

What are microplastics?

What will scout observe when she washes her clothes?



Key Question

Key Stage 1:

What are microplastics?

Key Stage 2:

Why are microplastics bad for our rivers (and other watercourses)?



Activity

Washing machine experiment

Lots of clothing is made with plastics – like fleeces and sports wear

1. Add an old fleece (made of plastic-based materials such as polyester or acrylic) to a bucket of warm water filled approximately halfway.
2. Add laundry liquid or powder (just a drop)
3. Encourage students to give it a good mix with the wooden spoon or stick – washing machine noises are optional!
4. Take a jug and pour a small amount of the water into a bowl. Does the water contain microplastics?
5. Hand out magnifying glasses so students can investigate!

Equipment:



- A bucket of water
- Laundry detergent
- An old fleece
- Wooden spoon
- Magnifying glass
- Jug/cup
- Bowl



Top Tip:

Practice using a magnifying glass correctly, by putting it close to the eye and moving towards the object to be magnified



What are microplastics?



Key Points:

- Microplastics are tiny pieces of plastic that have broken or scrubbed off bigger (macro) plastic items
- They do not biodegrade and can remain in rivers and oceans for hundreds of years
- Animals can accidentally eat microplastics which can make them sick



More questions to ask:

1. Were you surprised that you could see the microfibrils and microplastics?
2. Look at your clothes labels – are they made of plastic polymers?
3. How might the microplastics affect the environment?
4. How could we lower the amount of microplastics getting into our rivers?

Further Resources:

For more activities, worksheets and lessons, visit theriverstrust.org by scanning Scouts QR code!

With thanks to:



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Apply to different learners:

1. **More support:** Put a sheet of white kitchen paper in a sieve and pour some of the water from the bucket slowly through. Can you notice any brightly fibres left on the paper?
2. **Challenge:** Explain the effects of microplastics on our environment.

Other activities you could try:

1. Litter picking
2. Litter decomposing game
3. Plastics sorting game



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