

US beach town bans balloons to save the ocean

Level 2: Intermediate – Teacher's notes

Article summary: The article talks about a recent ban on balloons in Laguna Beach, California, and explains the dangers of balloons on marine life.

Time: 60 minutes

Skills: Reading, Speaking, Writing

Language focus: Relative clauses

Materials needed: One copy of the worksheet per student

1. Warmer

- a. This activity aims to get students to think about if and when they use balloons to decorate. Have them work in pairs to fill in the chart, then complete the other columns by talking to three classmates.
- b. Encourage students to share their ideas and suggestions. You could make a mind map to organise students' ideas. Remind students to elaborate on their suggestions if they can.

2. Key words

- a. Ask students to do the exercise individually and compare their answers in pairs or small groups. Students may be familiar with the word *release* as a verb and *claim* as a noun.

Key:

- | | |
|-------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. <i>strict</i> | 7. <i>tourism</i> |
| 2. <i>fine</i> | 8. <i>make sense</i> |
| 3. <i>trend</i> | 9. <i>claim</i> |
| 4. <i>release</i> | 10. <i>break down</i> |
| 5. <i>measure</i> | 11. <i>shiny</i> |
| 6. <i>coastal</i> | 12. <i>confusing</i> |

- b. Before reading the article carefully, students use some of the key words to fill the gaps in the sentences to ensure that they understand and know how the words are used in other contexts.

Key:

1. *confusing*
2. *strict*
3. *makes sense*
4. *tourism*
5. *shiny*
6. *Coastal*
7. *fine*
8. *trend*

3. Comprehension check

- a. Students first read the statements, decide whether they are true or false according to the article, and correct any false ones. Students may correct the sentences in different ways, e.g., in item 1, they may say, 'Laguna Beach, a city in California, enacted a strict ban on the sale and use of balloons,' or similar. Suggested answers are provided below.

Key:

1. *False. A city in California (Laguna Beach) recently banned the sale and use of balloons.*
2. *True*
3. *True*
4. *False. Balloons are 32 times more likely to kill seabirds than hard plastic.*
5. *False. There are no safe balloons to release.*
6. *False. Some stuff that can break down in soil can't break down in the ocean at all.*
7. *True*
8. *False. There are fewer balloons than plastic bags on beaches.*
9. *True*
10. *False. Plastic pollution anywhere affects the ocean everywhere.*

4. Key language

- a. Students could be asked to do this exercise individually and then compare their answers in pairs. The sentences are in the article, but some have been simplified to keep students' attention on the relative clauses. As an extension activity, you could ask students to go back to the text and find the original sentences. Ask students to look for the differences.

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Key:

1. Kara Wiggins is a doctoral researcher at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography **who** studies microplastics in the marine environment.
2. There's the plastic itself, **which** marine mammals and sea turtles can eat.
3. Manufacturers claim **that** some latex balloons are biodegradable.
4. Companies add a substance **that** slows the biodegradation process.
5. It becomes part of the plastic soup **that** floats through the oceans.
6. A lot of stuff **that** can break down in soil can't break down in the ocean at all.
7. There's also a string attached to balloons, **which** can be even more damaging.
8. Strings can wrap around necks and body parts, **which** can be deadly and devastating.

- b. Students could be asked to do this exercise individually and then compare their answers in pairs. Ask students to look back at task A and decide who or what each relative pronoun refers to. If students need more support, try phrasing each clause as a question, e.g., in item 2, ask 'What can be eaten?' to elicit 'plastic'.

Key:

1. Kara Wiggins (or the doctoral researcher)
2. the plastic
3. the claim
4. a substance
5. the plastic soup
6. a lot of stuff
7. a string
8. strings

5. Discussion

- a. Students discuss the statements related to the article and give their reasons and justifications for each answer, referring to their own experiences wherever possible.

6. In your own words

- a. Tell students to imagine they are studying the ways plastic hurts animals in the ocean. They will use a K-W-L chart to explore the topic. First, ask students, 'What do you already know?' and have them fill in the chart's 'What I know' column. If you prefer, this can be done in pairs or groups.
- b. Next, ask students, 'What questions do you have?' and 'What more do you want to know about plastic pollution in the ocean?' Have them write down their questions in the chart's 'What I want to know' column.
- c. Then, have students use an internet search engine to find answers to their questions and more information about the topic. Use the data to fill in the chart's 'What I learned' column.
- d. Students then present the information to the class. Encourage students to share the facts they've gathered and their opinions about the topic. As a follow-up activity, ask what questions they still have and if their feelings about plastic pollution in the ocean have changed.