

ILLUSTRATING THE READING STANDARD

“Plastic Fantastic?” *School Journal*, Part 3 Number 3, 2007

Noun frequency level: 10–12

The students in a year 5–6 class are engaged in a social sciences inquiry to discover how human actions have had a positive or negative impact on the environment. They are investigating the reasons and values that led to these actions and building on the key competencies of managing self and participating and contributing.

“Plastic Fantastic?” explores the impact of plastic bags on the environment and describes some actions that various countries have taken to reduce the use of plastic bags and therefore of the non-renewable resources used to manufacture them. The information is logically organised, and the text is supported by photos, a stylised map, and easily identifiable information boxes that help the reader to identify some actions they can take to reduce the use of plastic bags.

The teacher chose “Plastic Fantastic?” because it is a persuasive text organised under headings, with a variety of text forms. It includes a range of features, such as descriptive and explanatory language, factual information, persuasive language, and headings that help to focus the ideas and information provided. The questions in the first paragraph support the reader to engage with thinking about what influences people to use plastic bags.

The following example illustrates aspects of the task and text and demonstrates how a student engages with both task and text to meet the reading demands of the curriculum. A number of such examples would be used to inform the overall teacher judgment for this student.

Some people think plastic bags are a symbol of our “throwaway society”. They’re made from petroleum, which is a non-renewable resource – and this means every plastic bag thrown away is a waste not only of the bag itself but also of the resources used to make it.

The student asks questions before reading, such as “Is plastic really fantastic?” or “What is the effect of plastic on our environment?” She clarifies her understanding of the abstract idea of “a throwaway society” by using her prior knowledge about the items we throw away every day after using them only once or twice. The use of the word “non-renewable” and a dash in the same complex sentence make the text challenging, but the student uses the concrete example of “every plastic bag thrown away” as well as knowledge of the prefix “non” to understand the term “non-renewable”.

Up to 100 000 marine animals, mostly whales, seals, and turtles, die each year around the world after eating or becoming entangled in plastic bags.

With teacher prompting, the student locates and integrates several pieces of information to infer that the way people dispose of plastic bags is having a negative impact on animals and the environment. In response to questions, she can evaluate the enormity of the problem by using information about what plastic bags are made of and how long they take to break down. She connects to her understanding of “non-renewable” and asks questions about what people can do to reduce their use of plastic bags. The student makes connections to what the students are doing in “Hukanui Enviroschool” (*Connected 2* 2010).

Worldwide, it’s estimated that about four billion plastic bags end up as litter each year. Tied together, that number would circle Earth sixty-three times.

The petroleum used to make one plastic bag is enough to drive a car 115 metres.

The average plastic bag takes five hundred years to break down.

Ireland: In 2002, the government introduced the PlasTax. Shoppers now pay 15 cents for each plastic bag they use.

Bangladesh: Bangladesh has many floods, a problem made worse by plastic bags blocking the storm drains.

On 4 October 2005, Collingwood became New Zealand’s first plastic-bag-free town.



In response to teacher questions, the student uses the map to locate and summarise information to confirm that this is a worldwide issue. She asks and answers questions about the ways in which countries around the world have acted to reduce this problem.

She considers what Collingwood is doing to reduce the impact of plastic bags on the environment, and with teacher prompting, she evaluates the positive and negative impacts that a decision like this could have on her own town. She revisits the questions she asked before reading and draws conclusions about the decisions and actions people take in order to save the environment.