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

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Directing info

People:

Announcer

ca. 14-year-old girl Jenny: 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

their "national flower". Countless birds and wild animals have perished in the steppes and deserts because they've swallowed the bags. Jenny and Jack find out not only how plastic bags are made but how the problem of too many bags can be overcome.

1. Scene: Jenny is visiting Jack at home. She's borrowed pots and dishes for her party.

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Atmo in the background: Clattering of dishes

1. Jack: So, I think you've now got everything you wanted.

Two pots, plates and all the cups I could find.

2. Jenny: Thanks -- it's really very kind of you Jack to lend

me all of your dishes for my party. But maybe you should keep some cups so you don't have to use

your hands to drink?

3. Jack: No, that's OK we've got some glasses.

4. Jenny: OK; that's fine then. I'll go home now because

I've still got some things to do before tomorrow.

Have you got a plastic bag I can put this stuff in?

5. Jack (angry): Of course not!.

6. Jenny *(confused):* Sorry?

7. Jack: I said: "Of course not!"

8. Jenny: (now angry herself) Great. Thanks. And how am I

supposed to carry all of this home?

9. Jack: In a basket or in a bag made out of material but

not in a plastic bag -- I boycott them.

10. Jenny: Really? And why?

11. Jack: Because of the environment. And you should do

the same and stop using plastic bags. Don't you

know that resistance to plastic bags is growing in

lots of countries? In East Africa especially --

Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda and Uganda have

raised taxes on plastic bags and they've banned

the very thin ones completely.

12. Jenny: Um, I didn't know that at all. I've got an idea -- if

it's so important to you that I stop using plastic

bags, dear Jack. If you help me carry these pots

and dishes home you can tell me why plastic is

so bad for the environment. Then maybe I'll be

convinced.

13. Jack (looking for an excuse): Um, well, er, I actually

was planning to...

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

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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

gan.

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!