



Should our use of paper or plastic bags be designated as an individual choice or be regulated by the government?

GETTING ORIENTED

The weekly passage introduces San Francisco's laws about plastic bags. Here is some information that might be helpful to students less familiar with this issue.

Plastic Bags

Plastic bags are such a small item that it is difficult for many people may have trouble understanding how one bag can be a problem, but we need to realize that Americans throw away 100 billion plastic bags a year. Since plastic bags are made from petroleum, the resources used are the equivalent of dumping nearly 12 million barrels of oil. When these plastic bags get water logged and sink to the bottom of lakes or oceans, they cover the floor that is the feeding ground of many animals such as shrimp, shellfish, and sponges. To understand how the bags affect living things in the water, imagine that you are eating dinner at your dinner table and someone throws a big plastic bag over your dinner table and you. The majority of plastic bags are recyclable if the material is clean, dry, and without black pigment.



Recycling

Recycling turns materials that would otherwise become waste into valuable resources. Collecting used bottles, cans, and newspapers can earn you some money, but doing so is also so important for a healthy environment. Natural resources such as trees, water, and minerals are all protected when we recycle. Recycling saves energy. Recycling reduces the need for landfills. Future generations will be better off if we protect the environment now. People who live in cities where the whole city is committed to recycling feel good about what they are doing. They are proud of their programs and their city. San Francisco may have been the leader in this kind of program, but many other major cities have joined in to support the environmental health of the world.



Biodegradable Products

Biodegradable products are products that are able to decompose back into natural elements. Be aware of whether or not you are buying biodegradable products. When you use biodegradable products, you are helping to protect the environment for yourselves and for generations to come. Plastic bags are not biodegradable, but they can be recycled if you take them to a recycling location.



Green Politics

In today's world many people are very concerned about the environment. These concerns are major topics for people seeking political office. The effort to protect the environment in as many ways as possible is called Green Politics. This movement began in the 1970s. Green politicians are very concerned about the use of plastic bags and the fact that they are not recycled on a regular basis.





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EVIDENCE AND PERSPECTIVES

	<i>Some may have this view:</i>	<i>But others may think:</i>
General Public	<p>Most people care about the environment and want it to be safe and cared for. Most people do some recycling. Many cities across America help their citizens to recycle by providing a variety of trash cans for different kinds of waste such as plastic, paper, and yard waste. People feel good about doing their part to improve the environment. Some people read the labels on all kinds of things with great care. The most concerned people bring their own reusable bags to the stores and use them over and over. Many of the people who support the ban against plastic bags feel thankful that the government has taken the lead on plastic bag legislation; they are happy that the government is well-informed and has passed its knowledge on to the local people.</p>	<p>People who are against the banning of plastic bags often feel strongly about not wanting the government to tell them what to do. They want to make their own decisions about whether or not to embrace a recycling program. Some people can't be bothered with remembering their own bags. They say they don't have time to be thinking about bringing a bag from home to put their groceries in. They don't see the fact that there are many big landfills as a immediate threat to the world.</p>
Shop Owners	<p>Shop owners are part of the general public so they usually want to support what other people support. They may create reusable bags with their own store names and logos. They want people to like their shops and see their stores as part of the community.</p>	<p>Some shop owners see all the regulation of plastic bags as a major inconvenience. They think that supplying paper bags will cost shop owners a lot more money. They think people will be frustrated if the store clerks tell customers they need to bring their own bags or buy one. They also don't see plastic bag use as a major immediate problem.</p>

- ✓ The average person generates 4.5 pounds of trash every day or about 1.5 tons of solid waste per year. Although the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates that 75% of solid waste is recyclable, only about 30% is recycled.
- ✓ The first political party to be created with its basis in "environmental issues" was the United Tasmania Group, founded in Australia in 1972 to fight against deforestation and the creation of a dam that would have damaged Lake Pedder.
- ✓ Recycling protects and expands United States manufacturing jobs and United States competitiveness.
- ✓ Recycling reduces emissions of greenhouse gases that contribute to global climate change.
- ✓ Buying recycled products helps make the recycling process a success.
- ✓ Plastic bags floating in the Mediterranean are killing sea turtles as the turtles mistake the bags for the jellyfish that they normally eat.

- ✓ The U.S. has 3,091 landfills that create hazardous air emissions (methane) and eventually leak toxic waste into the ground water.
- ✓ Each year, Americans toss out enough disposable utensils to circle the equator 300 times.

Additional Information for Teachers

Recycling plastic bag information
www.plasticbagrecycling.org/02.0/s02.1.php
 More information about plastic bags
www.salon.com/2007/08/10/plastic_bags/
 The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
www.epa.gov/osw/conserv/rrr/recycle.htm
 More facts about waste
www.cleanair.org/Waste/wasteFacts.html/



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ANNOTATIONS FOR TEACHERS

Features of Academic Text: *Explicit awareness of organized discourse.*

Many non-fiction texts may begin with a quote or short story to introduce a controversy. For some students, this can cause confusion. They may wonder why the article begins like a story but then switches to something that sounds more like a textbook.

“Paper or plastic?” asks a grocery clerk in Boston. You no longer hear that question in San Francisco. In 2007, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors banned grocery stores from using plastic bags to bag groceries. Groceries are now put in paper bags or bags customers bring from home. Many applaud San Francisco for creating the bag law and urge other cities to follow the northern California city’s example. Others say that the city government has overstepped its bounds. They feel the city took action that it should not have taken.

In many pro-con articles like this one, writers follow a pattern. After introducing the controversy in an engaging way, writers include a paragraph that presents the “pro” side, followed by a paragraph that presents the “con” side.

Supporters say banning plastic bags is a good **strategy**. They **cite research** that says plastic bags are bad for the environment. Our country uses 30-100 billion plastic bags per year, and the bags are piling up in landfills. Plastic is not biodegradable, so the plastic bags will stay in the landfills for hundreds of years. Plastic bags also litter the streets. Some drift out to sea and kill turtles and other sea creatures. Plastic bags are made from petroleum, or oil, a costly resource. People who support the ban say that our earth is being polluted and its resources are being wasted. These people argue that we need government

intervention to protect the earth and its resources.

Opponents state that city governments have no authority to ban plastic bags. They argue that storeowners are doing their part to help the environment. Some storeowners are **phasing** in recycling strategies, such as placing recycling bins for the plastic bags in their stores. People against the ban also point out that plastic bags do not pose any immediate danger. They claim that researchers have no **data** that proves that paper is better. These people point out that we chop down trees to make paper bags. In addition, they argue that because paper bags weigh more than plastic bags, paper bags are more costly to transport from the factory to the store. Opponents also claim that because paper bags are not as strong as plastic, we use more of them. Finally, people against the ban argue that private industry pays for the bags, not the taxpayers, so private industry should decide.

What is your opinion? Should city governments ban plastic bags or should the grocery store owners decide?



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GENERATING WORDS

Roots and Prefixes

The *root* of a word is the base part of the word that helps you figure out what the whole word means. It gives the basic meaning. The meaning of the word can be changed by adding a *prefix* before the root.

For example, the prefix *bio* means that the word is related to *life*. All of the following words have something to do with *life* or *living* things.

Directions: Match the word with its meaning

biodegradable	a book about a person's life
biology	using living organisms to make products like pharmaceuticals
biohazard	the science of life
biography	capable of decaying through the actions of living things
biotechnology	material from humans or animals that are dangerous to living things

Using your knowledge of prefixes and root words, what do you think the following words mean?

Write the definition next to each word.

- biodiversity _____
- biosphere _____
- bioweapon _____

► What are some other words that have the prefix **bio**?



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DEVELOPING DISCUSSIONS

strong

weak

Government should limit the use of plastic bags?

<i>Harm to the environment</i>	<i>Danger to animals</i>	<i>Bags look messy in streets</i>

Government should not limit the use of plastic bags.

<i>Freedom to choose</i>	<i>Cheap to produce</i>	<i>Convenient to carry</i>



1

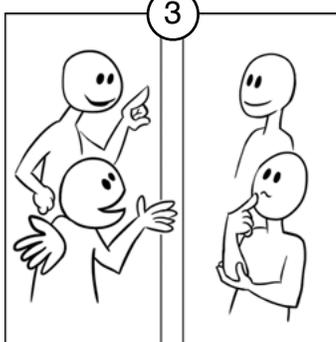


Step One: Look at the reasons for both sides of the issue. Think about which reasons are strong and which reasons are weak. Color in the meter above each reason. Think about why you chose the strongest and weakest reasons. Be ready to explain to your partner. Think about how you can use focus words: *strategy, research, cite, phase, and data.*



2

Step Two: Explain your meter to your partner. Why did you choose a strong or weak rating? Ask your partner questions if you need more explanation. Challenge your partner if your ratings are different. As a pair, be prepared to argue that one of the issues has stronger reasons.



3

Step Three: Explain to another pair of students in the class which side you think has the stronger reasons.

Word and phrases:

- The strongest reason for banning plastic bags is ____.
- This is the strongest reason because ____.
- The article provides evidence for this when it says ____.
- This is the weakest reason due to ____.
- That sounds like a good reason, but what is the evidence for ____ ?
- Is there data to support ____?
- I agree that it's the strongest. Can you think of any more evidence?
- That's important, but do you think it outweighs ____ .
- I didn't think of that. Can you say more about ____?
- We decided that ____ has stronger reasons. For example, ____ .
- Which side do you think has the best reasons?
- Do you really believe that?
- Can you think of any reasons that are not included here?