

Learning by Ear – Environment

01 – Waste

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Intro

Hello and welcome to Learning By Ear's special series that takes a look at the environment. Today you'll hear about the devastating consequences of waste, and in particular the environmental impact of plastic. Across the continent waste management is an issue which governments are failing to tackle effectively. In today's Radionovela we'll find out just how dangerous plastic waste is to marine life and how pollution kills our water ecosystems. We'll also take a look at how we can reduce the amount of waste we produce in the house and ask: could recycling take the pressure of our landfill sites?

Music – 0:30

Radionovela

SFX: lapping waves

1. Gladys: [Sigh]...I remember when this beach used to be so clean. Just white sands and palm trees...

SFX: scrunching up of plastic bag

2. Gladys [Annoyed]: Moses don't just throw your plastic bag.

3. Moses: Why not? It's rubbish... Don't you know, Gladys?

4. Gladys: Take a look at the beach nowadays. It's filthy

SFX: picking up plastic

5. Gladys: Look here in the seaweed...there are supermarket bags, soda cans, sweet wrappers. It's disgusting.

6. Monica: So what? Why would you want to carry your litter all day? Besides, my dad always throws plastic bottles out the car window when we're driving.

7. Gladys: Monica, don't you care about your environment?

8. Monica: Uhhh...I know I don't want to carry my rubbish around all day. Besides it's easy just to throw it away.

9. Moses: It's true. Also, there are no bins on the beach so what are we meant to do?

10. Gladys: [Growing frustrated] Keep it Moses until you find a bin.

SFX: Music and laughter

11. Gladys: Look around you...you think these tourists come all the way here to lie on a litter-strewn beach? No! They come here to enjoy our beautiful, pristine environment. And anyway, we shouldn't be keeping the beach clean for them, we should be keeping it clean for ourselves.

12. Monica: It does look dirty with all this rubbish.

13. Moses: So what if it looks dirty...It doesn't harm anyone.

14. Gladys: Ahhh...that's where you're wrong Moses. Come, I want you to meet my older brother John. He's a fisherman at the far end of the beach.

SFX: Hammering nails into wood

15. Gladys: Hi John...what's wrong with your boat?

16. John: Oh nothing, just a small leak. Now what can I do for you.

17. Gladys: Tell them about the turtle you found brother John...

SFX: puts down his hammer

18. John: Well, we'd been fishing all day. As we were retuning the beach we saw a turtle floating on the surface. I wondered why it didn't swim away as we got closer. Then I saw some white plastic coming out of its mouth...

19. Moses: John, you mean the turtle was eating the plastic?

20. John: Well it had tried, but it must have choked on the plastic and suffocated...

21. Monica: [Gasp of horror] You mean it was dead?

22. John: You see turtles mistake the plastic bags for jelly-fish...and they love to eat jelly fish.

23. Monica: But there can't be many plastic bags out at sea...

24. John: I'm afraid there are...we see more plastic than any other man-made item at sea. Because plastic is so light it is easily washed out to sea. Even worse, plastic is non-biodegradable.

25. Gladys: What does that mean brother?

26. John: It means plastic can't be broken down by living organisms...in other words if you just throw it away it will never disappear.

27. Monica: Is that why you see so many plastic bags in bushes and in fields?

28. John: Yes it is, Monica ...

SFX: traffic

29. Moses: Look at that pile of rubbish over there on the other side of the road.

30. Monica: That smell's awful...

31. Gladys: [Shriek] And there's a rat....ohhh I hate rats. My mother says they carry diseases and that you always find them around heaps of rubbish.

32. Monica: I don't know why but no one ever seems to collect the rubbish, so it's just left on the roadside to rot. Look there's our headmaster...

33. Moses: [calls out] Mr Gitanga...

34. Mr Gitanga: Yes Moses.

35. Moses: Whose job is it to clear the streets of rubbish?

36. Mr Gitanga: Ah that is the job of the council. But look around you...they can't cope.

SFX: Hum of agreement

37. Gladys: But why not?

38. Mr Gitanga: You see, when the council collects our rubbish it dumps it at a land-fill site, not far from here. But now the land-fill is full so there's no where left to take the rubbish.

SFX: walking along the road

39. Monica: Why is there so much garbage?

40. Mr Gitanga: Well there are several reasons. The first is that more and more people are living in our cities. Look at Manbarra, just 20 miles away. Twenty years ago there were 250,000 people living there, now there are nearly one million. Everybody generates waste...and the more waste we create the more we have to dispose of.

41. Moses: Mr. Gitanga, can't we burn rubbish?

42. Mr Gitanga: Yes you can. It's called incineration

43. Moses: [excitedly] Well that's the answer isn't it?

44. Mr Gitanga: Not necessarily. When you burn many types of waste, like plastic, you release toxic fumes that pollute the environment and are bad for our health. It's also more expensive than dumping rubbish in a land-fill. But what we really need to do is recycle more of our waste.

SFX: Coke can thrown into road

45. Mr Gitanga: Take that coke can that shopkeeper just threw into the road. It's probably made of aluminium, which is easy to recycle. Then the metal can be used to make another

product, like aluminium foil. First though the government needs to pay for factories that can recycle different products.

46. Gladys: Is there anything we can do to make a difference?

47. Mr Gitanga: Of course, recycling starts at home. You can recycle vegetable matter and food scraps to make compost. Immediately that means you're throwing less away. And you should re-use plastic bags, and not throw them away.

SFX: Hum of agreement

48. Mr Gitanga: But I want to show you another type of waste and why it is dangerous...

SFX: throwing stones into water

49. Gladys: Look at the colour of this water. My brother says he used to fish here too. But he says now there aren't any fish left in the river.

50. Moses: Why not?

51. Gladys: Because it's so polluted. Nothing can survive in here, look the water is black.

52. Mr Gitanga: You see those factories over there, the ones belching out black smoke, they take water from the river and by the time it's pumped back into the river it's contaminated with chemicals.

53. Moses: [Incredulously] So they're killing the environment?

54. Mr Gitanga: Yes they are!

55. Monica: Now I understand why pollution matters...because we all depend on the environment.

56. Moses: And if we damage the environment we reduce the quality of our own lives.

57. Mr Gitanga: Yes we do.

Music – 0:30

Did you know? – Plastic

Did you know that globally we produce and use more than 100 million tonnes of plastic annually... that's the equivalent of

120,000,000,000 plastic bags. In fact it's 20 times more than we used 50 years ago. We all use it, whether it's a plastic supermarket bag, a plastic water bottle or a plastic biro. For decades one of the great appeals of plastics has been their low price compared to other materials. But increasingly, their disposal has come at an increasing environmental cost.

Most plastics are non-biodegradable. In other words they can't be broken down organically. But how many of us think about what happens to our plastic products once we get rid of them. Plastic bags that have been carelessly thrown away litter the African countryside and coastal waters killing wildlife. Each year more than 100,000 marine mammals like whales and dolphins die after mistaking plastic bags for food. In April 2002 a dead whale washed up dead on the French coast. An investigation found its stomach contained more than 800kg of plastic bags and packaging. It's believed if you throw a plastic bag into the sea it will float around the world's oceans for more than four hundred and fifty years. But nobody knows for certain how long as plastics haven't existed for long enough.

What is for certain is that more and more plastic products, especially plastic packaging, are rapidly filling land-fill sites. Campaign groups insist there are alternatives to plastic bags. A growing number of countries are enacting laws to decrease the use of plastic bags. Rwanda is one country in Sub-Saharan Africa to have banned plastic bags. Other countries around the world are planning to impose taxes on the use of plastic bags.

Outro

And that's all for today's Learning By Ear special environment focus on waste, written by Richard Lough. Remember you can make a difference at home simply by re-using plastic bags and bottles and composting your vegetable waste. Thanks for being with us. If you want to hear the programme again or tell friends about it, go to our website at www.dw-world.de/lbe. Good Bye.