

Drowning in Plastic

How can this environmental crisis be solved?

About the Story

Lexile: 950L (combined)

For qualitative complexity factors, go to Scope Online.

Learning Objective:

to read about the problem of plastic trash and potential solutions, then write an essay

Key Skills:

author's craft, cause and effect, key ideas, text structure, synthesizing, tone

Essential Questions:

- What is throwaway culture?
- What is the cost of convenience?
- How can environmental problems be solved?

Standards:

The articles and lesson support these Common Core anchor standards: **R.1, R.2, R.3, R.4, R.5, R.7, R.9, W.2, SL.1, SL.2, L.4, L.5, L.6.** For more standards information—including TEKS—go to Scope Online.



Your Teaching Support Package

Find your full suite of materials at
scope.scholastic.com.

Audio:

- The articles
- Vocabulary

Photo Slideshow: What to Know About Plastic Trash

Literature Connections: ideas for connecting to curricular texts

Activities to print or project:

- Vocabulary
- Synthesizing
- Close Reading and Critical Thinking
- **Core Skills Workout:** Text Structures, Text Evidence*, Tone
- Quiz*
- Contest Entry Form

* Available on two levels

Step-by-Step Lesson Plan

Close Reading, Critical Thinking, Skill Building

1 Preparing to Read

Do-Now: Solve the Riddle

(3 minutes)

Write the following on the board:

Snarfblat is made from oil.

There is snarfblat in cell phones.

You brushed your teeth with snarfblat today.

You are likely wearing snarfblat right now.

There is a swirling pile of snarfblat in the Pacific Ocean three times the size of France.

What is snarfblat?

If you know what snarfblat is, list five items you see around you that are made of snarfblat.

Give students a few minutes to solve the riddle: Snarfblat is plastic. Then discuss their lists.

Show the slideshow.

(5 minutes)

Show our slideshow “**What to Know About Plastic Trash**” to introduce key terms and concepts related to the problem of plastic trash.

Preview vocabulary.

(10 minutes, activity sheet online)

Project or distribute the **Vocabulary Words and Definitions**. Highlighted words, first article: *accumulated, developing nations, drudgery, savvy*; second article: *advocate, infrared, renowned*

2 Reading and Discussing

“The Problem of Plastic”

(30 minutes, activity sheets online)

- Read aloud the As You Read box on page 12.
- Read the article as a class. Optionally, play the audio from Scope Online.
- Invite students to share any reactions.
- Discuss the following questions in groups.

Close-Reading Questions

▶ The author provides examples of items that contain plastic, such as cars, phones, potato chip bags, and toothbrushes. **Why do you think she does this?** (author’s craft) *The author likely provides these examples to show the degree to which plastic is part of our everyday lives. The author probably also wants to show that plastic is used in items that vary in importance and value (cars versus chip bags).*

▶ **What effects does plastic trash have on the environment?** (cause and effect) *Plastic trash is causing an environmental crisis. Plastic in landfills can leak harmful chemicals into the soil as it breaks down. In the ocean, plastic is an even bigger problem. There, plastic is harming hundreds of different species. Some animals are dying as a result of eating plastic—their stomachs fill with plastic, then they starve because they have no room in their stomachs for food. Other animals are getting tangled in or suffocated by plastic trash.*

▶ **What is the difference between the plastic used in a smartphone and the plastic used in a bag to carry apples?** (key ideas) *The difference is that the plastic bag is used once, briefly, whereas a smartphone is used for several years. Another difference is that the plastic bag isn’t as necessary. The apples could be carried in a reusable bag.*

▶ **What is the main purpose of the section “Throwaway Culture”?** (text structure) *The purpose is to explain how our use of disposable plastic products affects our environment.*

“Can We Save Our Planet From Plastic?”

(20 minutes, activity sheets online)

- Read the article as a class.
- Discuss the following questions in groups, some of which draw on both articles.

Close-Reading Questions

► In the section “Ditch Plastic,” Mackenzie Carro explains that some businesses are partnering with a service called Loop to start packaging and delivering products in reusable containers. What does this suggest about America’s “throwaway culture”?

(synthesizing) *The fact that some companies are now trying to package their products in reusable containers suggests that America’s “throwaway culture” may be changing.*

Loop aims to reverse throwaway culture by encouraging the use of reusable containers rather than plastic containers that are thrown away after one use.

► Describe the author’s tone in the section “What We Can Do.” What words and phrases help create this tone? (tone) *The tone could be described as hopeful, earnest, encouraging, and optimistic. Words and phrases that create the tone include “we can too,” “just a few of the ways we can all help,” “the key to progress will be persistence,” and “change will come.”*

Critical-Thinking Questions

► Do you think that humans should stop using plastic entirely? *Answers will vary. Many students may say no, because plastic*

is used in many important items, such as smartphones, cars, and refrigerators. A better solution would be to focus on eliminating our reliance on single-use, disposable plastic items, such as plastic straws, bottles, and bags.

► How does reading both articles give you a better understanding of the world’s plastic crisis? *By reading both articles, readers get not only an understanding of the causes and effects of the plastic crisis, but also a picture of how the problem is being addressed and practical ideas for what they can do to help.*

► In what ways, if any, might you change your habits after reading these articles? *Answers will vary. Students might suggest that they will try to use fewer single-use plastic products.*

3 Skill Building

Featured Skill: Synthesizing

(15 minutes, activity sheet online)

Have students work in groups to complete the **Synthesizing** activity. This activity will prepare them to respond to the writing prompt on page 15. *For alternate culminating tasks, go to Scope Online.*

Differentiate and Customize

For Struggling Readers

In a well-organized paragraph, explain one problem caused by plastic trash and one solution to that problem. Use text evidence.

For Advanced Readers

Why is plastic pollution a problem? What are some ways it can be solved? Answer both questions in a well-organized essay. Support your answer with information from both articles as well as one additional source.

For Changemakers

Come up with an idea for an awareness campaign to inspire your school or community to reduce its plastic waste. Explain your idea and why it would be effective.

For Scientists

In a slideshow or short video, explain what the Great Pacific Garbage Patch is, why it’s challenging to remove, and some ways scientists are working to solve the problem.