

What suffocates our planet?

Text Type: Debate
Suggested finishing time: 15 mins

Let's Think!

1. Do you know what plastic has done to our planet?
2. What can be made out of recycled plastic?

Motion: Should disposable plastic packaging be banned?

Proposition: It's Time for an End, presented by Rosalyn Wong

Over the years, we have seen exponential increases in the use of plastic in human history. The extensive use of plastic has led to not only the need for new landfills, but also environmental problems that would soon be out of our control. It is a fact universally acknowledged that most plastics do not degrade naturally and, even worse, cannot be broken down completely. Plastic bags, whose cost is minimal, don't even get our slightest attention. Used for only minutes to hours on average, they may persist in the environment for hundreds of years. Can we really bear the cost of the pollution this throw-away culture brings, like marine animals being strangled by discarded six-pack rings?

Are people simply forgetful or unaware of this catastrophe? I'd say the latter is more likely. Despite all those campaigns against the use of plastic, plastic waste remains ubiquitous, littering all across the city: whether it is on the street, floating on the sea, at the beach, or even in country parks. Even with the plastic bag levy imposed, we are still seeing tonnes of plastic waste being sent to the landfills every day. That is why a more stringent law, namely a plastic package ban, is what the city is most in need of.

I believe that, without a deterrent, citizens will not take what they do as seriously as they would when there is one. Let's not forget that the ban is beneficial not only to our environment and wildlife, but also to our future generations, and that the sooner the ban comes into effect, the less plastic waste will be produced.

Opposition: A Move to Another Global Problem, presented by Noah Kwok

First of all, please allow me to clarify that banning plastic packaging does not solve the problem once and for all since there are plenty of other plastic products being disposed of on a daily basis. Leaving aside its limited effectiveness, plastic manufacturers will be the first to bear its consequences because plastic packaging accounts for a large proportion of their revenue. Outlawing it will unquestionably induce a plunge in demand and affect the operation of these companies. At worst, those who work for them will be left jobless.

It goes without saying that plastic packaging plays a key role in protecting goods, especially food items, from physical damage and from contamination by heat, moisture, insects and microorganisms. Putting it in another way, banning plastic packaging will probably lead to food safety concerns, indirectly contributing to the problem of food waste. In the light of this, acts like replacing plastic straws with paper straws, which is what people are already doing, may be of greater help than implementing a ban on such an everyday item.

Before we try to come up with a definitive answer to whether plastic packaging should be banned, we should give the following questions a second thought. First, does eradicating it truly put an end to the problem of plastic waste? Second, is plastic packaging indispensable and not able to be replaced? To me, banning it is an unrealistic move.

~520 words

STEAM

Unlike most other items consumed on a daily basis, including paper and food, most plastics are not biodegradable, which means they cannot be broken down by organisms like bacteria.

More to Take Away

Before the advent of plastic, only clay and glass, which are weighty and brittle, could be moulded into objects of different shapes. The first synthetic plastic was made in 1907, named after chemist Leo Baekeland. Its resistance to heat makes it a good insulator widely used in various products, revolutionising our lives in various ways.

Looking into Grammar

The sentence pattern 'The + comparative + subject + verb, the + comparative + subject + verb' can be used to show the correlation, namely the proportionate change, of an event and its outcome.

✓ The **healthier** (~~X~~ **healthy**) one's lifestyle is, the **longer** (~~X~~ **long**) the person can live.

? Underline a similarly structured sentence in the debate.

Part A Multiple Choice Questions

Answer the following questions based on the information provided in the debate. Choose the best answer by blackening the appropriate circle.



1. In paragraph 1 of Rosalyn's argument, the word 'exponential' can best be replaced by '_____':

- A. steady and moderate
- B. rapid and substantial
- C. gradual and minimal
- D. abnormal and sudden

2. In paragraph 2 of Rosalyn's argument, Rosalyn points out that _____.

- A. plastic waste is a serious issue
- B. the public does not realise the severity of the situation
- C. the effectiveness of the plastic bag levy is not clear
- D. all of the above

3. In lines 10-12, Rosalyn raises the question in order to _____.

- A. draw readers' attention
- B. bring forth her stance
- C. leave room for discussion
- D. seek support for her claims

4. Read line 21. The word 'one' refers to _____.

- A. a harsher levy
- B. a ban on packaging
- C. a stricter penalty
- D. a prompt preventive measure

Q4: The word 'one' refers to 'a deterrent'. A deterrent is a factor which stops people from doing something by fear especially of punishment, a strong penalty in any form not limited to fines.

5. Which of the following is NOT a claim on which Rosalyn bases her argument?

- A. biodiversity loss
- B. environmental degradation
- C. public awareness and consumer habit
- D. the degradability of plastic

6. According to Noah, a ban on plastic packaging _____.

- A. is likely to make plastic producing companies cut down on labour
- B. will result in higher sales figures
- C. cannot alleviate plastic pollution
- D. will give rise to food poisoning

6 Eliminate options that seem illogical first.

7. In line 42, the word 'definitive' is closest in meaning to _____.

- A. publicly approved
- B. clear and convincing
- C. easily understood
- D. certain and final



8. Noah considers a ban on plastic packaging unrealistic because _____.

- A. there is no other better replacement for plastic packaging
- B. it will be ineffective considering plastic makes up a big part in our necessities
- C. there are doubts to be cleared and questions to be answered
- D. food crises might follow

8 The reasons should be directly associated with Noah's view.




Self-evaluation
Checklist

Please scan the QR code on P.6 to access the checklist for evaluating your own reading progress.


Part B Pre-HKDSE Questions

Answer the following questions based on the information provided in the debate. For questions 1 and 5, answer in complete sentences.

-  1. Do you agree that the public is not aware of the problem of plastic waste? Explain your answer. (Any reasonable answers)

1 What may the public do if they are aware of the problem?

Yes, I do because a lot of plastic products are still being disposed of on a daily basis. // No, I do not because people are already trying to reduce the problem in different ways.

-  2. Look for a phrase in lines 13-24 that means ‘starts to apply’.

comes into effect

3. Below are some comments on the debate. Determine whose side each of them is in support of. If it is on Rosalyn’s side, write ‘R’ in the box; if it is on Noah’s, write ‘N’ in the box.

(i) ‘I would say that people are neither forgetful nor unaware of what’s going on. It’s more like they are just too used to the presence of plastic. Nevertheless, prohibiting it may be really the only way.’ R

(ii) ‘I agree that it is an absurd idea. What’s the point of introducing something that would put our health at stake?’ N

(iii) ‘Is it also universally acknowledged that some biodegradable plastics exist? Isn’t using biodegradable plastic packaging better than getting rid of plastic packaging altogether?’ N

Q3: (i) The ban as the only way means it is a deterrent. (ii) The ban might put people at risk of food safety threats. (iii)

4. Look for words in the debate to match the definitions below. Biodegradable plastics as an alternative means there can be replacement for non-biodegradable plastics.

(i)	<u>extensive</u>	(lines 1-24)	(adj.)	great in amount and covering many areas
(ii)	<u>catastrophe</u>	(lines 1-24)	(n.)	a bad situation in which many people suffer
(iii)	<u>ubiquitous</u>	(lines 1-24)	(adj.)	seeming to be everywhere
(iv)	<u>plunge</u>	(lines 25-46)	(n.)	a sudden and large fall in value or level
(v)	<u>concerns</u>	(lines 25-46)	(n.)	worries shared by many

5. Do you think that a ban on plastic packaging is necessary? Why or why not? (Any reasonable answers)

Yes, I think so because people will not take what they do seriously unless there is a deterrent. //

No, I do not think so because it will not put an end to the problem of plastic waste.

5 Read the last paragraph of Rosalyn’s and Noah’s argument respectively for ideas that can support your stance.

Part C Vocabulary Bank

Match the words for describing plastic packaging in the left column with the descriptions in the right column. Write the correct letters in the boxes.

A. durable

B. convenient

C. efficient

D. appealing

E. unsustainable

F. non-biodegradable

G. suffocating

H. life-threatening

1. **D** able to attract interest

2. **H** having the potential to cause deaths

3. **G** making somebody unable to breathe

4. **A** able to be used for a long time without breaking or getting worn

5. **C** able to perform tasks successfully and thoroughly, without wasting time or energy

6. **E** unable to continue at the same rate for a long time because of irreversible consumption

7. **B** suitable as it saves time and is easily accessible

8. **F** unable to decay naturally into simpler chemical compounds over time, and therefore likely to disturb the environment

Word Craft

It goes without saying (Refer to P.100.) (=it is obvious)

Idioms are not limited to literary contexts but commonly used in daily conversations for expressing personal opinions. They may be seen in newspaper columns and journals as well.

e.g. there is no denying (=it is true)
it figures (=it is not surprising)

Let's Discuss!

1. Are you in the habit of recycling or reusing plastic packaging?
2. Can you think of any better alternatives to plastic items?