
Plastic Straw Myths

Segment Length: 4:26 minutes

Lesson Description:

Should plastic straws be banned? Some environmental activists think so. Seattle recently banned plastic straws and other cities are planning to do the same. Activists argue that plastic straws pollute the oceans and harm sea life, but will banning the straws actually help? What would be the consequences? This video takes a closer look at plastic straw bans.

Concepts & Key Terms:

Biodegrade – When matter is decomposed by bacteria or other living organisms.

Feel-good policy – Legislation or regulation that seems to address a problem, but doesn't actually improve it.

Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- discuss the government's role in protecting the environment.
- explain why people think plastic straws are a problem.
- evaluate the arguments for and against plastic straw bans.

Preview Activity and Questions:

Distribute the K-W-L charts and have students complete the first two columns to the best of their ability. (Have them fill in the last column after viewing the video.)

Viewing Guide:

It is recommended that teachers show the video twice: once to allow students to view it and focus on the issues presented, and once to allow them time to complete the viewing guide. After they complete the viewing guide, allow students a few minutes to work in pairs sharing and verifying answers.

Answers to Viewing Guide

1. Seattle
2. one percent
3. exaggerate
4. superior, inferior
5. necessary

Plastic Straw Myths

Viewing Guide

Name _____

Date _____

Class _____

Teacher _____

Directions: As you watch the video, fill in the blanks with the correct words.

1. _____ recently banned straws and other places want to do the same.
2. Plastic pollution in the ocean is a real problem, but only about one percent of it comes from the _____.
3. Okay, so activists and media _____ the problem.
4. You're replacing a _____ product with an _____ one and you're asking people to pay more for it.
5. You know a lot of things in life are not _____ but beneficial and enjoyable.

Now, take a few moments to reflect on the video and answer the questions below:

Why is there a dispute over the number of straws used in the United States each day? _____

Nina Nelson posted a video on her Instagram account saying that "In the U.S.A. alone, over 500 million straws are being used every single day, most of which are going into our oceans." Why might she have said that most of the straws used in the United States go into the oceans? _____

What do you think is meant by "feel-good policy"? _____

Is the plastic straw ban a "feel-good policy"? _____ Why / Why not? _____

What is your view of this issue? _____

Discussion and Analysis:

1. How often do you use plastic straws? Why?
2. If your local government banned plastic straws, how would it affect you?
3. Why might journalists have repeated that 500 million straws are used each day in the U.S. without verifying that? Why might activists still use that number?
4. Why would politicians get involved in this issue?
5. If only about one percent of the plastic in the oceans comes from the United States, how much impact will banning straws in the United States have?
6. To protect the environment, should the government ban items such as straws? If so, what else should it ban?
7. What would be the effect of the United States banning plastic straws on: a) the environment? b) businesses? c) consumers?
8. In the video, Angela Logomasini says that paper products take more energy to produce than plastic products, leading to a “net-negative environmental impact.” Is the benefit to the oceans worth hurting the environment in other ways? Why / Why not?
9. Should debates over government regulations be based on facts or is it acceptable to exaggerate or even lie to convince people to do what others want them to do?
10. Starbucks has voluntarily decided to eliminate plastic straws from its stores by 2020. How is this different from the government banning plastic straws?
11. Are you for or against banning plastic straws? Explain.

Discuss These Lines from the Video:

1. Five hundred million plastic straws are used in this country...every single day...and many end up in the ocean polluting water and killing sea life.
2. [Banning plastic straws] might sound good at parties, but it's not gonna solve any problems.
3. Plastic pollution in the ocean is a real problem, but only about one percent of it comes from the United States. Of that one percent, a tiny amount comes from plastic straws.
4. Paper products take more energy and more effort to produce. You're going to have a net negative environmental impact.
5. This is what environmentalists say about every policy they put out: “A few cents here, a few cents there.” Eventually, it begins to be a burden.
6. You know, a lot of things in life are not necessary, but beneficial and enjoyable.

Quotes for Discussion:

Without reflection, we go blindly on our way, creating more unintended consequences, and failing to achieve anything useful. – Margaret J. Wheatley

Single-use plastic straws and stirrers are a pernicious problem and source of pollution. They are among the most common types of litter worldwide. – Bill de Blasio

Preservation of our environment is not a liberal or conservative challenge; it's common sense. – Ronald Reagan

People think, 'It's so easy to give this up. If I can give it up, why can't you give it up?' It's something most people don't notice, but for a disabled person, straws are an accessibility tool. – Alice Wong

Water and air, the two essential fluids on which all life depends, have become global garbage cans. – Jacques Cousteau

Because to take away a man's freedom of choice, even his freedom to make the wrong choice, is to manipulate him as though he were a puppet and not a person. – Madeline L'Engle

Activities:

1. Show the class one or more of the following videos:

Can Big Business Save the Trees (and the Bees)?

http://stosselintheclassroom.org/videos/save_trees_bees/

Epstein: We Live on the Cleanest, Safest Planet in History

http://stosselintheclassroom.org/videos/epstein_we_live_on_the_cleanest_safest_planet_in_history/

Foam More Energy Efficient than Paper?

http://stosselintheclassroom.org/videos/foam_more_energy_efficient_than_paper/

The Philly Soda Tax Scam

http://stosselintheclassroom.org/videos/philly_soda_tax/

2. Some communities now ban plastic grocery bags. What are the advantages? What are the disadvantages? Research and report on plastic bag bans.
3. Research other bans and regulations. Identify which ones are “feel-good policies” and explain why you determined they are “feel-good policies.”
4. If only about one percent of the plastic in the ocean comes from the United States, where does the other ninety-nine percent come from? Research and report on the origin of garbage in the oceans today.

5. Write a persuasive essay in which you explain different arguments for and against plastic straw bans and then take and defend a position on this topic.
6. Research and report on other communities that have banned plastic straws since this video came out in July 2018?
7. Research and report on other materials used to make plastic straws? What are the advantages and disadvantages of using those materials?
8. Obtain and evaluate different types of straws (plastic, metal, and paper and other biodegradable materials). Be sure to test them under varying circumstances, such as with hot and cold drinks, carbonated and non-carbonated drinks, etc.
9. The Great Pacific Garbage Patch (GPGP) spans 617,763 square miles – which is bigger than France, Germany and Spain combined and contains at least 79,000 tons of plastic, according to recent research. Research the efforts to clean up this and other floating masses of garbage in the oceans and produce a slideshow to present your findings to the class.
10. Read and summarize “Five Reasons Banning Plastics May Harm the Environment and Consumers” from the Competitive Enterprise Institute.

<https://cei.org/blog/five-reasons-banning-plastics-may-harm-environment-and-consumers>

11. Read the article “The Last Straw” and write a paper on how laws with good intentions can negatively impact certain people.

<https://www.eater.com/2018/7/19/17586742/plastic-straw-ban-disabilities>

Name _____

Date _____

Class _____ Per _____

Teacher _____

Plastic Straw Myths K-W-L Chart

Directions: Complete the **K** and **W** sections prior to watching the video. After you have seen the video, complete the **L** section and answer the two questions below the K-W-L chart.

K	W	L
What I know about plastic straw bans:	What I want to know about plastic straw bans:	What I've learned about plastic straw bans:

Overall, worldwide, most of the plastic trash in the ocean comes from Asia. The top six countries for ocean garbage are China, Indonesia, the Philippines, Vietnam, Sri Lanka and Thailand, according to a 2015 study in the journal *Science* (<https://www.usatoday.com/story/tech/science/2018/09/07/great-pacific-garbage-patch-where-did-all-trash-come/1133838002/>). If we were serious about reducing plastic in the oceans, what could we do to help? _____
