

Plastic: Teachers' notes and tips – elementary

1 Pre-reading tasks

- a Put the students into groups of three or four and give each group a plastic bag. They can be any kind but it would be nice if some are the very flimsy sort.
- b Ask students to brainstorm facts about plastic bags. Make some suggestions: what they're made of, how they're used, when they were first used etc.

Tip: use realia

Everyone knows what a plastic bag looks like but having one to hold and look at might inspire the students – it also makes the activity more fun.

Tip: do an example first

Perhaps elicit 'practical' or 'light' from the students.

Tip: don't rush the students

Elementary students are often slower to start so give them time for this and monitor well. Don't steer students into any direction or give views yourself, just see what they come up with.

- c Once students have quite a few ideas or are beginning to flounder put groups together to share ideas.

2 First reading tasks

- a Then write on the board: *Should plastic bags be banned?* Ask students if they feel prepared enough to write a short essay to answer this question. Probably not, so elicit where more information about the subject can be found: newspapers, magazines and the Internet. (If some students say they can answer the question now see if they have included any figures or factual information in their brainstorming, or if they have just their own opinions.)
- b Tell students that you have put together some information about plastic bags from a variety of different sources. These include quite a lot of vocabulary about the environment but tell students not to worry about words they don't know at this stage.
- c Keep the students in their groups but give each student a copy of the reading and ask them to choose the best summary.

Tip: give the students confidence

Tell students that although they won't be able to understand everything they should be able to choose the best summary.

Tip: consider not pre-teaching vocabulary

If students read authentic texts they are not given the meaning of unknown words beforehand. Tasks like these help students to try more demanding texts outside the classroom.

- d Feedback: *b* is the best summary

3 Second reading tasks

- a There are 16 snippets of information. Ask students in their groups to look at 3 or 4 each and to underline words and phrases they don't understand.
- b They then ask another student in their group if they can help.

- c If not then students can use their dictionaries.
- d Once all the students have found the meaning of their words or phrases they share these with the group.

Tip: make sure dictionaries are the last resource

Dictionaries are very useful but those students who reach for one as soon as they come across a difficult word will be slow and inefficient readers. The aim of all these readings is for the students to understand the overall meaning and to try and work out as much as possible from context.

Tip: highlight prefixes and suffixes

Write the word *non-renewable* on the board and highlight the *new* part which students understand. Point out the whole word is made up of two prefixes: non+ re+ and a suffix: +able which makes this word an adjective. Give examples of something that is renewable: bus passes or library membership. You can renew a TV licence but you can't renew a one-year guarantee for a TV, it's non-renewable.

4 Third reading tasks

- a In pairs students read the text again and do three things:
 - decide if the individual articles are for or against banning plastic bags,
 - decide if they want to use the information for their writing task, and
 - decide if they themselves are for or against banning plastic bags.
- b Students should be helping each other with this so encourage speaking.

Tip: remind students of the writing task

They only need to choose a few of the articles to support and add information to their original brainstorming ideas.

5 Post-reading tasks – writing

- a Students are now going to write a short essay (120 –150 words?) to answer the question. There should be four paragraphs:
 - An introduction about plastic bags
 - A paragraph with a reason for banning / not banning them
 - Another paragraph with another reason for banning / not banning them
 - A conclusion that bags should / should not be banned.
- b Provide sentence heads and a clear idea of what is expected of them:
Should plastic bags be banned?

Plastic bags...

I think / believe that... / Personally,... It's a fact that...

In addition... Also...

Therefore...

- c Remind students to use their own words rather than repeat the information from the reading word for word.
- d Students can read each other's essays and see if they agree. Or they can be put up on your school's student website if there is one.