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# Ocean Plastic Pollution

*Reading Worksheet — Level F | tahricteaches.com*

Plastic **pollution** has become one of the most urgent threats facing our **environment**. Every year, over 380 million metric tons of plastic are produced globally, and roughly 11 million tons flow directly into the world's oceans. Unlike organic matter, plastic does not biodegrade — it photodegrades into microplastics: fragments smaller than five millimeters that permeate every layer of the ocean. This accumulating **crisis** is growing worse with each passing decade.

The **damage** to marine ecosystems is severe. Sea turtles, seabirds, dolphins, and whales ingest plastic debris, mistaking it for food. Discarded fishing nets — known as ghost gear — trap and kill thousands of marine animals each year. Coral reefs face additional stress from **harmful** plastic fragments that block sunlight. Single-use plastics, which account for nearly half of all plastic **waste**, are the leading contributors to ocean pollution worldwide.

Microplastics have entered the food chain in ways that directly affect human health. Studies have detected plastic particles in fish tissue, shellfish, and drinking water worldwide. Chemical compounds embedded in plastic, such as BPA and phthalates, leach into ocean water and accumulate in the fatty tissue of marine species. Even apex predators — animals that **survive** at the top of the food chain — now carry measurable levels of plastic contamination in their bodies.

Governments and organizations worldwide are working to **protect** marine ecosystems through legislation and cleanup initiatives. The European Union has banned many single-use plastics, and ocean cleanup projects are deploying large-scale systems to collect surface debris. However, experts caution that cleanup alone is insufficient. The most effective strategy is to **reduce** plastic production at its source — fundamentally changing how industry designs, manufactures, uses, and disposes of plastic materials globally.

No single **solution** exists, but collective action can create meaningful change. Consumers can choose reusable products and support companies that minimize plastic packaging. Schools and communities can organize cleanup campaigns to remove debris from local waterways. Policymakers can enforce stricter regulations on plastic production and disposal standards. Scientists continue to develop biodegradable alternatives to conventional plastic. The ocean's capacity to recover ultimately depends on humanity's willingness to act decisively and cooperate across borders.

## A. Vocabulary

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|---------------------|---|
| 1. pollution ____   | a. causing damage or injury                         |
| 2. environment ____ | b. harmful substances released into the environment |
| 3. damage ____      | c. a time of serious danger or difficulty           |
| 4. reduce ____      | d. to make something smaller or less                |
| 5. protect ____     | e. an answer to a problem                           |
| 6. harmful ____     | f. material thrown away as no longer useful         |
| 7. survive ____     | g. the natural world around us                      |
| 8. waste ____       | h. to continue to live through danger               |
| 9. crisis ____      | i. to keep something safe from harm                 |
| 10. solution ____   | j. harm caused to something                         |

## B. True or False

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1. Over 380 million metric tons of plastic are produced globally \_\_\_\_ each year.
2. Plastic biodegrades naturally in ocean water within ten \_\_\_\_ years.
3. Ghost gear refers to discarded fishing nets that trap marine \_\_\_\_ animals.
4. Microplastics have been found in human drinking water. \_\_\_\_
5. The European Union has encouraged greater use of single- \_\_\_\_ use plastics.
6. BPA and phthalates are chemical compounds found in \_\_\_\_ plastic.
7. Ocean cleanup projects alone are sufficient to solve the \_\_\_\_ pollution crisis.

8. Biodegradable alternatives to plastic are currently being \_\_\_\_\_ developed.
9. Reducing plastic production is considered less effective than \_\_\_\_\_ ocean cleanup.

### C. Fill in the Blanks

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**Word Bank:** pollution, environment, damage, reduce, protect, waste, solution

1. Plastic \_\_\_\_\_ has become one of the most urgent threats to marine life.
2. Every year, millions of tons of plastic flow into the natural \_\_\_\_\_.
3. The \_\_\_\_\_ to coral reefs and marine ecosystems grows worse each year.
4. Governments are working to \_\_\_\_\_ marine ecosystems through legislation.
5. The most effective strategy is to \_\_\_\_\_ plastic production at its source.

### D. Comprehension Questions

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1. How many metric tons of plastic flow into the oceans each year?
2. What are microplastics, and why are they dangerous?
3. What is ghost gear, and how does it affect marine animals?
4. What steps has the European Union taken to address plastic pollution?
5. According to the article, what is the most effective strategy for solving the plastic crisis?

### E. Discussion Questions

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1. Should governments ban all single-use plastics? What would the economic and environmental effects be?
2. Who bears more responsibility for ocean plastic pollution — individuals, companies, or governments? Explain your view.
3. What innovations in materials science could help solve the plastic pollution crisis?

# Answer Key

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**A. Vocabulary:** 1-e, 2-f, 3-c, 4-g, 5-h, 6-b, 7-i, 8-d, 9-j, 10-a

**B. True/False:** 1-T, 2-F, 3-T, 4-T, 5-F, 6-T, 7-F, 8-T, 9-F

**C. Fill Blanks:** 1-pollution, 2-environment, 3-damage, 4-protect, 5-reduce

**D. Comprehension:**

1. Roughly 11 million metric tons per year
2. Microplastics are fragments smaller than 5mm; they enter the food chain and affect marine and human health
3. Discarded fishing nets that trap and kill thousands of marine animals each year
4. Banned many single-use plastics
5. Reducing plastic production at the source

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