

**Topic**

Reducing the amount of plastic we use

**Aims**

- To discuss issues surrounding plastic packaging in supermarkets
- To study and practise the language of food items and packaging
- To undertake an out-of-class project involving taking and captioning photographs

**Age group**

Secondary (lower or upper)

**Level**

CEF level A2 – C1+

**Time**

From 25 minutes to 1 hour depending on which tasks you choose to use

**Materials**

Worksheet with photographs of various food items wrapped in excessive or unnecessary plastic packaging (e.g. bananas, kiwis, bread)

**Introduction**

This lesson is based on photographs taken in a local supermarket during a recent campaign which challenged consumers to shop without buying anything in plastic packaging during a week. The photos were shared on social media with the hashtag accompanying the campaign to be used as a springboard for discussion and project work with students. As well as offering a great context for reviewing the language of food, it also offers a chance to expand on this topic and look at the language used to talk about issues surrounding plastic waste.

**Procedure**

<b>1. Lead-in</b>  <b>(5 mins)</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Project the photos of the first page of worksheet on the board, share them through a QR code or show them on a computer. If none of these options is available, print off enough copies for groups of students to see.</li> <li>2. Ask the students to identify the food in the packaging and ask them where they think the photos were taken. This won't take long. You can choose to do this in pairs or as a whole class. If you're working with the whole class, you might want them to think and consult with a partner before you nominate someone to give the answers.</li> <li>3. Keep a note of any new vocabulary on the board. Make a note of new vocabulary in the context of a short phrase or sentence if possible. Draw students' attention to the sentences or phrases at the end of the activity. You may want to work with the pronunciation of any difficult sounds so that they get a chance to practise in the next stage.</li> </ol>
<b>2. Rank-ordering and discussion 1</b>  <b>(20 mins)</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Once you have established what food items are in the photographs, ask the students to work in small groups to do the following:             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Rank the items in the order in which they need the packaging least, starting with those which need no packaging. Encourage them to justify their answers. You may need to feed in useful language such as <i>banana skin, peel, protect, etc.</i></li> <li>b. Ask them to think about alternative ways of displaying each of the items. E.g. the bananas can be loose in a box.</li> </ol> </li> </ol> <p>Monitor and help with vocabulary and structures where necessary. Keep a note of any new or difficult language to feed back on at the end of this stage.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. Ask one group to report back on their rank ordering and any alternative packaging methods they discussed. Ask the other groups to compare with their own discussions and report on any similarities and differences.</li> <li>3. Give feedback on any new or difficult language from the discussion phase and then ask the students to discuss why supermarkets choose to package the food this way. What might they be gaining from it? This extends the topic, includes an element of critical thinking and allows the students a chance to recycle language from the previous discussion.</li> </ol>
<b>3. Spot the difference and discussion 2 - optional extension</b>  <b>(10 mins)</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Project or share the photos of the second page on the worksheet. These show the same, or similar items, packaged differently. Ask the students to work in pairs to vary the interaction pattern from the previous stage, and ask them to do the following:             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Look at the photo, identify the items and spot the difference in the packaging.</li> </ol> </li> </ol>

- b. Ask them to discuss what other differences there might be between the items, which are likely to be more expensive and why.

Suggested answers:

Generally-speaking the items in plastic are less expensive, the ones in glass or paper are often organic and more expensive. The packaging may reflect the ethos and principles of the company that produces the product, so whether or not they believe in sustainable production and packaging. It may also be that they realise that customers who choose those items are more likely to be anti-plastic.

Note on the photos:

1 The eggs in the cardboard boxes are free-range, the ones in plastic are not

2 There was a negligible difference in price between the glass bottles packaged in cardboard and the tins held together by the plastic rings.

3 the bottles on the right are made of glass and contain fermented tea, the bottles on the left are made of plastic and contain a generic “detox” drink. The fermented tea is more expensive.)

Variation: if you do not want to conduct a second discussion task, you could set this task for out-of-class. It could be conducted on an online forum such as Moodle or Edmodo, or students could post their answers to an online noticeboard such as [Linoit](#) or similar.

As with the previous discussion task, make a note of any new or difficult language. Focus on this language before conducting whole class feedback on the discussion so the students have a chance to recycle the language you’ve focused on.

**4. Brainstorming:  
opening out the  
discussion to the  
students’ context  
- optional  
extension**

**20 mins**

In groups, as a whole class, or as a board race, brainstorm other products that are often packaged in plastic. You can use the photos on page three of the worksheet as a starting point if you think it’s necessary, or for comparison at the end.

The students then work in small groups to discuss where else these things are sold and if they are always packaged in plastic (e.g. meat is also sold at butcher’s shops or market stalls and is often sold in greased paper).

At the end of the discussion, ask them to choose three items and write a short report on each. Display these reports around the classroom and ask the students to read each other’s reports. Encourage them to comment and ask questions using post-it notes. These questions and comments can feed into a whole class discussion stage.

In the whole class discussion stage introduce the students to the idea of plastic-free shopping and what it entails. Ask them to think about what the main problems

	<p>might be, and which items would be most difficult to buy. As an extension, you may want to ask students to do some research on the zero-waste movement and various plastic-free initiatives and campaigns. Or the class could set up their own plastic-free challenge (see the section on projects below).</p>
<b>5 Project possibilities</b>	<p>There are all kinds of possibilities for projects to follow on from these discussions. Here are a few suggestions, each of which can be developed further with peer feedback, and maybe accessing an online campaign or hashtag e.g. they could add their photos and captions on twitter with the #plasticfree hashtag on twitter and explore what other people are posting. You may want to open a class account and manage it yourself to be able to do this more efficiently and safely with under 16s in particular.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Students choose one (or more) of the photos and write a caption for it as if they were sharing it on social media.</li> <li>2. Students take their phones to the supermarket and take photos of other examples to share in the next lesson.</li> <li>3. Students write emails to post to the supermarket's website asking them to reduce the plastic they use in packaging (giving concrete suggestions for alternatives).</li> <li>4. Students take part in a zero plastic challenge and try not to buy anything packaged in plastic until the next lesson. They then report back on the problems and successes.</li> </ol>

**Contributed by**

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