

polythene: bags of trouble

A literacy activity addressing key elements of the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) while encouraging children to reflect on the implications of banning plastic bags to protect the environment

Relevant elements of the Year 6 NLS Teaching Programme

NLS reference: Term 2: Non-Fiction

Reading comprehension:

15 to recognise how arguments are constructed to be effective, through, e.g.:

- The expression, sequence and linking of points
- The provision of persuasive examples, illustrations and evidence
- Pre-empting or answering potential objections
- Appealing to the known views and feelings of the audience

Writing composition

18 to construct effective arguments:

- developing a point logically and effectively
- supporting and illustrating points persuasively
- anticipating possible objections
- harnessing the known views, interests and feelings of the audience

Suggested lesson structure

Whole class reading comprehension

The focus of this activity is on critically evaluating a piece of non-fiction journalistic writing for the construction of arguments, persuasive examples and how different points of view and potential objections are handled by the writer. All of this is set within the context of a global environmental problem.

The text can be used to consider the following questions. (Suggested answers are in italics)

1. The writer begins by stating that the ban on polythene bags is to save the city of Dhaka from 'imminent environmental disaster'. What persuasive examples does he use as evidence for this?

'...millions of polythene bags disposed of every day...clogging Dhaka's drainage system...' 'Every day nearly ten million polythene bags are disposed of by Dhaka residents' '...an overcrowded city which is already suffering from high levels of air pollution and other kinds of environmental hazards'.

The writer, although not using any direct quotes, uses different groups to present the arguments: the Government Environment Minister, Environmental groups, Dhaka residents.

2. Is the article balanced or is it biased in favour of a particular viewpoint?

Whether the article leans in favour of 'environmental groups' and the government ban is questionable. However, the article puts several points of view from different groups: the government, environmental groups, and residents. It reports the government's view - that plastic bags are a danger because they clog up the drainage; the worries of environmental groups - worried that government will not enforce the ban; the views of residents - who find the polythene bags useful and cheap and suggests that 18,000 workers who make polythene bags will have to lose their jobs.

3. Who might object to the ban? At which points in the article does the writer pre-empt possible questions or objections?

He answers possible objections from residents about what they will use instead ('... promoting jute bags as an alternative to polythene and people have responded positively') and concerns from people about job losses ('[the government] had to think of alternative employment for nearly 18,000 workers...')

Additional contextual questions:

Why are polythene bags a problem?

Polythene is a form of plastic and it is non-biodegradable: it won't rot.

Why are polythene bags such a big problem for the city of Dhaka?

Dhaka is prone to severe flooding and when polythene bags block drains water will be prevented from running away so making flooding worse.

Group or independent writing task

The writing activity identified below can be completed within or outside the Literacy Hour framework. See also *Bags of plastic facts* on back page

Global citizenship aims of the polythene bag ban activity

- ✓ To encourage children to think critically and use available evidence to present a reasoned case
- ✓ To help children detect bias, opinion and assess different viewpoints
- ✓ To help children understand the relationship between people and the environment
- ✓ To promote a sense of responsibility for the environment and the use of resources
- ✓ To begin to recognise the consequences on others of choices made
- ✓ To equip children with the knowledge and understanding to empower them to take positive actions which ensure greater social justice and protect the environment

These aims are based on the Oxfam Curriculum for Global Citizenship, available from Oxfam Education, 274 Banbury Road, Oxford, OX2 7DZ

Flexibility: The text and suggested activities given here for Year 6 could equally be relevant to **Year 5, Term 3 Non-fiction**. Reading comprehension involves examining writing which informs and persuades and writing comprehension involves constructing an argument to persuade others of a point of view.

Writing task

The article by Moazzem Hossain mentions a 'massive publicity campaign' to persuade the public not to use polythene bags.

Imagine you are to launch a campaign to try to prevent people in the UK using polythene bags:

- Discuss and decide what arguments you would use to try to persuade people not to use polythene bags.
- What would you suggest people use instead?
- Who do you think would object? What arguments would they use? How would you argue against these objections?

Having thought about these questions and worked out some solutions to them, design a leaflet to try and

The great poly-bag ban

The following article was written by Moazzem Hossain, a BBC journalist working in Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh

The Bangladesh Government has begun enforcing a complete ban on the sale and use of polythene bags in the capital Dhaka.

Environment Minister Shahajahan Siraj says the decision has been taken to save the city from an imminent environmental disaster.

Environmental groups say millions of polythene bags disposed of every day are clogging Dhaka's drainage system and posing a serious environmental hazard.

Polythene shopping bags were introduced into Bangladesh nearly two decades ago, quickly replacing jute bags traditionally in use in every household of Bangladesh.

A recent study says that in Dhaka an average household uses about four polythene bags a day.

Every day nearly ten million polythene bags are disposed of by Dhaka residents.

These disposed polythene bags have posed a new environmental threat for an overcrowded city which is already suffering from high levels of air pollution and other kinds of environmental hazards.

The Environment Ministry has launched a massive publicity campaign to persuade the public not to use polythene bags.

Environment Minister Shahajahan Siraj says the campaign has been successful in raising the awareness of the public about the hazards of the bags. Mr Siraj says they are promoting jute bags as an alternative to polythene and people have responded positively.

Despite the campaign, a large number of Dhaka residents were seen on Tuesday using polythene bags which they say are user friendly and cheaper.

Environmental groups say that, without tougher environmental legislation, it will be very difficult for the government to attain any success in its fight against polythene.

Mr Siraj said the government would propose a bill in the next session of the parliament to ban the production of polythene bags.

He warned the measure could take some time as they had to think of alternative employment for nearly 18,000 workers now employed in the industry.

Further resources

The following titles offer opportunities for further activities on issues of waste and recycling for KS2.

Protecting our environment: a practical guide to waste minimisation. A resource pack for Key Stage 1 & 2 produced by the Tower Hamlets Waste Education Project. Features a host of facts and figures on waste as well as pupil activities and curriculum links. Available from HEC (contact details on back page) Price: £14.95 inclusive of post and packaging.

The Dustbin Pack. A resource for Key Stage 2 produced by *Waste Watch*. Contains teachers notes, children's fact sheets and activities on waste and its impacts and the potential for reduction through reuse and recycling. Available free to schools (contact details on back page)

Useful websites on waste and recycling

Waste Watch: www.wastewatch.org.uk Click on schools and kids, then 'Fun for kids' option for games, activities, quizzes, facts and figures on waste.

Recycle-more: www.recycle-more.co.uk/b2s/intro.html A schools section of the site for both teachers and pupils who want to learn more about how to tackle waste. Includes activities, games and information on waste and recycling.

Environment Agency: www.environment-agency.gov.uk/kids contains information, environmental games, and animations for children on waste and other environmental issues.

Feedback on these activity ideas would be much appreciated. Comments can be sent to HEC or your local DEC or made via the Global Footprints website.

Further ideas, contacts and information

Bags of plastic facts

Plastic, plastic everywhere:

On land...

- ◆ Twelve billion plastic bags are handed out to shoppers in Britain every year, that's about 400 bags per adult each year
- ◆ Most plastic bags end up buried in a landfill site where they will never rot

And at sea...

- ◆ Turtles often die because they swallow plastic bags that end up floating in the sea
- ◆ Seabirds are often found with plastic fragments in their stomachs and plastic molecules in their muscles.
- ◆ In California sea lions often end up in with plastic wrapped around their necks

Getting tough in Bombay, India...

- ◆ Plastic bags have been banned for similar reasons to Dhaka. They litter the streets and block the drains, causing floods when the heavy rains fall
- ◆ Traders at vegetable markets now hand out recycled paper bags instead. This is a good way of using old paper and the bags are biodegradable (they will rot)
- ◆ Shops found giving out plastic bags or factories found making them can be closed down for a month as a punishment

Further information about waste

The following organisations will be able to provide further information on waste and recycling

Oxfam 274 Banbury Road, Oxford OX2 7DZ Tel:01865 313600
Produce a range of global citizenship education packs. Education catalogue contains extensive range of resources across the curriculum. To order phone 01202 712933. Also have a website dedicated to teachers and children which contains information and activities: www.oxfam.org.uk/coolplanet

Friends of the Earth 26-28 Underwood Street, London N1 7JQ
Tel: 020 7490 1555 www.foe.co.uk

Produce information sheets and other resources suitable for young people on all environmental issues including waste and recycling.

Waste Watch Europa House, Ground Floor, 13 - 17 Ironmonger Row, London EC1V 3QG Tel: 0870 243 0136
www.wastewatch.org.uk

A national charity with cross-sector support which aims to educate, inform and raise awareness on waste reduction, reuse and recycling.

Eco schools Tidy Britain Group, The Pier, Wigan, WN3 4EX
www.eco-schools.org.uk

A Europe wide project designed to encourage whole-school action for the environment. Operate an award scheme for schools who adopt an action plan to make environmental improvements in the school community

School Waste Reduction Action Plan

Here are some ideas that might be included in an action plan to reduce waste in school:

- ◆ Set up a recycling scheme for paper in the school
- ◆ Ensure both sides of all paper is used before paper is recycled
- ◆ Use scrap paper for rough work and casual notes
- ◆ Reuse envelopes
- ◆ Have separate bins in the playground and in classrooms for different types of rubbish



- ◆ Decant or make up drinks from large bottles and put them into smaller reusable bottles rather than buying individual cartons/cans/bottles
- ◆ Avoid heavily packaged food for packed lunches; use a lunch box which can be reused again and again rather than tin foil or plastic

- ◆ Reuse plastic pots, trays and other packaging for storage of classroom equipment, in artwork or for growing plants in

- ◆ Make sure that a collection/recycling method exists in school for the collection of glass and aluminium cans or encouraging children to take cans home for recycling



- ◆ Ensure that reusing and recycling of old/outgrown clothes is encouraged, e.g. second hand collections available to children, collection of old clothes for charity shops
- ◆ Encourage children to save old toys for charity or for school fetes or

Development Education Centres (DECs)

This resource has been produced by the Humanities Education Centre, a DEC in Tower Hamlets, with contributions from other DECs. Your local DEC will be able to provide a range of exciting resource ideas for the teaching of Global Citizenship. To find your nearest DEC contact:

Development Education Association,
29-31 Cowper Street, London, EC2A 4AP
☎ 020 7490 8108 e-mail devedeassoc@gn.apc.org

Your local DEC :