Found in the Waters

- Editorial Cartoons: Toles and Telnaes | Two Takes on Throw-Aways
- Tom Toles: Did life begin in the ocean? Will it end there?
- Ann Telnaes: Plastics are killing our oceans
- Discussion Questions: Two Takes on a Plastic Issue
- Post Reprint: “As plastic piles up in the oceans, leaders struggle to take action”
- Think Like a Reporter: Serve the Public
- Post Column Reprint: “Jagged remains of more than 100 ghostly ships rest forever in Mallows Bay”
What To Do With What’s in the Water?

Oceanographers and other scientists, seafarers and divers and pilots confirm that the Great Pacific Garbage Patch is two massage debris fields in the north and western Pacific, spinning above and below the surface. Many believe a trash heap is collecting on the seafloor.

All agree that bottles, bags, microplastics and other garbage are very harmful to marine life. Resin pellets are mistaken for fish eggs; when young are fed these they die of starvation or ruptured organs. Ghost fishing tangles and drowns seals and other marine mammals. Sunlight is blocked. These are a few of the dangers floating in oceans, rivers and streams.

This guide provides the visual commentary of Tom Toles and Ann Telnaes, drawing inspiration from different sources. Questions are provided to guide “reading” of their work. Another Post reprint looks at government response. Think Like a Reporter considers paths to serve the public using this issue.

Also found in the waters near D.C. are 100 ghostly ships. Students may find the creation of National Marine Sanctuaries a fascinating approach to preserve history and serve the present. All are windows to what citizens can do with what’s in the water.
Two Takes on Throw-Aways

Tom Toles

June 17, 2019  Did life begin in the ocean?  Will it end there?

Ann Telnaes

August 23, 2019  Plastics are killing our oceans

They Have Style and a Point of View

Both Tom Toles and Ann Telnaes are Washington Post editorial cartoonists who have won Pulitzer Prizes in Editorial Cartooning. This Pulitzer is awarded for distinguished work, “characterized by originality, editorial effectiveness, quality of drawing and pictorial effect.”

1. Describe the style of Tom Toles.

2. Describe the style of Ann Telnaes.
Two Takes on a Plastic Issue

Tom Toles

1. Cartoonists label items that they want readers to understand.
   Begin with the location.
   a. What is an aquarium?
      b. What is the purpose of an aquarium?
      c. What species are often on display in aquarium tanks?
      d. Why do you think Toles added “Ocean” to specify the aquarium?

2. Toles provides a key to the items found in this particular window.
   a. What kind of information do display labels usually provide?
      b. What does Toles communicate through the labels for items in this tank?

3. Who are the figures in the foreground?

4. Toles’ alter ego appears in the right corner.
   a. To what is he referring?
      b. In what way does this comment deepen his commentary?

5. Identify the issue and summarize Toles’ point of view on it.
Two Takes on a Plastic Issue

Ann Telnaes

1. In the lower left corner, Telnaes has added a note to readers: “with apologies to Calder.”
   a. What is the purpose of the note?
   b. Who is Calder?
   c. For what art form is he known?

2. Cartoonists use details to establish a set or environment.
   a. What is the setting of the editorial cartoon?
   b. Why are particular items placed in this setting?

3. The large, monumental mobile is composed of objects. Select three of them and indicate what they represent.
   a. 
   b. 
   c. 

4. What perspective does Telnaes present through her visual commentary?

5. The female in the cartoon is holding a folder. Write the explanatory information that would be found about the installation she is viewing.

Ann Telnaes is an editorial cartoonist for The Washington Post where she creates in various mediums — animation, visual essays, live sketches and traditional prints. She won the Pulitzer Prize for editorial cartooning in 2001. Her latest book is “Trump’s ABC.”
TOKYO — The Pacific Ocean is “crying out in despair,” said Japan’s Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, as he lamented the plastic contamination reaching even to the sea’s deepest and most remote spots.

At the Group of 20 summit in late June, Abe unveiled what he called the Osaka Blue Ocean Vision, a commitment to halt additional plastic waste reaching the seas by 2050.

To the dismay of environmental groups, however, world leaders at the gathering in Japan made no commitment to curb the production of new, single-use plastic.

It was a victory for the plastics industry and the Trump administration, which has blocked any targets or commitments to curb plastics production.

More than 8 million metric tons of plastic are dumped into the world’s oceans every year — equivalent to a garbage truck’s worth every minute — and scientists predict that by 2050 there will be more plastic by weight in the oceans than fish.

G-20 leaders, whose nations together represent 80 percent of the global economy, pledged to battle the problem — but not by producing less plastic. Instead, they are looking to better managing waste.

Put simply, world leaders ignored the elephant in the room, said David Azoulay, managing attorney at the Center for International Environmental Law — that “plastic producers are investing massively to vastly increase production of virgin plastic, which can only aggravate the plastic crisis the world is currently facing.”

Yet Abe’s determination to foster concerted action was undermined by U.S. opposition to curb plastic production, and to any legally binding commitments, officials said.

The G-20 communique acknowledged the need for collective action to curb marine litter “through a comprehensive life-cycle approach that includes reducing the discharge of plastic litter by improved waste management and innovative solutions.”

The G-20 document also explicitly recognized the “important role of plastics in society.”

Christopher Chin, executive director of the Center for Oceanic Awareness, Research and Education in San Francisco, called it a “slap in the face.”

“Clearly plastic does play a role in society and some of it is quite useful and I would say even necessary, but we don’t need to say that,” he said. “But what isn’t necessary is the single-use stuff that...
can’t be recovered.”

Since China stopped importing plastic waste from the rest of the world at the end of 2017, the United States and Japan have found themselves drowning in plastic, with some U.S. cities canceling recycling programs and others simply burning waste.

Chin used the analogy of a running tap and an overflowing sink: The G-20 was trying to clean up the mess without even turning off the tap.

The Trump administration blames the problem on Asian countries, where huge amounts of plastic are being washed along rivers and into the sea, with one study naming China as the worst culprit.

The United States says curbing marine plastic pollution is a high priority, but insists the answer lies in “environmentally sound management of waste” and “innovative solutions” to improve resource efficiency and recyclability.

“We believe these innovations offer more sound solutions to mismanaged waste and scrap than ineffective restrictions such as bans or targets,” said a senior administration official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity under briefing rules.

But environmental groups say this argument ignores the fact that the United States has long been the world’s biggest exporter of plastic waste to poorer countries, and also glosses over the role of U.S. corporations in selling plastics and products packed in plastics to developing countries, often in small, single-use sachets.

Simon Denyer is The Washington Post’s bureau chief in Tokyo, covering Japan and the Koreas. He previously worked as The Post’s bureau chief in Beijing and New Delhi; as a Reuters bureau chief in Washington, New Delhi and Islamabad; and a Reuters correspondent in Nairobi, New York and London.
Think Like a Reporter | *Serve the Public*

There are many areas in which media serve the public. The stories they report inform, give fair coverage to different points of view and allow the public to make up their own minds. They provide alerts to impending severe weather, concerns about the economy, health and infrastructure, and other topics of local interest. Broadcast outlets air PSAs and host health screening days. Reporters visit schools to teach writing, photography, social media use and weather-gathering lessons.

To focus on the work of the science reporter serving the public, let’s use the role and impact of plastics in society. This is a local, national and global issue.

Plastic bottle refuse and the “Great Pacific Garbage Patch” get media attention. NOAA’s National Ocean Service informs that the marine debris in the North Pacific “is continuously mixed by wind and wave action and widely dispersed both over huge surface areas and throughout the top portion of the water column.” The problem — the ingestion by marine species — is more than seen on the surface.

Like the “Pacific Garbage Patch,” there are both observable and “below the surface” aspects of an issue that reporters must search to confirm, report and follow-up to be of service to the public.

**How Do Plastic Pieces Get Into Rivers and Oceans?**

*Explain to your readers how plastics get into local rivers as well as oceans.*

Read the articles of science journalists for examples of different approaches: lively images — illustrations and photographs, graphs and charts, reporting the influence of weather events, and coverage of impact on life within the waters. Reading scientific reports, then making them understandable to readers.

Four examples follow. Read and discuss the content, the presentation, the length and sources of information.

- **“Congrats! You dump 100 plastic bottles in nature each year.”**
  https://tinyurl.com/ubff5g2

- **“Flooding has flushed 43 billion plastic pieces out to sea”**
  https://tinyurl.com/vnydn7s

- **Is plastic trash making coral reefs sick?**
  https://tinyurl.com/tuejcvn

- **“What happens when hermit crabs confuse plastic trash for shells? An ‘avalanche’ of death.”**
  https://tinyurl.com/v24xzmh
Find an Angle That Relates to Your Readers

*News that affects their lives will get attention.*

Readers are most likely to pay attention to your science reporting on plastics if there is a local angle. If you live miles from an ocean or your community is engaged in recycling, they may not stop to read your article.

Initiate research or talk to local officials. Maybe these issues do relate to your audience, but there may be more relevant areas to report. Find out the facts. Relate them in a meaningful manner to your readers. Possibilities include:

- What if you follow the recycle day pickup of paper and plastics? Doing this you find if the bins’ content is thrown into the same dump as other trash. How separated?
- What if you learn that a local river has plastic bags and water bottles floating downriver from your community?
- Many businesses are eliminating plastic straws. What is happening in local businesses and in your school district? The cost?
- How does your school cafeteria handle plastic disposal?
- Go under the bleachers after a school event. What do you find? Take photographs.

Provide Readers Alternatives to Plastics

*In addition to pointing out a problem, provide solutions.*

*Readers may adopt or reject these; regardless, you have informed them.*

When making your list of suggestions be sure you are not giving advertisers in your publication or donors to your school’s programs special treatment or free promotion. At the same time, do include viable alternatives to plastic products found in your school, your students’ homes and community.

You may offer alternatives in a sidebar in your print edition; not just national incentives but what schools in your state or region are doing. Create an opinion box in the school cafeteria for alternative-to-plastics suggestions. Have the responses read over the morning announcements. Publish an online ballot to vote on the best suggestions. Follow-up with students to engage them — maybe through a student council or class-sponsored competition or project.

Why Should Your Readers Care?

*Bring the issue home. This is not only a problem in the Pacific Ocean; it is also in your local rivers and streams.*

Be sure that you are including local issues, environment and practices, and how your community would benefit from action.

Interview people who are responsible for local restrictions on plastic bags; recycling and enforcement of separation of items in trash collection and dumping; and state regulations on plastic use and littering.
What Can You Do?

Think like a reporter.

Inform with facts and background, give opportunities for engagement with your readers, and open the door to action. Write an informative or explanatory article. Use photographs, illustrations, charts and graphs. Pen an editorial or draw an editorial cartoon.

Report on the actions taken by your readers. Be on the spot when clean-up days, rallies and town council presentations are being made. Remember that reporting good news — especially when action is done in response to your initial reporting — is empowering and part of your public service.
The newest National Marine Sanctuary in the United States wasn’t chosen for its natural beauty. It was chosen because of what Susan Langley calls the “dead ships.”

Langley is the underwater archaeologist for the state of Maryland’s historic preservation office. On a recent morning, I sat behind her in a two-person kayak — a “divorce kayak,” she called it — as we paddled around what’s known as the Ghost Fleet of Mallows Bay. Here rest the skeletal remains of more than 100 wooden steamships, hastily built for World War I before eventually winding up on the Potomac River in Charles County, Md.

There were about two dozen people in our flotilla. Many were interns at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the agency that oversees the marine sanctuary program. The kayaks belonged to Atlantic Kayak, which organizes regular tours of the bay. Langley brought her own paddle. She spends a lot of time on the water or in it.

“Those are her boats,” said Paul "Sammy" Orlando, a regional coordinator in NOAA’s Office of National Marine Sanctuaries, as we waited to slide down the kayak ramp and into the water.

“My babies,” Langley echoed.

The dead ships were dead almost from the moment they were launched. The war ended, and the ships were sold for salvage. Some wound up in Alexandria to be disassembled, their metal fittings removed and sold for scrap.

Then operations switched to Mallows Bay, about an hour’s drive south of Washington, and at Widewater, a bay across the river on the Virginia side. The ships were rafted together, sunk in place, then burned to the waterline.

In the depths of the Great Depression, Charles County, Md., got 15 percent of its income from wildcatters breaking the wrecks. Many ships, however, were never fully disassembled. They rest here still, and at low tide, they emerge like bony limbs from a flooded graveyard.

Fascinating. And yet the first ghostly wreck we came to had nothing to do with that. It was the Accomac, a ferry that loomed over us as we
paddled closer. The Accomac showed up suddenly in 1973, apparently abandoned by its owner.

“How do you sneak a vessel that size into a bay?” Langley said. “There’s already a bunch of wrecks. No one will notice one more.”

The Accomac is the most intact vessel at Mallows Bay, making it what lawyers call an “attractive nuisance.” Plans are underfoot to add signs warning against trying to board it, even if just looking at the rusty, jagged hulk makes you want to get a tetanus shot.

“I have to pretend I care about people, but I care about my resources,” Langley said. “Don’t walk on my ships.”

A lot of people down here hope the new sanctuary designation will boost tourism. At the boat ramp, you can pick up a paddler’s guide to Mallows Bay, printed on water-resistant paper so you consult it as you float over the wrecks.

We paddled north past the hull of the Benzonia, launched in the Columbia River in Washington state in 1919.

“The Benzonia was going to be our poster child,” Langley said.

The outline of the ship was once recognizable, the jagged wooden stern standing high above the water. Then a fire broke out, rendering it less picturesque.

The fire was mysterious, but Langley thinks she knows what probably happened: An osprey nest in the stern caught fire, ignited by sunlight through some prismatic plastic trash carried in by a messy osprey.

“You look at a bald eagle’s nest, and it’s very neat: The chicks are here, there’s some fish there,” Langley said. “An osprey nest looks like a frat house.”

We saw both: eagles and ospreys. Hummingbirds, too. And egrets and herons.

And V-22 Ospreys. Quantico Marine base is across the river, and the transports split the air like massive dragonflies.

Low tide is the best time to see the Ghost Fleet, but paddling can be hard then. The shallow waters are choked by hydrilla, an invasive seaweed. Even at high tide, when I was there, you get a sense of the post-apocalyptic oddness of the place, overwhelmed by the feeling that nature reclaims all.

“I always say, come for the World War I ships and stay for the rest,” Langley said.