



## Little Things

Have you ever noticed how it's much easier to ignore something if it's really big? Take a dinosaur or an ancient tree fern. These things were bigger than we can ever imagine now; nothing their size has existed for millions of years. And yet, when they died, many of them went on to break down and form fossil fuels. One of the most dangerous of these is crude oil. If you've ever seen a crude oil pit, you'll know just how massive they can be. Far bigger than the dinosaurs that died to create them. Far too big to think about, really. When was the last time you considered where oil comes from?

Perhaps a little bit smaller, though not by much, are the frenetic processing plants. These shining, silver beasts rear up into the sky, belching out thick smoke and slipping hidden, dangerous secrets into the rivers and oceans. Much like an animal, these monsters need to be fed. Thousands of tonnes of oil are swallowed whole, and an endless stream of plastic pellets is expelled. So much plastic, in fact, that it's far too big to think about.

The plastic pellets are quite small, but my goodness, they make big things. In just the same way as you can, these little nuggets can go on to be just about anything they want to be. They could form the plastic cup that you drank from at break time or the bumper of an articulated lorry barreling down the highway. Or maybe, they could go on to form the wasteful packaging that your new toy arrived in. These things are smaller, easier to think about. But still perhaps too big to worry us.

Like everything, these products soon become useless to us. Most of these items (nearly 60%) will



end up in landfills. Much of this will eventually find its way into the waters that provide homes for thousands of species of animal. Unfortunately, plastic will eventually break down into smaller and smaller pieces, but it won't disappear. These pieces of plastic - micro-plastics - are nearly too small to see, but they are definitely not insignificant. What happens when a fish eats these micro-plastics? Where do they end up?

Next time you have fish for your dinner, think about this. Suddenly, things are small enough to start worrying about. Suddenly, we can understand just how dangerous the big things can be.

Bon Appétit.

## RETRIEVAL FOCUS

1. Which is bigger, a crude oil pit or a dinosaur?
2. How much oil do factories take in?
3. How many products end up in landfills?
4. What are the small pieces of plastic called?
5. Other than dinosaurs, what else might form fossil fuels?

## VIPERS QUESTIONS

- I** Why does the author sign off with Bon Appétit?
- V** Using the context of the sentence, write a definition for *frenetic*. Check using a dictionary.
- I** What are the **dangerous secrets** that are slipped into the rivers and oceans?
- S** List all the things that the author notes during their day that are damaging the Earth.
- V** Which word shows that micro-plastics are important?

Answers:

1. Crude oil pit
2. Thousands of tonnes
3. Nearly 60%
4. Micro-plastics
5. Tree ferns or plants

I: It means eat well - it is a reference to the fish being poisoned with plastic

V: Fast and energetic, wild and uncontrolled

I: Toxic waste, plastics, poisons etc

S: Factories, plastic cups, lorries, packaging for toys, micro-plastics

V: Insignificant