



## We Can Do Better!

Jasper Ralph, Plastic-Free MV  
Martha's Vineyard

### ☀ Call to Action

**Adopt sustainable practices in your life: carry your own reusable straws. Bring shopping bags with you to the market. Every little bit helps!**

**Check out: [www.plasticfreemv.com](http://www.plasticfreemv.com);  
[@plasticfreemv](#) on Instagram and  
[@plasticfreeonmv](#) on Facebook**

### ☀ Values

- Initiative
- Determination
- Commitment
- Community
- Environmentalism

### ☀ Lessons Learned

**Small changes in the usual way we do things can be the beginning of significant change in the world.**

**You have the power to change what you don't like about the world.** People will listen to you, as long as you speak clearly, sincerely, and consistently enough.

**The desire for change is contagious.**  
Go spread it!

**One day as Jasper Ralph was sitting in a restaurant in Martha's Vineyard enjoying a cool drink, he started to wonder about the plastic straw in his glass.**

He hadn't asked for it, and he didn't want it: it seemed like such a waste. So he created a group with other students called Straw Free MV, and together they convinced many businesses on the island to only give out straws to customers when they specifically asked for them. That was just the beginning: Jasper and his friends soon expanded their goal to advocate for a new bylaw that would ban the sale of plastic bottles smaller than 34 ounces on the island. So far they have gotten the bylaw passed in three of the island's six towns. "We really do have the power to change what is happening," Jasper says. "Adults listen to kids: when they see that kids are standing up for something, it makes it look like it's really important."

### ☀ Language Arts

**How would you tackle the issue of plastic pollution created by single-used plastic in your own community?** Write down a bullet-point list of possible solutions. Research one of these solutions that you think would be the most viable in your community and write a short pitch which you will then deliver to local business owners. After you do, gather feedback from the people you talked to: were they persuaded by your argument? What was most effective in your pitch?

**Working in small groups, write a script for a video or short film about a group of friends who want to help curb plastic waste in the ocean.** The story should start on the day they realize there is a problem with plastic waste, and end when they manage to take action.

**Working in your groups from the previous activity, create an “escape room” designed to teach people about the danger climate change poses to an island.** Make sure your challenges and puzzles test the participants’ knowledge about climate change, its consequences, and what can be done about it. Then have the rest of your class participate in the escape room. Once everyone has had a chance to “escape” have a discussion about what everyone learned from the experience.

## STEM Activities

**We use plastics all the time: so often, in fact, that they’re practically invisible to us.** In this [Earth Day lesson activity guide](#)<sup>1</sup>, students will keep a log of their plastic use, take actions to decrease it, and explore systemic approaches (like plastic bag bans, and taxes on bags) to minimize the use of plastics.

**Watch this [video on the effects of single-use and disposable masks on the environment](#)**<sup>2</sup>. Research what disposable masks are made of and how they can affect the environment if disposed of improperly. How can single-use masks be disposed of or recycled in a way that does not harm the environment?

**Using this [marine science activity](#)**<sup>3</sup>, explore the threats of plastic waste to our oceans and devise a plan to do a better job of keeping discarded trash from entering our oceans.

## Sustainability Innovations

**Jasper began his activism within his local community and created permanent and expanding change.** Through the global collaboration of businesses and organizations the world is following a similar pattern. [The Plastic Pollution Coalition](#)<sup>4</sup> is a global alliance of more than 1200 businesses, organizations, and world leaders who share the mission of a creating a plastic-free world.

**Plastic pollution has become a huge world issue because of its long lifespan and because of the number of waterways that can be polluted.** [The Ocean Cleanup](#)<sup>5</sup> is a technology-focused nonprofit organization that focuses on ridding the ocean and its waterways of plastic: they have developed the first scalable solution to efficiently intercept plastic in rivers before it reaches the ocean.

**In addition to dealing with plastic pollution, it is important to protect the world’s oceans and value what they contribute to our world.** [Oceana](#)<sup>6</sup> is the world’s largest international advocacy organization that focuses solely on various aspects of ocean conservation.

## Sustainability Career Pathways

**Materials Engineer:** Along with reducing the use of plastic, it is essential that we design sustainable alternative materials to replace plastics. This will take materials engineers. Explore the field of [materials engineering](#)<sup>7</sup> to learn about some of the ways you could help grow a greener economy.

**Recycling Industry:** But Realistically, plastic isn’t going to go away anytime soon. So finding better ways to recycle and reutilize plastic and other wasted materials is also essential. Recycling is a huge industry, employing drivers, sorters, mechanics, technicians, and plant managers, to help ensure that materials are made into new products instead of being incinerated. Here’s a great [overview of the recycling industry](#)<sup>8</sup> if this sounds like the path for you.

**Community Environmental Educator.** Many communities offer a variety of environmental educational opportunities to their residents- through local governments, parks, museums, and neighborhood associations. Do you love teaching? Working with volunteers? Organizing community events? This could be the career for you. [Learn more about community environmental education here](#)<sup>9</sup>.

---

1 <https://www.morningsidecenter.org/teachable-moment/lessons/earth-day-lesson-plastics-and-you>

2 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d0iUCDyrSgE>

3 <https://worldslargestlesson.globalgoals.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Life-below-water-Marine-Litter-Lesson-Plan-Final.pdf>

4 <https://www.plasticpollutioncoalition.org/>

5 <https://theoceancleanup.com/>

6 <https://oceana.org/>

7 <https://engineering.purdue.edu/MSE/aboutus/whatsmaterials>

8 <https://www.bls.gov/green/recycling/>

9 <https://naace.org/cepro/blog/community-environmental-education>

