



# PLASTIC PEOPLE

The Hidden Crisis of Microplastics

## DISCUSSION GUIDE

# USING THIS GUIDE

This Discussion Guide is designed to help you use *Plastic People: The Hidden Crisis of Microplastics* to educate, engage, and activate people in the community after they have seen this ground-breaking film. It provides an overview of the documentary, discussion questions, possible steps to take action, and additional resources.

The film and discussion guide offers community leaders an accessible tool to encourage participation in advocacy at all levels. Helping people understand that this urgent climate crisis directly impacts our health enables audiences to brainstorm actionable ideas and become part of the solution.

***'Plastic People' is one of those essential state-of-our-world documentaries.***

Owen Gleiberman,



## INCLUDED IN THIS GUIDE:

|                             |    |
|-----------------------------|----|
| Synopsis .....              | 3  |
| Directors' Statements ..... | 3  |
| Selected Film Credits ..... | 5  |
| Engage with the Film .....  | 5  |
| Discussion Questions .....  | 6  |
| Take Action .....           | 7  |
| Additional Resources .....  | 11 |



## SYNOPSIS

The ground-breaking feature documentary *Plastic People: The Hidden Crisis of Microplastics* investigates our addiction to plastic and the growing threat of microplastics on human health. Almost every bit of plastic ever made breaks down into “microplastics”. These microscopic particles drift in the air, float in all bodies of water, and mix into the soil, becoming a permanent part of the environment.

Now, leading scientists are finding these particles in our bodies: organs, blood, brain tissue, and even the placentas of new mothers. What is the impact of these invisible invaders on our health? And can anything be done about it?

Acclaimed author and science journalist Ziya Tong takes a personal approach by visiting leading scientists around the world and undergoing experiments in her home, on her food, and her body while collaborating with award-winning director Ben Addelman (*Discordia*, *Bombay Calling*, *Nollywood Babylon*, *Kivalina v. Exxon*) in an urgent call to action for all of us to rethink our relationship with plastic.

## DIRECTORS' STATEMENTS

### **BEN ADDELMAN, DIRECTOR**

Having spent almost 20 years making documentary films and television, I believe in the power of this ever-changing medium to open people's minds and see the world through a different lens. Most often, this is a subtle, incremental process that accumulates over time. But occasionally a documentary can take on a subject that is so shockingly urgent that these shifts in point of view happen all at once. The subject of microplastics has the potential to be one of those subjects. We are endeavouring to create a film that rises to the level of the subject matter and has a profound effect on the audience and society at large.

Of course, there are dangers to having this type of lofty ambition. Films with big social messages can be boring, poorly made, and partisan and result in the opposite of the desired effect. That is why the team behind *Plastic People: The Hidden Crisis of Microplastic* is committed to making an entertaining film with real character, drama, excitement and depth.

The film is structured as one person's journey to uncover the depths of the microplastic issue and, specifically, how this form of pollution impacts human health. This is a global subject, and we will use this opportunity to move around the world with a sense of adventure and investigative spirit. The (preventable) spread

of microplastics, and their impact on human health, is a nascent subject that still possesses the power to surprise, shock and infuriate. This tension and drama will be woven into the serious message of Plastic People to achieve the best of both worlds.

From the moment we began discussing this project, I was very impressed with every member of the team's commitment to making something distinctive and meaningful. I have never worked on a project with so much attention paid to that unique combination of creating a social impact and making something big and entertaining right from day one.

I very much look forward to using everything I have learned about filmmaking, structure, creating elevated visuals and storytelling to help bring out the best of this important subject, using this film to educate, to connect and to inspire action on a critically important subject.

### **ZIYA TONG, CO-DIRECTOR**

"We are fast becoming a plastic society. Pretty soon, we will have more in common with Ken & Barbie than with our natural environment." — Anthony T. Hincks

We live in a time where some of our greatest threats are invisible. Like the climate crisis, microplastic pollution cannot be: it spans the globe, chokes up rivers and animals, and insidiously infiltrates the human body.

As a science journalist and author, I have been reporting on the threat of plastic for almost two decades and believe that now more than ever, we need to reveal the connection between planetary health and human health, which is why I've put my own body on the line for the Plastic People project.

As part of my journey, I will test my own home, my own food, and even my own feces for microplastics. We are very fortunate to also have a world-first for this project, as we meet surgeons and scientists who are probing the human brain to reveal whether microplastics can cross the blood-brain barrier. The results of testing here will be incredibly significant.

Many people have heard of the enormity of microplastic pollution in the environment, but few know the depths of the worrisome science pointing to the fact that plastic accumulation in human bodies is causing serious health concerns. And while we may come across the occasional news headline, there is something viscerally different about actually seeing plastic fragments in human blood, right on the big screen.

In this film, our goal has been to do just that: make the invisible visible. Tying the human body to the global body, we travel the world to expose the threat of waste colonialism. We hear stories from those on the front lines of the plastic pollution crisis whose bodies are inundated with microplastics on a daily basis. And we see how plastic breaks down in the natural environment: how it spreads on farm fields, enters water systems, and drifts across currents in the air, as we breathe, eat and drink it into our bodies again and again. Importantly, however, *Plastic People* is not a paralyzing film. It's an ambitious attempt to grapple with plastic's threat to human health in a hard-hitting but ultimately solutions-oriented way. Yes, the subject matter is weighty. But the goal here is to motivate people to action, not to fear. Accompanying the film will be a state-of-the-art impact campaign to allow viewers, armed with new information, to push for solutions.

It's strange: I have travelled to the most remote corners of the globe for my journalism. But it is *Plastic People*, the journey to discover the pollution that is closest to home — that's inside of me — that is possibly the most consequential story I've ever told. On behalf of the whole team, thank you in advance for considering this vital and timely documentary. We would be grateful and honoured to share it with your audience.

## FILM CREDITS & INFORMATION

**DIRECTOR:** Ben Addelman

**CO-DIRECTOR:** Ziya Tong

**EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS:** Peter Raymont, Rick Smith

**PRODUCERS:** Vanessa Dyllyn, Stephen Paniccia

**CINEMATOGRAPHER:** Roger Singh

**EDITOR:** Ania Smolenskaia

**PRODUCTION COMPANY:** White Pine Pictures

**RUN TIME:** 82 minutes

**LANGUAGES:** English, English with French Subtitles

## WAYS TO ENGAGE WITH THE FILM

- Host a community screening in your area, workplace, or organization connected to environmental and/or health-related issues. Contact the [Plastic People team](mailto:info@plasticpeopledoc.com) for more details: [info@plasticpeopledoc.com](mailto:info@plasticpeopledoc.com)
- Include a post-screening panel discussion
- Organize a Q&A with local experts

- Ask your audience to take part in an [online survey](#) after the screening
- Engage your local school to host an educational screening
- Visit [our website](#) ([plasticpeopledoc.com](http://plasticpeopledoc.com)) to learn about upcoming screenings in your local community
- Connect with one of our impact partners in your local community:

## A PLASTIC PLANET

#Break  
Free  
From  
Plastic



Canadian Association of  
Nurses for the Environment  
Association canadienne des  
infirmières et infirmiers pour  
l'environnement



environmental  
defence



environmental  
investigation  
agency



Friends of the Earth  
Les Ami(e)s de la Terre



Little  
Things  
Matter  
Protecting Children from  
Toxic Chemicals



PlasticPollutionCoalition



SMALL  
CHANGE  
FUND



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What was your most surprising discovery while watching the film?
- Plastic People demonstrates that microplastics are not just an environmental issue but also an urgent health crisis. Why is this important for people to understand?
- Given the concerns about plastic safety and hormone-disruptive chemicals that are found in different types of plastic, what transparency could we, as consumers, demand from producers of these goods?
- What measures could be taken to address concerns that toxins in plastics are impacting reproductive health and fertility?
- Many leading sustainability groups are focused on governmental policies and treaties over individual efforts to minimize plastic production and waste. Why is this critical to combating the issue? What can individuals do to support stronger and more robust regulation?
- In the film, we learn about reduced growth rates in shellfish and see how microplastics accumulate in our food. What changes can we implement in our daily routines to limit our exposure to microplastics in our food?
- For years, recycling was considered the best way to combat plastic pollution. How has that proven to be ineffectual?
- Rwanda is considered a global leader in reducing plastic pollution. What can other nations and communities do to learn from their successes and to follow in their footsteps?

- Nations in the Global South are feeling the brunt of overproduction and plastic pollution. Why is it so important for these nations to have a strong voice at the discussion table?
- The main goals behind a Global Plastic Treaty are to hold all countries to a high common standard on plastic consumption and to create a clear path toward a future free from plastic pollution. Do you think a unified worldwide treaty will help with decreasing plastic pollution? How can we, as daily consumers, support this initiative?
- We need to rethink the way we use plastic. How can we turn around our “throwaway living” culture and inspire others to reuse, repair and repurpose things they already own?

## TAKE ACTION

### USE YOUR VOICE

Help spread awareness by sharing about *Plastic People* on social media and by having conversations around microplastics as a health issue. Visit [www.PlasticPeopleDoc.com/TakeAction](http://www.PlasticPeopleDoc.com/TakeAction) for ideas, links and more!

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/plasticpeopledoc/>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/plasticpeopledoc/>

X (Twitter): <https://x.com/plasticpeople>

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/@PlasticPeopleDoc>

### INFLUENCE POLICY

Let your government representatives know that you want them to commit to the Global Plastics Treaty by signing petitions calling for their support:

Canada: <https://act.environmentaldefence.ca/page/113165/action/1>

US: <https://actionnetwork.org/petitions/global-plastics-treaty-us/>

World: [https://wwf.panda.org/act/plastic\\_pollution\\_treaty/](https://wwf.panda.org/act/plastic_pollution_treaty/)

**GET INVOLVED** with one of our Impact Partners:

[#BREAKFREEFROMPLASTIC](#)

[A PLASTIC PLANET](#)

[CANADIAN PARTNERSHIP FOR CHILDREN'S HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT](#)

[CANADIAN ASSOCIATION OF NURSES FOR THE ENVIRONMENT \(CANE\)](#)

[CANADIAN ASSOCIATION OF PHYSICIANS FOR THE ENVIRONMENT \(CAPE\)](#)

ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENCE  
ENVIRONMENTAL INVESTIGATION AGENCY  
FRIENDS OF THE EARTH  
LITTLE THINGS MATTER  
MIND YOUR PLASTIC  
OCEANA  
PLASTIC HEALTH COUNCIL  
PLASTIC PEOPLE COALITION  
PLASTIC SOUP FOUNDATION  
SMALL CHANGE FUND  
WWF

## SWAP PLASTIC OUT IN YOUR DAY-TO-DAY LIFE





**HOST A SCREENING:** Encourage others to host a community screening like this one in Santa Barbara from earlier in 2024!



**TAKE THE SURVEY:** After your community screening, share the survey with your audience. It is available at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/PlasticPeopleDoc>.

**WORK WITH EDUCATORS** to screen the film for students using the available curriculum available at [www.plasticpeopledoc.com/Education](http://www.plasticpeopledoc.com/Education).

**LEARN MORE FACTS ABOUT PLASTIC:**



## AND EVEN MORE ABOUT PLASTIC:

- Almost half of all plastic produced goes into single-use items (*National Geographic Society, 2023*).
- Every molecule of plastic ever created still exists somewhere on Earth, in some stage of degradation. It never goes away – it just degrades from big to small to microscopic, forever (*Rick Smith, PhD; Co-Author, Slow Death by Rubber Duck*).
- Ten to twenty million metric tons of plastic leave the land and enter the ocean each year (*Chelsea Rochman, PhD; Ecologist, University of Toronto*).
- Microplastics have become part of our planetary cycles – they are in atmospheric currents, the water cycle, and the carbon cycle (*Chelsea Rochman, PhD; Ecologist, University of Toronto*).
- Microplastics are eaten by every level of the food chain (*Plastic Soup Foundation, 2023*).
- Microplastics have been found throughout the human body. In feces, placentas, lungs, and even our blood (*The Guardian, 2022*).
- The Gulf Coast Growth Ventures (GCGV) site in Texas is one of the largest plastics manufacturing plants ever built. Every year, it produces literally trillions of polyethylene pellets – the building blocks of plastic – and ships them across the world (*ExxonMobil, 2021*).
- Formosa Plastics and other industrial plastics plants along the Gulf coast of Texas dump an average of 5 million gallons of toxic waste every day (*Diane Wilson, San Antonio Bay Estuarine Waterkeeper*).
- WWII brought modern plastic to the world...during the war, plastics production rose on the order of 300 to 400 percent (*Susan Fienkel, Author, Plastic: A Toxic Love Story*).
- In the 1950s, the plastics industry invented the concept of single-use plastics with the mantra “the future of plastics is in the trash can.” A near-infinite new market for plastics was born (*Susan Fienkel, Author, Plastic: A Toxic Love Story*).
- In the 1970s, governments started talking about banning plastic packaging like Styrofoam used for fast food. In response, the plastic industry began pushing the idea of recycling (*Susan Fienkel, Author, Plastic: A Toxic Love Story*).
- The plastic industry developed the famous “chasing arrows” logo meant to show consumers how to recycle. In fact, most plastic is not recyclable. Less than 10% of plastic worldwide ever gets recycled. Most of it either ends up in landfill or out in the environment (*Susan Fienkel, Author, Plastic: A Toxic Love Story*).

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### PODCASTS

#### [A Look at Our 'Toxic Love Story' with Plastic](#) (episode)

Plastic is everywhere in our world, and scientists are increasingly discovering the negative health and environmental impacts of the material. This hour, we take a look at our relationship to plastic. We talk about the material, its evolution, and its symbolism in our culture. Plus, we look at the use of single-use plastic in television and why it matters. A conversation with Susan Freinkel, Erica Cirino, and Dana Weinstein.

#### [Rising Tide #36 - Two Sisters Taking on Plastic](#) (episode)

Dianna and Julia Cohen are two of the co-founders of the Plastic Pollution Coalition. Mixing lifetimes of art and activism, they talk about the challenges of plastic pollution, including countering industry propaganda about recycling. Along with ocean and human health impacts and actions we can all take, they offer insights, opportunities and solutions to take us beyond petroleum-based plastic pollution.

#### [Dr. Imari Walker-Franklin Discusses Microplastics](#) (episode)

Imari Walker-Franklin is a young chemist, environmental engineer, microplastics researcher, and, most recently, an author. She is a smart and well-spoken activist for people and the planet; a sort of watcher who understands how these tiny particles of plastic can impact so much of our lives. The conversation primarily focused on the concerns of microplastics and plastics in general in our environment and the surprising data that poses more questions and deep concern.

#### [Sustainable Asia](#) (podcast)

The Global Plastics Treaty negotiations offer an opportunity for governments around the world to set mechanisms to address plastic pollution—one that should focus on solutions such as reuse and plastics reduction, and not on false solutions such as waste incineration and other techno-fixes! In this podcast series produced in partnership with Sustainable Asia, experts do a theme-wise analysis of the Global Plastics Treaty, telling us why an effective legally binding instrument addressing the plastic pollution crisis is important for all of us.

#### [Africa for Zero Waste](#) (podcast)

Fresh perspectives on zero waste within the African context. Zero waste is often seen as exclusively for the affluent eco-conscious individuals of high-income countries but with successful implementation, a zero waste system can truly embrace traditional knowledge and existing practices of preservation in Africa.

Tune in as we discover the world of zero waste, the organizations championing this system of waste management in Africa, as well as delving into the environmental issues threatening our people and planet.

Discover more podcast resources:

<https://www.breakfreefromplastic.org/podcasts/>

<https://www.plasticpollutioncoalition.org/about/media/podcasts>

## **BOOKS**

*Slow Death By Rubber Duck* by Bruce Lourie and Rick Smith

*Toxin Toxout: Getting Harmful Chemicals Out of Our Bodies and Our World* by Rick Smith

*Plastic: A Toxic Love Story* by Susan Freinkel

*Plastics* by Imari Walker-Franklin and Jenna Jambeck

*Flidgywumper Saves the Seas: A Children's Book* by Karin Westdyk

*Zero Waste Home* by Bea Johnson

*Wasteland* by Oliver Franklin-Wallis

*Count Down* by Dr. Shanna Swan

*Sicker, Fatter, Poorer* by Leonardo Trasande

*To Dye For* by Alden Wicker



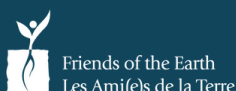
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plasticpollutioncoalition



environmental  
defence



## AND TO OUR FUNDING PARTNERS

TELUS independent



TELEFILM CANADA PARTNER OF CHOICE



## AND OUR ADDITIONAL SUPPORTERS

Park Foundation, The Dragonfly Fund,  
Chisholm Thomson Family Foundation, Echo Foundation,  
MakeWay Foundation, Metcalf Foundation, Houssian Foundation,  
Nona Macdonald Heaslip, Jennifer Ivey Bannock

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