

# New Internationalist

Should we ...?

New Internationalist Intermediate Ready Lesson

SHOULD WE FLY  
IN THE CLIMATE  
CRISIS?



Letter: who to? who from? why written?

**Dear Problem page,**

**I talk to my family in Australia a lot on Skype, but my brother always asks me to visit them. We are in a climate crisis, so should I go? My brother is offering to pay for the flight (unusual for him!).**

**Yours,**

**Someone who doesn't fly much**

Groups: think of some arguments:

FOR

and

AGAINST

eg.

- enjoyment
- family
- landscape
- wildlife

eg.

- carbon footprint
- cost
- long journey
- jetlag

# Language of advice:

## Positive:

1. You sh\_\_\_\_ fly
2. You ou \_\_\_\_\_ fly
3. It's a g\_\_\_\_\_ i\_\_\_\_\_ to fly
4. If I \_\_\_\_\_ fly

## Negative:

1. You sh\_\_\_\_\_ fly
2. You ou \_\_\_\_\_ fly
3. It's \_\_\_\_\_ fly
4. If I \_\_\_\_\_ fly

Discuss in groups, using the language of advice, how to reduce each person's carbon footprint. You could talk about:

- Travel / transport
- Fuel use
- Amount of cleaning / clothes washing
- Heating / showering
- Food (vegan / vegetarian / meat-eating)
- How much you buy
- How much what you buy travels

Write a reply to the letter:

Dear 'someone who doesn't fly much',

Thank you for .....

We think .....

However .....

Now read the real answer

**What's the advice? –  
fly to Australia or not?**

**Answer:** In Sweden they call it *flygskam*, 'flying shame'. Some activists, scientists and others make a decision to never fly. They hope people will see flying as 'socially toxic', like smoking when pregnant or old attitudes to sexuality. Then we could start to work on the problems with climate change.

It's a good argument. And better when we look at the facts: a return flight from Europe to Australia can produce 4 – 6,000 kilograms of carbon dioxide per passenger. It would take up to three years of normal life for the average person in India to produce that much. Two more facts: about 80 per cent of the world's population has never taken a flight, and stopping flying is one of the most effective ways to cut your personal carbon emissions.

If you think about all this, and the burning Amazon rainforest, and the hurricane damage in the Bahamas, it doesn't seem right for you to fly to Australia. But I can't tell you that you mustn't go. It won't make much difference, if we compare normal emissions with emissions of super-wealthy people who travel by helicopter for very short journeys.

It's the people who run the industries like aviation and construction who produce the most emissions. They make money from damaging the planet, so they should suffer, not normal people who use planes. But at the same time, our actions make a difference and we need to show how important the climate emergency is with these actions.

Perhaps there's an ethical difference. Some people travel for a wonderful holiday. Some travel to visit family. I bet most people in Europe who promise never to fly are not migrants with family on the other side of the world. They are separated by long and unfair histories that made the North rich and the South poor.

The business-people who fly from Frankfurt to the City of London every 2 weeks – and have banking jobs that fill the world with 'socially regressive' debt, which needs economic activity (using more carbon) to pay it off – produce more carbon than a migrant family who travel to the Global South every two years or someone with a brother in Australia they haven't seen for years.

If you do fly, you can cut out carbon somewhere else. For example, you could buy the ticket and decide to not eat meat and not use a car for a year. This could help reduce the overall damage.

There are also interesting ideas you could look at, for example Climate Perks. This is a campaign to get companies to give employees extra holiday days if they travel by rail or sea instead of flying. But this won't help for Australia! Finally, don't forget that spending time with family can seem like a nice idea – but when you get there and start arguing about politics and their behaviour, you might wish you had saved the planet and yourself by not flying!

Now read again to see if these statements are true (T), false (F) or no information (NI):

1. People think that flying is just as bad as smoking while pregnant.
2. One person flying to Australia from London uses the same carbon emissions as all the people in India use over three years.
3. More than three quarters of the world's population have never flown.
4. People who fly short distances by helicopter use more carbon emissions than people who fly long distances by plane.
5. 'Climate Perks' gives people more holiday from work if they travel by train or boat.
6. It could help the environment if you fly to Australia, but don't drive and become vegetarian for a year.

**Now write more letters to a problem page:**

a) Should I stop eating meat?

b) Should I stop using plastics?

c) Should I stop driving?

d) Should I stop buying plastic bottles of water?

**Then swap letters and write replies / advice**

# Homework / follow-up

Read some of these balanced arguments:

<https://eewiki.newint.org/index.php?title=Arguments>

Especially this one:

<https://eewiki.newint.org/index.php?title=Argument: If you worry about climate change, is it a good idea to have children%3F>