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## **Sample essays: Analysing argument**

### **Sample #1 - Plastic pollution**

*written by Jonathan Wong*

Link to the relevant article:

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-05-06/plastic-recycling-supermarket-plastic-bags/9723780>

\*Notes

- for the purposes of this analysis, most of the images in the above article are irrelevant - the exception is the main image depicting bags of apples.
- the additional comment by 'Tony' is not available.
- the relevant 'National Geographic' image is depicted above.

## Essay:

There has been a significant amount of debate in recent times as to whether both Australians and overseas supermarkets are overly reliant on single-use plastics. In an article entitled ‘Plastic pollution ... supermarket aisles’ published on the ABC news website on 6 May 2018, freelance writer Nicola Heath contends that supermarkets need to minimise plastic use, and that consumers must avoid overusing plastics, too. In a concerned tone, Heath suggests to an audience of supermarket retail executives and Australian consumers that the environment needs to be our priority. In a subsequent comment written by ‘Tony’, he contends in a defiant tone to the same audience that we cannot just blame big business for plastic use - that there are logistical problems with removing all plastic - and that consumers need to change as well.

Heath begins her article by describing how a ‘major supermarket’ offered her ‘bonus loyalty points’ to purchase certain products wrapped in plastic. Referring to this anecdote emphasises to the reader that supermarkets are apathetic towards the volume of their plastic use - that they value consumer spending over the environment. She then describes them as ‘environmental vandals’, which paints supermarkets as not just apathetic, but almost negligent, before asking the reader to contemplate when ‘chopping an apple [became] so inconvenient’ that plastic was used to package it. This rhetorical question points out to the reader that we value what is easy over what is right - namely that we will happily sacrifice the health of the environment simply so we do not have to prepare our own foods. Heath then mentions some key statistics, which she prefaces with the alarming statement that ‘our oceans ... are drowning in plastic litter’. Among these statistics are ‘40,000 pieces per square km’ of plastic filling up our oceans, and ‘30 kilograms of rubbish’ found in the stomach of a dead sperm whale. The alarming statement encourages the reader to see that environmental damage is occurring now, and the statistics will consolidate this view that the evidence of such damage is now impossible to ignore.

Heath goes on to reference a ‘high-profile campaign’ called ‘#banthebag’, which resulted in the outlawing of single-use plastic bags from the major supermarkets in 2018. The mentioning of this campaign, as well as the fact that ‘Woolworths [are phasing out bags by] June 20’ along with Coles (July 1) indicate to the reader that something has already been done regarding one type of plastic. The reader is asked to appreciate that options are available - that if we organise and conduct concerted campaigns, then it is possible to

galvanise environmental change. She cites a few statistics as well, specifically that Woolworths ‘hands out 3.2 billion ... plastic bags’, as well as an ‘ACT review’ which found that plastic bag use ‘fell by 36 per cent’ after their 2011 ban was put into force. These statistics demonstrate to the reader that a ban will instigate real, material change, and to highlight the core of the current issue, an image of apples in plastic packaging is attached to the article. Every single pack of apples is wrapped in plastic, demonstrating to the reader that although we have banned plastic bags, the issue has still not been completely solved. The picture makes the plastic seem superfluous, and asks the reader to consider why they are not kept out on their own, without any wrapping.

Tony touches on the issue Heath refers to throughout her piece, although he believes that removing all plastics from supermarkets is not as simple as how Heath describes it. Heath contends that the ‘huge volume of plastic’ in supermarkets, including ‘plastic encasing apples ... bananas’ is just far too much. She also states that bananas ‘come pre-packaged by nature’, and her arguments are intended to ask the reader to appreciate that we need to abstain from packaging things in plastic just for the sake of it. Tony, on the other hand, is of the opinion that ‘legal action’ will result if ‘customers [slip] on grapes, lettuce leaves etc’ and that the supermarkets ‘can’t be expected to watch one area all the time’. He is pointing out Heath’s naivety by stating that there are logical considerations in why plastic is used. The reader is thus asked to agree that removing all plastics will take time, money and will involve a lot of pushback. Tony believes that customers are partly to blame for this outcome, and that he has ‘personally seen customers throw lettuce leaves’ and ‘[walk] away from [spillages]’. His point is that consumers are the reason there are so many plastics in supermarkets - that these ‘hazards’ are their own doing, and that the ‘insurance premiums’ are what ensure ‘everything comes nicely wrapped’. This encourages the reader to see that the issue starts with us; that if we want supermarkets to relinquish their use of plastics, then we have to be more responsible when using them.

Another image lies at the bottom of the comment, and it depicts a cover of National Geographic magazine from 2018. On the cover is a large plastic bag, resembling an iceberg, with only the very tip visible at the surface. Making the plastic bag the centrepiece of the cover highlights to readers that plastic is clogging our oceans, and the comparison to an iceberg suggests to them that there is more of this waste than we can fathom. The caption, which reads ‘18 billion pounds ... tip of the iceberg’ reinforces this fact - that tons upon tons of waste are being dumped into our oceans and seas every year.

Heath concludes her article by asking for consumers to ‘draw a line in the sand’ and to ‘make sustainability our priority, not convenience’. This is a call to action that is intended to inspire the reader to do something about the plastic packaging issue - to not rest on their laurels regarding the successful #banthebag campaign, and to try and push for more. Tony, on the other hand, states that ‘it’s easy to ... blame big business’, and finishes by mentioning that ‘we are ALL responsible for this problem’ and need to change. This statement asks the reader to consider that the issue is our own, that if we want to influence the supermarkets, we are the ones who need to make a difference.