

# Banning Plastic Bags

## Pre-Reading

### A. Warm-Up Questions

1. Does your native country allow plastic shopping bags?
2. Why are plastic bags bad for the environment?
3. What do some people have against canvas (cloth) shopping bags?

### B. Vocabulary Preview

Match up as many words and meanings as you can.

Check this exercise again after seeing the words in context on page 2.

- |                      |  |
|----------------------|--|
| _____ 1. convenience | a) to block, to stop water from flowing        |
| _____ 2. clog        | b) something that makes life easier            |
| _____ 3. ban         | c) the removal of waste                        |
| _____ 4. disposal    | d) to no longer allow a thing or action        |
| _____ 5. devastating | e) complete, total                             |
| _____ 6. invoke      | f) damaging, causing great hardship            |
| _____ 7. scrap       | g) to make a request for, to ask for aid       |
| _____ 8. enforce     | h) to make sure that a rule or law is followed |
| _____ 9. mandatory   | i) required, obligatory                        |
| _____ 10. outright   | j) to stop having or using, to get rid of      |



## Reading

### BANNING PLASTIC BAGS

*Bring your own basket*

1. When a Swedish engineer developed the one-piece, lightweight plastic bag in the 1960s, everybody thought it was a great invention. The plastic bag soon became a **convenience** that shoppers couldn't imagine living without. However, as drains and waterways became **clogged** with plastic, the 'single-use' bags were identified as a major environmental threat.
2. These days, governments around the world are **banning** plastic bags. In 2002, Bangladesh became the first nation to do this. Improper **disposal** of plastic bags was named as a major contributing factor to **devastating** floods in Bangladesh in the '80s and '90s. The first major US city to **invoke** a plastic bag ban was Los Angeles in 2010. That same year, Mexico City announced a one-billion-dollar annual investment to become a greener city. The Green Plan included a major campaign to **scrap** the use of plastic bags.
3. Despite bans and restrictions, the rules themselves are not always **enforced**. Some shopkeepers complain that they lose money by not offering plastic bags to customers. They may also feel that they have no incentive to obey bylaws since no fines are laid. The opposite occurs in Rwanda, where the nationwide plastic bag ban has been strictly enforced since 2008. Rwanda is one of the cleanest countries in the world due to a **mandatory** 'Clean Up the City' day on the last Saturday of each month. Many shoppers in Rwanda have gone back to the traditional shopping basket.
4. Not all politicians are in favour of banning plastic bags. In 2012, Toronto Mayor Rob Ford called the idea to scrap plastic bags 'dumb' when his city councillors voted to switch from a five-cent fee on plastic bags to an **outright** ban. Some health experts agree that it's not the smartest idea to switch to cloth bags. Reusable bags are typically full of germs. These bags could pose serious health hazards. Do the pros outweigh the cons?

*'Think about it. Why would you make something that you're going to use for a few minutes out of a material that's basically going to last forever, and you're just going to throw it away?'*

—Jeb Berrier, Bag It!

## Comprehension

Discuss these questions in pairs, and write the answers below.

1. When and where were plastic bags invented?

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2. Why was Bangladesh the first nation to ban plastic bags?

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3. What did the government of Mexico City decide in 2010?

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4. What do Rwandans do to keep their country clean?

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5. Why do some health experts disagree with the use of reusable shopping bags?

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## Vocabulary Review

### A. Complete the Sentences

Complete the sentences using vocabulary from page 1.  
You may need to change the word forms.

1. The drains were \_\_\_\_\_ with rubbish, which caused a major flood in the city.
2. In Rwanda, the plastic bag ban is \_\_\_\_\_ by police officers on city streets.
3. That politician said there is no such thing as climate change. I think that's an \_\_\_\_\_ lie!
4. Before the \_\_\_\_\_, environmentalists estimated that people in Mexico City used about 20 million plastic bags per day.
5. It was \_\_\_\_\_ to see all of the plastic bags swirling around in the ocean.

### B. Nations & Nationalities

Rewrite each sentence by changing the country (e.g. Sweden)  
to the nationality (e.g. Swedish).

Ex. The plastic bag was invented in Sweden.

*A Swedish engineer invented the plastic bag.*

1. In Mexico, you can no longer dispose of plastic bags in the garbage.  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. A politician in Canada is against banning plastic bags.  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. In Rwanda, there is a mandatory 'Clean Up Our City' day every month.  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Several cities in America have a plastic bag ban.  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Vocabulary Review cont.

### C. Write Sentences

Write a sentence for each word. Change the word form if you can!

1. convenience

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2. disposal

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3. clog

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4. ban

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5. devastating

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## Discussion

1. What other items do you think will be banned for environmental reasons in the near future?
2. What can a city do to become 'greener'?
3. What are some alternatives to plastic bags?  
Which is the most convenient?
4. Do the potential health hazards of cloth bags outweigh the environmental threat of plastic ones?

## Listening

Fill in the blanks as you listen to the recording.

### **BANNING PLASTIC BAGS**

*Bring your own basket*

1. When a Swedish engineer developed the one-piece, lightweight plastic bag in the 1960s, everybody thought it was a great invention. The plastic bag soon became a \_\_\_\_\_ that shoppers couldn't imagine living without. However, as drains and waterways became \_\_\_\_\_ with plastic, the 'single-use' bags were identified as a major environmental threat.
2. These days, governments around the world are \_\_\_\_\_ plastic bags. In 2002, Bangladesh became the first nation to do this. Improper \_\_\_\_\_ of plastic bags was named as a major contributing factor to \_\_\_\_\_ floods in Bangladesh in the '80s and '90s. The first major US city to \_\_\_\_\_ a plastic bag ban was Los Angeles in 2010. That same year, Mexico City announced a one-billion-dollar annual investment to become a greener city. The Green Plan included a major campaign to \_\_\_\_\_ the use of plastic bags.
3. Despite bans and restrictions, the rules themselves are not always \_\_\_\_\_. Some shopkeepers complain that they lose money by not offering plastic bags to customers. They may also feel that they have no incentive to obey bylaws since no fines are laid. The opposite occurs in Rwanda, where the nationwide plastic bag ban has been strictly enforced since 2008. Rwanda is one of the cleanest countries in the world due to a \_\_\_\_\_ 'Clean Up the City' day on the last Saturday of each month. Many shoppers in Rwanda have gone back to the traditional shopping basket.
4. Not all politicians are in favour of banning plastic bags. In 2012, Toronto Mayor Rob Ford called the idea to scrap plastic bags 'dumb' when his city councillors voted to switch from a five-cent fee on plastic bags to an \_\_\_\_\_ ban. Some health experts agree that it's not the smartest idea to switch to cloth bags. Reusable bags are typically full of germs. These bags could pose serious health hazards. Do the pros outweigh the cons?

## Answer Key

### LESSON DESCRIPTION:

In this lesson, students read a brief history of plastic bags. They learn why governments around the world are starting to ban what was once considered a brilliant invention. The lesson includes vocabulary review exercises and discussion questions.

**LEVEL:** High Int

**TIME:** 1.5–2 hours

**TAGS:** discussion, plastic, environment, bags, plastic bags, reusable bags

### Pre-Reading

#### A. WARM-UP QUESTIONS

Have students work in small groups or as a class.

#### B. VOCABULARY PREVIEW

- |      |      |      |      |       |
|------|------|------|------|-------|
| 1. b | 3. d | 5. f | 7. j | 9. i  |
| 2. a | 4. c | 6. g | 8. h | 10. e |

### Reading (and/or Listening)

Read individually, in small groups, or as a class. Discuss the quote. You can also play the listening as your students read along. A gap-fill version of the reading is available on page 6. Help your students with vocabulary and expressions that they are unfamiliar with.

### Comprehension

1. Plastic bags were invented in Sweden in the 1960s.
2. Bangladesh was the first nation to ban plastic bags because a report found that bags contributed to major flooding.
3. In 2010, the government of Mexico City decided to put one billion dollars a year into a Green Plan. As part of the plan, they put a ban on plastic bags.
4. Rwandans take part in a 'Clean Up the City' day once a month.
5. Some health experts fear that reusable shopping bags are a health hazard.

### Vocabulary Review

#### A. COMPLETE THE SENTENCES

- |             |             |                |
|-------------|-------------|----------------|
| 1. clogged  | 3. outright | 5. devastating |
| 2. enforced | 4. ban      |                |

*(continued on the next page...)*

## Answer Key cont.

### Vocabulary Review cont.

#### B. NATIONS & NATIONALITIES

Answers may vary. Challenge your students to think of other nationalities. Are there any they don't know? Here are some to try: England/English, France/French, Germany/German, Australia/Australian, Korea/Korean, Thailand/Thai.

1. Mexicans can no longer dispose of plastic bags in the garbage.
2. A Canadian politician is against banning plastic bags.
3. Rwandans take part in a mandatory 'Clean Up Our City' day every month.
4. Several American cities have a plastic bag ban.

#### C. WRITE SENTENCES

Individual answers. Possible word form changes include dispose, enforcement, enforcer, scrap (noun), and devastate.

### Discussion

Answers will vary. Discuss in small groups or pairs.  
Can also be done individually as written answers.

### Listening

1. convenience, clogged
2. banning, disposal, devastating, invoke, scrap
3. enforced, mandatory
4. outright