Activity: Packaging survey (online)

In this activity, pupils do a 'typical' food shop online and log the packaging of the items in their basket. The class then collates their findings to get a sense of volumes of plastic generated by everyday life.

You will need:

- The following items (or images of them): paper, cardboard, clingfilm, picture of a cigarette butt, plastic carrier bag, glitter, glossy wrapping paper, tin can, aluminium can, crisp packet, plastic drink bottle, glass bottle, plastic milk carton, TetraPak carton, piece of food (e.g. fruit), wooden item, woollen item, disposable face mask
- Plastic and Not Plastic signs
- Timeline cards
- Devices with access to the internet
- Shopping survey form for each group
- Tally chart

Most of the litter in the ocean is plastic.

We can help the plastic pollution problem by reducing our plastic use.

What to do

Can your pupils spot plastic in everyday items?

1. Not all plastic is obvious, so start by making sure that pupils know what packaging contains plastic. Put all the items listed (or pictures of them) in a pile.
2. Place the Plastic sign to one side of the pile, and the Not Plastic sign to the other.
3. One at a time, ask pupils to select an item and place it in the 'plastic' or 'not plastic' pile. Once all the items have been sorted, reveal the answers. Were there any surprises?
4. Look at the items in the 'plastic' pile. Which of the items can be reused? Which are 'single-use' and are designed to be used only once?

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How long does it takes for litter to break down in the ocean?

1. Ask 6 pupils to make a timeline holding the cards.
2. Pick out the food, cardboard, crisp packet, plastic carrier bag, drinks can, and plastic drinks bottle.
3. Give each item to a different pupil and ask them to place the item next to the time they think it will take for the item to degrade. Confirm the correct answers (see answer sheet).
4. Ask the pupils with the plastic items to step forward. There's a twist – the time given is the time it takes for the item to break *up.* The plastic will never actually leave the planet, but breaks into smaller and smaller pieces. Look at the plastic items and discuss how long the items are used for compared with how long they will last on Earth.

Plastic never leaves the planet. It breaks up into smaller and smaller pieces but never goes away.

How much single-use plastic in your shopping?

1. Divide pupils into pairs or small groups, based on how many devices have internet access.
2. Give each group a survey form and ask them to write down typical items people might buy in a weekly shop. *Note:* you could provide a list and skip this step.
3. Ask pupils to go to an online supermarket, find each item and note the packaging. Once pupils have found all the items, ask them to categorise the packaging on the packaging tally chart.
4. Collate the results into a class spreadsheet of findings. Ask the pupils to present the findings as a graph showing the amounts of single-use plastic packaging found. What is the most used packaging? Why is it used?

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Preparing for Step 3

In Step 3 you'll take action to help clean up our seas. You could choose to:

- Run a plastic-free shopping challenge
- Write to supermarkets and manufacturers to ask them to reduce their plastic packaging.

If you choose to take one of these actions, prepare by asking the class to think back to the baskets of shopping. For the products in single-use plastic packaging, try and think of some plastic-free alternatives.

Product in plastic packaging	What is a plastic-free alternative?

Once you have lots of ideas for how to remove single-use plastic packaging from a typical shop, pupils can move on to Step 3.

You can carry out the project in the way that best suits your school's circumstances. We've created pupil workbooks that show one possible approach:

- Workbook for a plastic-free shopping challenge
- Workbook for writing to supermarkets and manufacturers.

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Why is single-use plastic a problem?

Plastic is incredibly useful – flexible, lightweight, durable and hygienic – but it lasts forever.

It doesn't biodegrade, but breaks down into smaller and smaller pieces. Too much plastic has short-term uses but long-term impacts on the planet. Did you know that 80% of the litter in the ocean is plastic?

How does plastic reach the ocean from the land?

- Littered – When people drop litter it can be washed or blown into drains and rivers and from there, travel to the sea.
- Left on beaches – Rubbish that is left on a beach can be washed directly into the sea and items placed into an overflowing bin can be blown into the sea.
- Blown from refuse trucks or off landfill sites – Plastic put in the bin ends up in landfill. Because it's light it can be blown into drains and rivers and into the sea.

What about recycling?

The government's statistics on waste in 2020 showed that only 47% of household plastic packaging was recycled.

Not everyone recycles (only about half of UK households), not all plastics can be recycled, and even plastic put into recycling bins may not be recycled due to problems experienced in the recycling process.

Solutions

No matter where you live, the plastic you throw away could end up in the sea.

Reducing plastic use is the only way to prevent it from ending up in our ocean.

Answer sheet

Plastic or not

Not plastic:

- Paper
- Cardboard
- Glass bottle
- Tin can
- Aluminium can
- Piece of food e.g. fruit
- Item made of wood
- Item made of wool

Plastic:

- Clingfilm
- Cigarette butt
- Plastic carrier bag
- Glitter
- Glossy wrapping paper
- Crisp packet
- Plastic drink bottle
- Plastic milk carton
- TetraPak carton
- Disposable face mask
- Reusable plastic objects e.g. lunchbox, toy

11 million tonnes of plastic ends up in the ocean worldwide each year. That's about a full rubbish truck every minute!

Single-use plastic

- Cling film
- Cigarette butt
- Plastic carrier bag
- Glitter
- Glossy wrapping paper
- Crisp packet
- Plastic drink bottle
- Plastic milk carton
- TetraPak carton
- Disposable face mask

Litter timeline

- Food waste – a few months
- Cardboard – 2 to 5 years
- Crisp packet – 75 years
- Plastic carrier bag – 250 years
- Aluminium can – 450 years
- Plastic drinks bottle – 800 years

The timings for plastic items are estimates, as it hasn't been around long enough for us to be certain, and plastic never fully disappears.

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Shopping survey

Name:

Record the type of packaging used for each item

Item	*Packaging*

Packaging tally chart

Name:

Use this tally chart to record how many of each type of single-use plastic packaging was used.

Type of packaging	*Tally*	***Total***
Plastic bottle		
Plastic pot		
Plastic tray/punnet		
TetraPak carton		
Crisp/snack packets		
Plastic bags (all sizes)		
Bubble wrap		
Plastic film/lids		
Blister packs		
Plastic pouches/sachets		
Frozen food bags		
Cheese wrap		
Plastic gloves or mask		
Foam or polystyrene		
Plastic tubes, sprays		
Other		

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Plastic

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Not plastic

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A few months

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2 to 5 years

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75 years

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250 years

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450 years

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800 years