



Advanced | Exemplar Essay

Bag Tax

Not the Right Answer



Claim and Focus

The writer engages the reader with context surrounding the topic (“landfills,” “pollution,” “government officials,” “California,” “Our state”) and narrows to a clear and specific claim that is developed fully throughout the essay (“Although plastic bags do harm the environment, enforcing a tax on those bags to stop consumers from using them is not the right answer”).



Support and Evidence

Several pieces of highly relevant and cited evidence are presented (“American Progressive Bag Alliance,” “DC’s Plastic Bag Tax Exposed”) as are full explanations of how each supports the claim (“While trying to mitigate... environmental fund,” “putting taxes on plastic bags does not hinder consumer behavior”). Counterclaims are offered (“by charging for bags, we will help the environment”), weakened by cited evidence (*Inspiration Green*, *Animal Australia*) and sufficiently debunked (“there will always be people who choose to litter, no matter how it affects animals or how high the taxes on bags may be”).



Organization

The essay is effectively structured to progress the argument forward. Related ideas are linked by varied transitions (“Based on data,” “On the other hand,” “That notion is misleading though,” “On the whole”) that help show connections between claim, evidence, and counterclaim.



Language and Style

The essay maintains a fair and formal tone, while a unique voice emerges through the argument. Sentence structure is varied, and word choice is balanced with advanced vocabulary and connotations that appeal to the audience’s values (“While trying to mitigate a negative environmental impact, we could be putting tens of thousands of hard-working people out of their jobs”).



Using Exemplars in Your Lessons

Exemplar essays are tools to take abstract descriptions and make them more concrete for students. One way to use them is to print the clean copies of the essays and allow students to use the rubric to make notes or even find examples of important elements of an essay - thesis statements, introductions, evidence, conclusions, transitions, etc. Teachers can also use exemplars to illustrate what each score point within a trait ‘looks like’ in an authentic student essay. For additional ideas, please see “25 Ways to Use Exemplar Essays” by visiting the Curriculum Resources page in Help.

Bag Tax



Notes

Not the Right Answer

Dear Fellow Consumers,

Everyday, millions of pounds of plastic sit in our landfills, never decomposing or disintegrating. Many people question whether there is a way to avoid adding all of that extra pollution into our environment, especially considering the drastic effects that pollution can have on the Earth. In a recent attempt to combat this pollution problem, some government officials have come up with a solution to prevent non-biodegradable waste, like plastic bags, from polluting our environment. They believe one way to make this change is to add a tax on plastic bags in all stores and restaurants. Governor Edmund Brown of California recently signed a law addressing this issue that prohibits stores from handing out plastic bags for free, requiring them to put a tax on them. Some people welcomed this new law as a great step towards saving the environment. However, others were shocked at the idea and believe that this is just another thing that can be taxed. Our state government is proposing a similar tax, saying that local stores should be required to charge a 25-cent fee for each plastic bag. Although plastic bags do harm the environment, enforcing a tax on those bags to stop consumers from using them is not the right answer.

Based on data from cities that have already enacted this tax, there are many reasons why a decision like this will *not* affect the economy and individuals in a positive way. When California proposed a similar ballot issue, the American Progressive Bag Alliance stated that banning plastic bags would threaten over 30,000 jobs nationwide. In fact, they said that if the law went into effect, "It

would jeopardize thousands of manufacturing jobs... and fleece consumers for billions." While trying to mitigate a negative environmental impact, we could be putting tens of thousands of hard-working people out of their jobs. Furthermore, evidence revealed that such a fee was a "scam" to increase grocers' profits, as none of the money was actually directed to an environmental fund.

Additionally, there is little evidence to support the notion that enforcing a plastic bag fee would actually change the behavior of the consumers themselves. In an article titled, "DC's Plastic Bag Tax Exposed" concerning Washington D.C.'s bag tax, it states that "taxes should not be used as a method of impacting consumer behavior [because] it doesn't work. And these taxes disproportionately hurt the lower income sectors of society." Imposing a fee or tax could penalize people who can't afford to pay it. That is to say, the poorer population might not have the money to purchase plastic bags or the more expensive reusable bags. This extra expense could also be seen as unfair because the richer population has little problem paying these extra costs. Despite the government's beliefs, putting taxes on plastic bags does not hinder consumer behavior, and could negatively impact certain populations.

On the other hand, people in support of this tax argue that by charging for bags, we will help the environment. That notion is misleading though, because keeping the environment clean and healthy is important to all of us, regardless of our positions on the bag tax. Those of us who oppose the tax simply believe that it is not the most effective method for helping the environment. For instance, according to *Inspiration Green*, a website used to help spread the word about pollution, an estimated number of 500 billion and 1 trillion plastic bags get used each year. Additionally, *Animal Australia*, an organization that helps save wildlife, said that "more than 100,000 animals die every year after ingesting or becoming entangled in [plastic bags]." The preservation of species on Earth is a very important topic that needs to be attended to by the world as a whole, but taxing plastic bags isn't

going to help. People are creatures of habit and many will continue to choose convenience over cost. Unfortunately, there will always be people who choose to litter, no matter how it affects animals or how high the taxes on bags may be.

On the whole, the government's attempt to affect the environment is a good indication that they are working towards helping the Earth, but the way they plan to execute it is terrible. In this situation, the government's plan to tax and punish those who use plastic bags is by far the worst possible solution. Despite its intention, this plan could actually negatively reinforce current plastic bag use and behaviors. Instead, the government should look for a more positive way of helping the environment. What can be done instead is create campaigns and help to spread awareness about the hazard of plastic bags to the environment, and teach people how to dispose of them correctly. If things were approached more positively and people were rewarded for bringing in their own reusable bags, the plastic bag usage would most likely decrease. Punishing people by making them pay extra for their bags won't help as much as positively reinforcing them to do something better.

In conclusion, although plastic bags are a problem, putting taxes on them is not an effective solution. It is extremely important to keep Earth healthy, but putting a tax on plastic bags simply is not the right way to do that. There are many positive alternative solutions to this problem that that don't require a tax and would be better for our economy and our nation's citizens.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Respectfully,

A Concerned Citizen