

Plastic pollution: How I see it

by Ruth de Villiers

This report is linked to the Sustainability Development goal, [*Life Below Water*](#)

The beach has always been a place of tranquillity for me. A place where peace is restored. A place where all of my problems begin to fade away. I think Broughty Ferry beach is beautiful, and I thought nothing could change that. But now something has stolen its beauty, the man-made creation: plastic.

In 2019, my eyes were opened to the truth about plastic. I watched the BBC documentary series 'War on Plastic' which addressed the issues of single use plastic, micro plastics, landfill and plastic exploitation. I was appalled. Shocked. Distraught. Questions were racing through my head; Why was plastic, this robust, eternal, super-material being used to make items designed to be used for a few minutes before being thrown away? If plastic was so deadly, why was it everywhere? Was plastic inside of me? Was I going to 'become plastic'? And why was no one in my area tackling the issue directly? I felt too small and unimportant to make a difference to the problem. Plastic was everywhere and so I couldn't do something about it, or could I?

Soon after I watched 'War on Plastic' my English class completed many literacy tasks based on the topic of plastic pollution. I expected my peers to react in the same way as I had, I wanted to discuss how we could tackle the problem in our area but my classmates were more interested in discussing what they were doing after school. To them, this was life and life carried on but that wasn't good enough for me, so I racked my brain for a solution.

The scale of the issue is huge; there is now plastic pollution found on every beach in the World¹ and micro plastics found deep inside Arctic ice¹. I could recite a spiel of drastic plastic facts, they are embedded in my brain, since they revealed a shocking truth to me. For example, it is estimated that *by 2050, plastic will outweigh all the fish in the sea² and that over 5,000 items of marine plastic pollution including 150 plastic bottles will be found per mile of British beach¹*. But these are just estimates! If things continue as they are, it could be sooner or more. Because of the *8 million pieces of plastic that find their way into the ocean every day¹, at least 100,000 marine mammals, 100,000 turtles and 1 million sea birds have been killed so far.¹*

This all adds up to over **8 million tonnes** of plastic entering our oceans *every year.*² And this number is only increasing as the demand for plastic rises.

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About 2 weeks later, my school's annual 'Big British Beach Clean' was due to take place. I was quite sceptical that I would find much litter or anything big but I thought it would be a good idea to support it, so I went along. And what I found on what I thought was a relatively clean beach blew my mind. It seemed like the litter was never-ending, I don't think we were able to pick it all up!

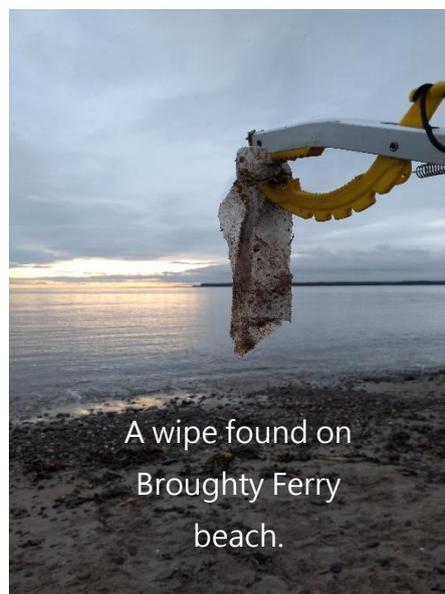
I thought about where all that plastic would go if we didn't pick it up. Into the sea. Into an animal's stomach and pollute our water. Or become part of a floating garbage island! And the tide was washing the litter away *every second*. I wondered if it was like this on other beaches around the UK and on my school trip to Loch Eil's shores I realised that the pollution there was worse than back home. I decided that it was time for action; I couldn't just let *an entire eco-system be destroyed!* And that is how my hobby of beach cleaning began.

In the following week, I set up The Grove Beach Cleaning Club, originally meeting once a month on Saturday mornings. Unfortunately, I started the group in the Winter when the weather was at its worst, so the group had to take a break for 2 months while the weather picked up. Meantime, I underwent an operation. I lay in hospital dreaming of when I could next clean up the beach! I hope, and will, make school beach cleans regular and enjoyable and build a passionate community. Once I was discharged from hospital and had recovered, I started to go beach cleaning weekly (sometimes with my family) which has allowed me to regularly clean my nearest patch of beach, a 5 minutes' walk away from my house. In 30 minutes, I usually pick up enough litter to fill 1 – 2 Tesco Bags for Life (the litter I pick up is predominantly sanitary waste) and the beach cleans have allowed me to connect with nature, observe the wildlife and dunes, clear my head and introduce my family and friends to the joys of beach cleaning! The beach is now added to the Royal Marine Society website as an official beach cleaning site and now I can share my findings.

So how have I shared this project with my community? I have printed my report out and displayed it on the community notice boards in **The Broughty Ferry Community Library**, the **Barnhill Co-op** and in the **Love Your Planet shop** so that everyone can read it and be inspired to help build a community that cares for our shores. I have also **presented my report to my school Eco group** and **sent this report to my friends and family** and **posted it on the Grove Academy Eco Schools twitter page**.

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The pictures were taken by me on 07/12/2019 and 30/01/2020

References:

¹ sas.org.uk/our-work/plastic-pollution-facts-figures

² [BBC.co.uk/newsround/42810179](https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/42810179)