**How Much Plastic Do You Use In a Day?**

**Featured Resource:**[**The Reality of Plastic**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bQJyM7pG2DY&feature=youtu.be)**(KQED QUEST)**  
Plastic. It’s super useful but it’s also a big problem for the environment. Get a quick overview of the scope of the plastic problem and what some people are doing to try to solve it.

**Do Now**

How many different plastic items do you use in a day? How many of these are disposable or single-use? How do you think our reliance on plastic affects the Earth? **#DoNowPlastic**

**How to Do Now**

Post a video response to the Do Now question in this week’s **[Flipgrid](https://flipgrid.com/b97ecf)**. You can also post your response on Twitter, Instagram, or in the comment section below. **Be sure to include *#DoNowPlastic*and*@KQEDedspace*in your tweet or Instagram post*.***

*Try one of these activities along with your response:*

* Upload a photo of all the plastic items in your backpack (including your backpack if it’s nylon!).
* Collect all the single-use plastic you use in a day. Share a photo of it along with one way you will cut back on your own plastic-waste footprint.
* Make an infographic of the plastic items in your classroom. How many are recyclable? How many aren’t? How many are disposable or single-use?

**Plastics!**

Plastics are everywhere. This light, durable material helps keep our food fresh and is used in everything from clothing  fibers to medical supplies to paint. But the characteristics that make plastic useful also make it damaging to the environment. Most plastics are made from fossil fuels and contain chemicals that leach into the water supply, posing a health risk to humans and animals. Plastics also pollute the ocean, pile up in landfills, and don’t biodegrade. Instead, plastic breaks down into tiny particles that can be deadly to marine life.

The statistics on plastic waste are eye-popping:

* Almost every piece of plastic ever made still exists.
* Plastic kills thousands of marine mammals and sea birds every year.
* 100 billion plastic bags are used in U.S.  yearly taking 12 million barrels of oil to make the bags.
* More than 300 million tons of plastic are produced worldwide every year.
* The [Ocean Conservancy’s 2015 coastal cleanup](http://www.oceanconservancy.org/our-work/marine-debris/2016-data-release/2016-data-release-1.pdf) collected more than 18 million pounds of trash from beaches and waterways around the world. Seven of the top ten items collected were plastic: beverage bottles, food wrappers, bottle caps, straws, bags, grocery bags and lids.

As the environmental consequences of plastic becomes widely known, scientists, environmentalists and everyday citizens are [engineering solutions to the plastics problem](http://response.restoration.noaa.gov/about/media/innovative-solutions-tackling-plastic-pollution-ocean.html). Scientists at Harvard have invented a biodegradable plastic using [shrimp shells](http://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2014/05/promising-solution-to-plastic-pollution/). A Dutch college student found a way to [scoop up plastic debris](http://mentalfloss.com/article/64630/20-year-old-invented-new-way-clean-oceans) before it’s swept into the ocean. Artists are using discarded plastics in sculptures and collages. Restaurants and cafeterias are turning to biodegradable food containers. Community groups are clearing parks and beaches of plastics and recycling what they find. Currently, only five percent of plastic is recycled.

Once we start thinking about the plastic problem and possible solutions, we start noticing how much plastic is a part of our daily lives. From computers to pencil cases to sandwich bags, plastics surround us at school and home. If we want to help stop the flow of plastic pollution, awareness is the first step.

**Read more about the history, uses, and impacts of plastic:**

**ARTICLE:**[**Plastic: The Popular Pollutant**](https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B4z_7euRnnnGeUF0alVtNnNoWkE/view?usp=sharing)**(KQED Learning)**

**INFOGRAPHIC:**[**The Unintended Consequences of Convenience**](https://cow2014.files.wordpress.com/2014/09/1_consequence.png)

**VIDEO:**[**How Much Plastic Is in the Ocean?**](https://youtu.be/YFZS3Vh4lfI)**(It’s Okay To Be Smart)**