



“A partnership that helps build GOOD PEOPLE who DO GOOD things.”

5 GYRES PLASTIC POLLUTION AWARENESS WITH YOUNG STEWARD ADDYSON

The 5 Gyres Institute empowers action against the global health crisis of plastic pollution through science, art, education and adventure because they hope to regenerate a world free of plastic pollution.

Plastic was first introduced in the 1950's as a convenient, cheap, lightweight product that could be thrown away after one use. At the time, no one realized the material **can be toxic AND NEVER REALLY BIODEGRADES** (define for young stewards). In fact, plastic remains in our environment **for hundreds of years**, and only a **VERY SMALL amount of all the plastic EVER MADE has been recycled**...all the rest has been incinerated (contributing to climate change) or is still on the planet. Because it doesn't biodegrade, the waste created by plastic, gets pushed around the world kind of like the game **HOT POTATO**. No one wants the hot potato in their hand for too long so they send it off to the next guy as quick as they can. This hot potato pass off is done **through waste systems**, eventually ending up in less fortunate countries without waste systems, for the people who live in these places to have to endure the pollution and trash the world is accumulating.

It's important to realize, when we put our plastic waste into the bin on the sidewalk and wave goodbye to the trashman who collects it, the waste isn't always recycled and certainly doesn't just go away. Instead, most of it is shipped somewhere else to do its nasty business of polluting, and this makes other people's beaches & communities **REALLY MESSY**.

People have made up stories about this waste, that it has created a "giant, floating plastic island that has been washed out to sea through ocean currents called Gyres". This information isn't completely accurate and has made us believe that we can just go find the big swirling trash pile, pick it up and our problem will be solved... While massive amounts of plastic **IS** sitting on some beaches & washing out to sea through many natural waterways, **IT IS NOT A MESS THAT CAN BE EASILY SWEEPED UP AND PROPERLY DISPOSED OF**. Instead, plastic breaks down into small pieces, more like an **ocean smog**, that spreads into the waters & onto the beaches. Many times, you can look out on the water and think you're looking at a clean ocean, but at closer inspection, the small particles will be found.

These small pieces release toxins that make small creatures, including tiny organisms called, phytoplankton sick. This is a big deal for us, since these little guys produce **most of the oxygen** we breathe AND vacuum the atmosphere of toxins called carbon from our atmosphere. (Phytoplankton sequester 40% of carbon and produce 70% of the world's oxygen). **Over 600 other species of animals** think the plastic pieces are food, so they swallow it into their bellies, tricking them into thinking they are full, which eventually makes them starve. This plastic also gets stuck in medium sized animal's noses & larger animals like, seals and whales get entangled in larger pieces of it.

So, how much plastic is in the ocean? Well, a group of 5 Gyres scientists did a study around the world and found out that in 2012, there was enough plastic in the oceans to stretch all the way to the moon AND BACK... TWICE. (Use a visual for young stewards to understand how far this is.)

When we learn what plastic is doing to the animals, we not only must have compassion for their life experiences, we also have to realize that we are part of the FOOD CHAIN of these animals. When ocean animals eat plastic, it makes them sick with the toxins in the plastic, then we catch the fish and eat the toxins, making us sick too.

Plastic pollution is making a huge impact on the whole world. Animal's are being impacted, our food system, people having to live in the waste, and our planet's climate is changing, because it is all connected. Our waste management and reliance on this material is contributing to the problem.

Plastic Pollution is a problem we can't recycle our way out of. BUT, there are MANY things WE CAN do to help solve this problem.

WE CAN:

- PLEDGE to go #PlasticFree and REFUSE the top 5 sources of single use plastic: plastic bags, water bottles, to-go containers, straws and to-go cups & lids.
- REDUCE what we buy & REUSE ALL existing plastic now in circulation.
- LEARN more about our waste management systems, so we recycle and PROPERLY sort our waste, to help stop waste contamination that sends recyclable items to land fills and less fortunate countries.
- PARTICIPATE in corporate responsibility programs [define for young stewards] that are being enacted by more and more *responsible* companies to help clean up their plastic mess.
- PICK UP plastic waste we find in our communities and send it back to the manufacturers with a polite ask to stop packaging in one use plastic.
- TELL OTHERS about the crisis of plastic pollution so they will go #PlasticFree too!

By participating and CARING about people and planet in these ways, we can WORK TOGETHER to REGENERATE a healthy ocean and planet, free of plastic pollution.