NEWS LESSON

# What a Bag of Discarded Plastic Is Worth



BEFORE YOU READ

## 1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. What would persuade you to pick up litter you did not drop?
2. Can a free meal be a good reason to help a neighbourhood?
3. Would a small reward change a habit you already cared about?

## 2 Key words

These words are in the article. Write the letter of the meaning (A to H) in each box.

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | **informal** | ☐ | A | thrown away because it is not wanted |
| 2 | **discarded** | ☐ | B | understand something fully |
| 3 | **grasp** | ☐ | C | exactly |
| 4 | **precisely** | ☐ | D | easy to see or notice |
| 5 | **waterways** | ☐ | E | not official or part of a regular system |
| 6 | **organised** | ☐ | F | rivers and canals that boats can use |
| 7 | **visible** | ☐ | G | points where something cannot go any further |
| 8 | **limits** | ☐ | H | arranged in a clear and planned way |

## 3 Read

Read the article and underline the key words from task 2. The paragraphs are numbered.

**Ambikapur's Garbage Café pays informal collectors in food rather than small change. It cannot absorb a city's plastic, but it does make their work visible.**

1 Most cafés expect their customers to pay by cash or card. In Ambikapur, a city in central India, one café accepts a far less attractive form of payment: plastic waste. Customers can hand over discarded packaging and, in return, receive a cooked meal. The project ties together two challenges that are usually discussed separately, hunger and pollution, and it does so in a way anyone can grasp in a sentence.

2 The Garbage Café was set up in 2019 with the involvement of local authorities. Its most memorable offer is a full meal in exchange for a kilogram of plastic. The food provides immediate value to people who collect recyclable material, while the plastic enters an organised waste-management system rather than ending up in streets or waterways.

3 The arrangement is particularly meaningful for informal waste collectors. They may earn very little from selling material to dealers, even after spending hours sorting through rubbish in difficult conditions. Being able to exchange what they gather for something as essential as lunch changes the practical value of their work. The exchange happens on the same day rather than at the end of a long month.

4 Ambikapur has also developed broader waste-sorting and recycling initiatives, so the café was never intended to be the city's entire environmental strategy. It is a visible way of involving the public and encouraging people to see plastic as material that has to be collected and managed, rather than simply thrown away and forgotten. A scheme that people can see working on their own high street is also far easier to talk about than a recycling target.

5 Single-use plastic is cheap and convenient, which is precisely why it turns up everywhere. It can block drains, spoil open land and break down into fragments that are too small to pick up, so anything that is not collected tends to stay in the environment for decades.

6 There are limits. A café cannot process all the plastic produced by a city, and collecting more waste is not the same as cutting down on waste in the first place. Critics could also question whether handing out meals in return for rubbish addresses the deeper causes of poverty, or merely makes them slightly easier to live with.

7 Nevertheless, the concept works because it is easy to understand. Instead of asking people to worry about a distant environmental crisis, it offers a direct exchange with an immediate benefit. A kilogram of plastic becomes a plate of food. An abstract argument about waste turns into a practical question about what a community actually values.

Sources: BBC Future. Picture: AI illustration.

## 4 True, false or not given

Circle **T** (true), **F** (false) or **NG** (the article does not say).

1. A collector who hands over plastic at the café is rewarded on the same day. T F NG
2. The café is the city's main way of dealing with waste. T F NG
3. Most of the café's customers are informal collectors. T F NG
4. Some people might say the café makes poverty easier to live with without fixing it. T F NG
5. Plastic that nobody collects disappears within a few years. T F NG

## 5 Vocabulary

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed.

| arrangement | Critics | dealers | fragments | initiatives | involvement | target | tonnage |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

1. The council welcomed the _____ of local volunteers in the clean-up.
2. Under the new _____, shops collect used bags and customers get a small discount.
3. Several recycling _____ have started in towns across the region.
4. A bottle left in the sun can split into tiny _____ that are almost impossible to collect.
5. _____ argue that free meals do not tackle the causes of poverty.
6. The city set a recycling _____ of fifty per cent.

## 6 Verb forms

Write the correct form of the verb in brackets.

1. The community garden _____ by volunteers in 2020. (BUILD)
2. By the time the collector arrived, the kitchen _____. (CLOSE)
3. Bottles that _____ on the beach can take decades to break down. (LEAVE)
4. If every shop _____ plastic as payment, the streets would be much cleaner. (ACCEPT)
5. By the end of the week, the volunteers _____ over two hundred kilograms of plastic. (COLLECT)

## 7 Language focus: phrasal verbs

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. Some phrasal verbs have two small words, like put up with. Learn the whole chunk, not just the first part.

| down | into | off | out | round | up | with |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

1. The charity plans to set _____ a second café next year.
2. We could cut _____ on waste by banning thin plastic bags.
3. Many collectors have to put up _____ very low prices.
4. The council hopes the scheme will help people find _____ how much waste they produce.
5. The council will look _____ ways to cut plastic use.

SPEAK

## 8 Talk about it

Discuss in pairs or small groups. Give reasons for your answers.

1. What would make a rubbish-for-food scheme feel welcoming rather than embarrassing?
2. Should people need a reward to look after shared spaces?
3. Which everyday problem could your neighbourhood tackle with a simple exchange?

## 9 Role-play: one kilogram, or nothing?

Work in pairs. Read your card, then have the conversation. Swap roles and do it again.

**Student A · the café manager**

The rule is one kilogram of plastic for one meal. A collector arrives with a bit less. Ask what is in the bag and why it is light. You can say no, or find a fair solution.

**Student B · the waste collector**

You've worked all day and your bag is a little under one kilogram. You haven't eaten. Explain your day and ask for a meal. Offer something in return.

**Useful phrases**

I've been collecting since early this morning.

It's only a bit under a kilogram.

I'm sorry, but the rule is the same for everyone.

Could you make an exception just this once?

I'd be happy to give you a smaller meal.

That's fair, I'll bring more tomorrow.

**Afterwards, tell the class: was the manager's decision fair, and would you have decided the same?**

ANSWER KEY

**2 Key words**

1 E · 2 A · 3 B · 4 C · 5 F · 6 H · 7 D · 8 G

**4 True, false or not given**

1 T · 2 F · 3 NG · 4 T · 5 F

**5 Vocabulary**

1 involvement · 2 arrangement · 3 initiatives · 4 fragments · 5 Critics · 6 target

**6 Verb forms**

1 was built · 2 had closed · 3 are left · 4 accepted · 5 will have collected

**7 Language focus**

1 up · 2 down · 3 with · 4 out · 5 into

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