statistics

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/nov/21/only-a-third-of-uk-consumer-plastic-packaging-is-recycled>

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5. Why do we need packaging?

Aim

To understand the reasons why packaging is used and to consider different viewpoints.

Activity

Ask students to make a list of foods commonly purchased by their families.

Insert the list into a table, as below

Product	Packaging	Reason
Bananas	Plastic	To last longer (extend shelf life)
Potatoes	Plastic bag	Easier to carry

Point students to this article and discuss whether their reasons match those given. Are consumers' reasons different from producers' reasons?

<http://www.bpf.co.uk/packaging/why-do-we-need-plastic-packaging.aspx>

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6. Monitoring plastic packaging at home

Aim

To appreciate how much plastic packaging is used and thrown away in the home environment.

Activity

How much plastic food packaging does your family buy?

Ask students to monitor the plastic packaging bought during a week.

Look in the cupboards at home - which items are packaged using plastic?

Before the next collection, check your recycling and rubbish containers (be safe and use protective gloves if looking through a waste bin—be careful of any sharp edges, broken glass etc. Wash hands thoroughly after your investigations).

Take and print off photos of any plastic packaging to create a montage in the classroom.

It might be possible to carry out a similar exercise in school. If the school kitchen staff agree, perhaps a plastic food packaging survey can be carried out there during a week.

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7. Considering different viewpoints

Aim

To understand that there are different views on most topics and that it is important to consider all viewpoints in order to make informed decisions.

Activity

1. Ask one group of students to read the following article and to summarise the main points.
<http://www.recoup.org/p/185/why-plastic-why-plastic-packaging>
2. Ask a second group to follow the same process regarding the following article:
<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2017/oct/12/supermarkets-stop-using-plastic-packaging-former-asda-boss-andy-clarke>
3. Each group should decide how best to report back to the class (they might decide on a PowerPoint presentation, a speech, a list of bullet points etc)
4. Follow up work might be in class or as homework and, according to the age and ability of your students, could be an explanation of the two viewpoints or a statement of the student's opinion after considering both viewpoints etc.

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8. How can you cut back on use of plastics?

Aim

To consider different ways of reducing personal use of plastics.

Activity

Ask students to make their own lists of ways they can think of to reduce use of plastics.

Share ideas.

Read the following article to see if other ideas can be added to the list

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/newsbeat/article/42309891/six-simple-ways-to-cut-back-on-plastic>

Introduce a voting system to decide which might be the most popular method within the class.

Assess reasons for the decision - is the winning method easier to achieve or considered of greatest impact? Or are there other reasons?

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9. Debating

Debate offers students the opportunity to research using materials representing a wide range of viewpoints, to question others, to listen to differing views and hence to make their own informed decisions.

In school debate can play an active role in many subject areas including geography, English, PSHE and science.

Why not invite representatives of local organisations into school to take part in a debate? Organisers of local food banks, farmers, supermarket managers—see who will take up the challenge!

Benefits

Helping young people to examine food issues by research, by talking about and listening to various viewpoints is an invaluable way to assist them in the formulation of their own views. The activities help students to examine the positive and negative effects of issues under discussion and to uncover ways forward.

This approach is also contributing towards the acquisition of many skills:

Information processing – locating and collecting relevant data

Reasoning – giving reasons for opinions and actions, and making decisions informed by reasons or evidence

Enquiry – asking relevant questions

Evaluation – judging the evaluation of what they hear and read

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9. Debating

Activity

Now the students have had the opportunity to research many aspects of plastic packaging, arrange a class debate.

Divide the class into teams with pairs of teams preparing to present or oppose a particular statement

e.g. 1. We believe supermarkets are responsible for the plastic packaging dilemma.

2. The future of the planet is in our hands. As consumers we need to do everything possible to avoid plastic packaging.

Or hold a silent debate. Pose a series of questions on large sheets of paper around the room.

Students then visit each sheet and add their comments.

Students then need to link/agree/disagree with other comments and say why.



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10. The carrier bag question

Aim

For students to consider their own actions and to see them within a wider context.

Activity

In January 2018 the Prime Minister announced a crackdown on plastics by eliminating all avoidable plastic waste through extending the 5p plastic bag charge to small retailers.

Ask the students to carry out a survey within their class/year group/at home etc to see who asks for carrier bags when they go shopping and who takes their own bags.

The following link explains the impact of a previous ruling on carrier bag use.

<https://www.edie.net/news/5/Plastic-bag-charge-UK-sustainability-statistics-from-Defra-2017/>

Students might like to develop a campaign on this topic (see next page).



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11. Create a campaign

At whatever stage of learning you feel your students have a good grasp of the issues around plastic packaging appropriate to their age, ask them to work in groups to create their own campaign to tackle a specific issue (such as carrier bag usage)..

Who is their audience? This could be other pupils/classes/year groups; families; the whole school to include the kitchens, the staff ; their community outside school; other ideas

What techniques will they use? Posters/films/leaflets/social media/ presentations in assembly, to the local council; invitations to outside speakers

How will they monitor progress and impact? Pre- and post- surveys; interviews; questionnaires.

Provide an opportunity for students to report on their campaign and their findings.

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12. Useful links

Opportunities for further investigation:

To keep the topic up to date teachers are recommended to add to this list as new articles appear.

Why is plastic a problem?

https://www.lifewithoutplastic.com/store/how_plastics_affect_the_environment#.WlctSa5lIU

The problem and some potential solutions

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2017/mar/13/waste-plastic-food-packaging-recycling-throwaway-culture-dave-hall>

Types of plastic in packaging

<http://www.wrap.org.uk/content/types-plastic-packaging>

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13. About

Linking Environment And Farming & Farming and Countryside Education



LEAF (Linking Environment And Farming) is the leading organisation delivering more sustainable food and farming.

www.leafuk.org



FACE (Farming and Countryside Education) is the leading educational charity working with schools to help children and young people understand the connection between farming and their daily lives.

www.face-online.org.uk

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