

## READ ME

At the end of one holiday, driving through a flat rocky land of small shrubs and yellowing grasses, my friends and I decided to play a mock game of 'I-Spy'. After *S for sky*, and *R for rocks* I said: *I spy with my little eye something beginning with PB. PB?* My friends were flummoxed. Look carefully I told them, it's everywhere. Then they saw: PB in the trees, caught in the bushes, around the rocks and being blown about in the wind. Sometimes there were just small coloured pieces, sometimes whole pieces but certainly everywhere. Yes, the landscape was full of plastic bags.

## FILL OUT AS YOUR PARTNER READS

It's not just the omnipresent plastic bag, plastic is now everywhere and in more places than you might imagine. Of all the different material in the world plastic is perhaps the one we take most for granted

\_\_\_\_\_ : you may even be wearing plastic and not realise it. Are you wearing contact lenses? Is that shirt 100% cotton, that sweater 100% wool? Are they not 10% acrylic or 30% polyester? Have a close look at the label - you're probably wearing plastic. So what exactly is plastic, and where does it come from?

## READ ME

Plastics are polymers: long chains of atoms bonded to one another. They can be developed from natural materials, from chemically modified natural materials or from completely man-made molecules. Plastic bags are usually manufactured from polyethylene resin pellets made from ethylene gas, a by-product of oil. They were first introduced in 1977 and now account for 80% of the shopping bags handed out in grocery stores in the US. Each year, an estimated 500 billion to 1 trillion plastic bags are consumed worldwide - that's a million a minute. Most of it ends up as litter.

## FILL OUT AS YOUR PARTNER READS

So, the landscape is covered in plastic bags and many countries have decided enough is enough. In South Africa the bags are now made more durable and therefore more expensive, so they are reused rather than thrown away. In 2002 Ireland imposed a plastic bag tax, known as PlasTax, which in the first year reduced consumption by 90% and resulted in approximately 1 billion fewer bags being consumed annually. The tax also raised almost \$10,000 for an environmental fund. Tanzania, along with Zanzibar, has now banned flimsy plastic bags and anyone caught importing or selling a bag thinner than 30 microns could face six months in jail or \$2,000 fine. The ban is also a result of the damage the bags do to animals and marine life. Thousands of sea turtles, for example, die every year from eating discarded plastic bags mistaken for food. To them the bags look like tasty jellyfish.

## READ ME

So plastic is the good, the bad and the ugly. It's practical and cheap - but we might end up counting the cost later.