



Where does plastic go?

Lesson plan: mystery bags, where plastic comes from, how it travels to the sea, and checking the facts



Ages	9 to 15
Time	60 minutes
Group	Up to 35 students, in groups of four or five
Where	Any classroom. No internet needed.
You need	The slides, one mystery bag per group, one detective sheet per group and one interview sheet per student

What students learn

- What plastic is made from, why it is so useful, and why so much is thrown away.
- How plastic travels from homes to rivers to the sea, and why the Philippines is so affected.
- Why sachets are such a problem, and who could fix it.
- How to question a statistic, using the famous plastic lifetime posters.

Before the lesson

1. Make one **mystery bag** per group with 8 to 10 clean, used plastic items, for example: a bottle, a bottle cap, a sachet, a straw, a plastic spoon, a food wrapper, a sando bag, a toothbrush and a piece of packaging. Wash everything first.
2. Print one **Detective sheet** per group and one **Class interview** sheet per student.

The lesson

- 1 **Mystery bags 12 minutes, slides 1 and 2.** Groups unpack their bags and fill in the detective sheet. Ask each group to share the item they think was used for the shortest time.
- 2 **What is plastic and how much? 8 minutes, slides 3 and 4.** Keep it balanced: plastic is useful, the problem is how much we throw away.
- 3 **No such thing as away 10 minutes, slides 5 and 6.** Ask students to trace the journey of one item from their bag. Explain why rivers matter so much in the Philippines.
- 4 **Sachets 5 minutes, slide 7.** Avoid blaming families: sachets are often the only affordable option. Ask who else could help.
- 5 **How long does plastic last? 10 minutes, slides 8 and 9.** Let students order the items first, then reveal the twist. This is a great moment to talk about checking sources.
- 6 **Class interview 12 minutes, slides 10 and 11.** Students interview each other, then share. End with one question from slide 11.

Answers and what to listen for

How long does plastic last? There is no reliable answer, and that is the point. Praise students who question the numbers.

Making it easier or harder

- **Younger groups:** use five items per bag and do the interview as a whole class.
- **Older groups:** ask students to find one plastic fact online and trace it back to its original source.
- **Local words:** *sando* bags (carrier bags) and *labo* bags (thin clear bags) are useful words to use with Filipino students.

Safety and good practice

- Only use clean items in the mystery bags. No sharp or broken plastic, and nothing that held medicines or chemicals.

Curriculum links

- **Science:** materials and their properties, human impact on the environment.
- **Maths:** reading large numbers and percentages.
- **Thinking skills:** checking claims and sources.
- **Ocean Literacy Principle 6:** the ocean and humans are inextricably interconnected.

The teacher reading has the science behind every slide, with links to the sources.

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