

Learning by Ear – General Knowledge, episode 1 “How does plastic get into the bags?”

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Directing info

People:

Announcer

Jenny: ca. 14-year-old girl

Jack: ca. 15-year-old boy

Internet Cafe owner

Locations:

At Jack's home

On the street

In the Internet cafe

Atmos / Sounds:

Clanking of dishes

Rustling of plastic bags

Steps

Sound of dishes being carried

Traffic sounds

Bird chirping

Computer noises / typing sounds

Background noises of cafe: Voices, laughter, glasses, chairs

Intro (Announcer)

Hello and welcome to our "Learning by Ear" series "General Knowledge".

This time Jack has pointed out a serious problem to his friend Jenny:

Plastic bags. Every year, half a billion plastic bags are manufactured.

Most of them are thrown away carelessly. South Africans cynically call

the bright bags which end up in bushes and shrubs all over the country

14. Jenny: What were you planning to...?

15. Jack: (fast) I was planning to ask you whether I should help you carry the stuff.

16. Jenny: There you are then! Let's go... (*Steps...*)

Music

2. Scene: Jenny and Jack are on their way home

Atmo in the background: Steps, Sound of dishes being carried, traffic sounds, birds chirping

17. Jenny: So, Professor, now you can start your lecture about plastic bags!

18. Jack: Plastic bags are really harmful to people and animals, which choke on the bags or suffocate miserably. Doesn't the whole thing get on your nerves? Plastic bags cluttering up the sides of the roads? Look, there's one and here's one on this branch (*rustling of bag*). I'm sure we'll see plenty more bags before we get there.

19. Jenny: It's true that they're not particularly nice -- it's ugly to see them flying around everywhere. And if you look carefully, they really seem to be everywhere.

And so many of them. It makes you think how used to them we already are.

20. Jack: Exactly! Have you ever thought about why there are so many bags flying around?

21. Jenny: Not really no. I've got no idea. Because people always need bags and they can just throw them away?

22. Jack: Exactly! Most bags are just used once and then thrown away -- as opposed to baskets or bags made of material, which are used lots of times.

23. Jenny: But how come there are plastic bags all over the place? Why don't they end up on garbage dumps?

24. Jack: Well they do to a certain extent but then they blow away from there as well. If you throw away a piece of fruit, it stays there and rots. The bags on the other hand don't disappear.

25. Jenny: What do you mean?

26. Jack: I mean that each plastic bag needs decades, even centuries, to decompose as opposed to paper or plants. That also goes for plastic bottles.

Plastic waste also blocks our sewers and that's why there are floods.

27. Jenny: Man, I've never thought about all of this. But how come bottles and bags don't decompose?

28. Jack: The questions you ask! Because of the material they're made of, of course! The bags are man-made!

29. Jenny: What do you mean man-made?

30. Jack: Well, humans have invented and produced man-made material. Whereas wood, metal and stone are natural materials. They existed before there were people on earth.

31. Jenny: So plastic is man-made?

32. Jack: Yes, and there are all sorts of plastic -- hard ones for making telephones, for example, or cups or eyeglass rims. Others are more flexible and can be used for film, packaging or bags.

33. Jenny: But how does the plastic get into the bag?

34. Jack: I have to pass now. I don't know how plastic is manufactured. But how about we go into that Internet café and do some research.

35. Jenny: All right! I could do with a break -- I'm getting sick of lugging all this stuff...

Music

3. Scene: Jenny and Jack are sitting in an Internet café and doing some research

Background atmo: Voices, chairs, computer noises (keyboard sounds, mouse clicks -- fade under)

1. Jenny: Hello! Is there a computer free?

2. Internet café owner: Take a look at the back in the corner?

3. Jack: Oh yeah, at the back there...

4. Jenny: So, let's do a search. What does the Internet have to say about manufacturing plastic bags?

Jenny types...short search

5. Jack (*reading slowly and clearly*): Aha, there's something under the heading "From petroleum to shopping bags". I'll read it out: "The raw material for producing po-ly-thene grocery bags -- as

plastic bags are called properly -- is petroleum. Petroleum is heated to produce ethylene gas. This is converted to polyethylene, which looks like porridge. It is then forced through holes into strings, which are cut into granules. These are heated, stretched and cooled to make bags. Machines can make 30,000 bags an hour.”

6. Jenny: Did you understand that?

7. Jack: Well, just about. You need petrol to manufacture plastic bags -- I remember now.

8. Jenny: Yes, and petrol is expensive and in short supply. When there's none left it will be gone forever. So it's a waste of an important resource to make so many plastic bags with petroleum. I wonder how many bags are made all over the world.

9. Jack: It says here that “every year 600 billion plastic bags are manufactured.”

10. Jenny: But that's madness! What happens to the bags if they don't decompose and aren't used again?

11. Jack: Let's see what the Internet has to say about disposing plastic bags.

Jenny types... short search

12. Jenny (*skims the text and reads out loud*): Here's something about plastic waste: "Er, blah di blah di blah, expensive incinerators for burning garbage are not a solution. When plastic is burned poisonous gases are released. Chlorine, for example, which pollutes the environment and contributes to the greenhouse effect. And heavy metals remain in the ashes. Recycling plastic waste is also difficult because it has so many extra materials. Many plastics can't be recycled together. As they wait to be disposed on garbage heaps, poison can flow into the groundwater."

13. Jenny (*outraged*): This all sounds terrible!

14. Jack: But what's the lesson?

15. Jenny: That we have to reduce our use of plastic drastically. And plastic bags are the first thing to stop using. Hang on a second -- I have to go now.

Sound of chairs (Jenny wants to go)

16. Jack: Oi, what's up with you? Where are you going off so suddenly?

17. Jenny: Don't you understand? I'm going out to wage war on plastic bags. First of all, I have to tell everyone

who's coming to my party tomorrow not to bring their gifts in bags. No exceptions!

18. Jack: It seems that I've managed to convince you how bad plastic bags are then!

19. Jenny: You certainly have! Come on Jack, we've no time to lose! You have to get the drinks -- in glass bottles of course!

20. Jack: Oh no...

Music

Outro (Announcer)

And Jack will probably carry the glass bottles in a basket. After the party, the search for knowledge will continue. Jack and Jenny never tire of answering interesting questions. But that's all for today from our "Learning by Ear" "General Knowledge" series written by Leona Frommelt. You can listen to all our other programs on our website www.dw-world.de/lbe. Thanks for now and don't forget to tune in next time!