

Pesky Plastics

Plastic is an incredibly useful man-made product. At school, you may sit on a chair made from plastic or drink out of a plastic cup or bottle. Your school uniform may even contain plastic. Plastic products are all around us.

What is the problem?

Most plastic is not biodegradable. This means that it doesn't rot like food or paper. Plastic takes over 400 years to decompose (break down), so it stays in the environment for a very long time. 400 million tonnes of plastic waste is produced every year and almost half of this is single-use plastic. Single-use means it's only used once before it's thrown away. Examples of single-use plastics include: disposable cups, crisp packets, cling film and glitter.

Even though a lot of plastic can either be reused or recycled, it's often just thrown away. Most ends up in landfill (buried underground), but lots of it ends up in our oceans. Experts think that by 2050, the amount of plastic in the ocean will weigh more than the amount of fish in the ocean.

Floating plastic is bad news for sea creatures. They can get tangled up in discarded fishing nets, ropes or plastic bags. Smaller bits of plastic, such as bottle tops, are often confused with food. One third of sea turtles have eaten plastic. They can't digest plastic, so their stomachs become full. This leaves no room for real food and they starve. Each year, 100,000 animals die because of plastic in the oceans.



What is being done to protect the oceans and their animals?

Many things have been done to cut down on single-use plastics. Plastic carrier bags used to be free, but they now cost a minimum of 5p. This is to encourage people to reuse their bags. Plastic drinking straws have also been banned in the UK and several other countries. Some supermarkets have tried to cut down on unnecessary plastic packaging but lots more can be done.

One of the best ways to reduce plastic waste is to recycle it and turn it into new products. More plastic is now being recycled, but households and businesses still need to be encouraged to recycle more. Recycling facilities also need to be developed so that more types of plastic can be recycled. If everyone plays their part in reducing, reusing and recycling their plastic, our oceans may one day recover.



Questions

03

- 1 Which word used in the first paragraph is an antonym (means the opposite) of 'natural'?
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- 2 What does biodegradable mean? (tick)

- ☐ It will never rot.
- ☐ It can be sorted.
- ☐ It can break down naturally.
- ☐ It is disposable.

- 3 Fill in the blank. How long does it take for plastic to decompose?

over _____ years

- 4 Which of these items is another example of single-use plastic? (tick)

- ☐ A wheelie bin
- ☐ A lunchbox
- ☐ A bucket
- ☐ A bottle of water

- 5 Experts think that by 2050, the amount of plastic in the ocean will weigh more than the amount of fish in the ocean.

Who are the experts? (tick)

- ☐ People who know a lot about plastics in the ocean.
- ☐ People who know how to make plastic.
- ☐ People who care for sea creatures.
- ☐ People who are in charge of the country.

- 6 Which two words in the paragraph above are used as an informal way of saying 'not good'?

- 7 What fraction of sea turtles have eaten plastic?

- 8 How many animals die each year because of plastic in the oceans?

- 9 How many examples are given in the paragraph above to show what has already been done to cut down on single-use plastics? (tick)

☐ 2
☐ 3
☐ 4
☐ 5

- 10 What can recycling facilities do to reduce the amount of plastic going to landfill? (tick)

☐ Force people to recycle more.
☐ Make plastic bags more expensive.
☐ Ban all single-use plastic.
☐ Recycle more types of plastic.

Score:



Answers

A

- 1 Which word used in the first paragraph is an antonym (means the opposite) of 'natural'? man-made
- 2 What does biodegradable mean? ☒ It can break down naturally.
- 3 Fill in the blank. How long does it take for plastic to decompose? 400
over _____ years
- 4 Which of these items is another example of single-use plastic? ☒ A bottle of water
- 5 Experts think that by 2050, the amount of plastic in the ocean will weigh more than the amount of fish in the ocean.
Who are the experts? ☒ People who know a lot about plastic in the ocean.
- 6 Which two words in the paragraph above are used as an informal way of saying 'not good'? bad news
- 7 What fraction of sea turtles have eaten plastic? one third
- 8 How many animals die each year because of plastic in the oceans? 100,000
- 9 How many examples are given in the paragraph above to show what has already been done to cut down on single-use plastics? ☒ 3
- 10 What can recycling facilities do to reduce the amount of plastic going to landfill? ☒ Recycle more types of plastic.