

# SUSTAINABLE FASHION A GUIDE FOR TEACHERS



Information, activities and ideas for  
learning about the impacts of fast fashion



OXFAM

# CONTENTS

About this guide.....	<u>3</u>
A question of fashion.....	<u>4</u>
Working with young people on this issue.....	<u>5</u>
Fast fashion consequences.....	<u>6</u>
What is climate justice?.....	<u>8</u>
Impacts on planet and people.....	<u>9</u>
Further information and resources.....	<u>10</u>
Cross-curricular activity ideas.....	<u>13</u>
Make your own bunting!.....	<u>17</u>
Take action.....	<u>18</u>
Be inspired!.....	<u>20</u>

## ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This short guide provides a helpful starting point for bringing sustainable fashion into the curriculum and encouraging members of the whole school community to engage with the issue in their daily lives.

With signposting to resources and web links to support learning about the impacts of fast fashion, this guide raises awareness of some of the amazing ways in which people around the world are changing things for the better. It also provides some useful background information about the issue, cross-curricular activity ideas and creative suggestions for taking school-based action.

The guide is aimed at teachers and educators working with young people aged 9-16 but may also be helpful for those supporting younger and older learners.



Photo: Andy Aitchison/Oxfam

© Oxfam GB 2022

This publication is copyright but the content may be used free of charge for education purposes provided that the source is acknowledged in full. For copying in any other circumstances, or for re-use in other publications, or for translation or adaptation, permission must be secured and a fee may be charged. Email [education@oxfam.org.uk](mailto:education@oxfam.org.uk).

[www.oxfam.org.uk/education](http://www.oxfam.org.uk/education)

# A QUESTION OF FASHION

Fast fashion' is a controversial issue. Although some elements of this industry such as increased affordability and accessibility for consumers to 'stylish' clothing may appear desirable, fast fashion is having detrimental impacts on our planet and its people.

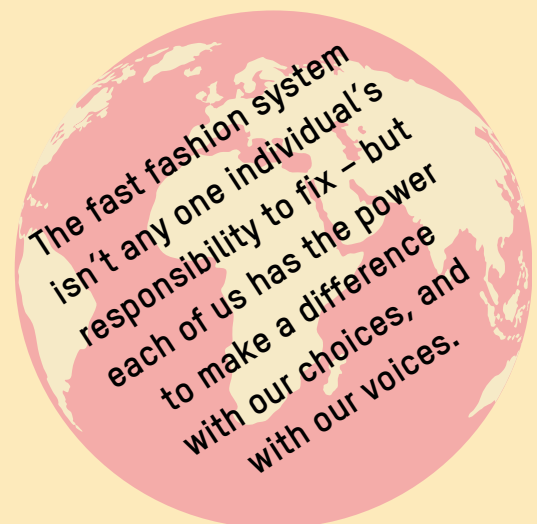
This drive for rapidly and cheaply made clothing contributes to climate change, which is affecting us all and is pushing people deeper into poverty. People facing poverty in the world's lowest-income countries are the ones who suffer the most. They often don't have access to the support needed to survive and recover from extreme weather, such as having clean water on tap during a drought, or house insurance to help rebuild after homes are destroyed by floods. What's more, they're the ones who've done the least to cause this crisis.

Fast fashion clothes are produced in high volume which means a high cost to the planet: Four percent of global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are caused by the clothing and apparel industry. The more clothes bought by consumers, the more clothes are produced to meet this demand and the greater the environmental consequences. Alongside the damage being caused to our planet is the human impact of fast fashion. Producing clothes quickly and at low cost often means low wages and poor working conditions for agricultural and garment workers.

Urgent action is needed now to help create a fairer and more sustainable world for everyone.

## WHAT IS SUSTAINABLE FASHION?

Sustainable fashion is about creating and using clothes in ways that are better for the environment and the people making them. There are lots of ways to make fashion more sustainable, from rethinking how clothes are produced, to repairing and rewearing and shopping second hand.





## WORKING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE ON THIS ISSUE

Although this resource provides advice and support aimed at enabling young people to learn about the environmental and social impacts of the fashion industry, it doesn't suggest that followers of fast fashion are wrong. Young people should have the freedom to form their own opinions about an issue and make their own choices. They should be encouraged to take ownership of any action they may decide to take in response to their learning, and to shape it as they choose.

It is also important to be aware of any potential sensitivities when exploring these issues in the classroom. Clothing is often bought for young people by parents, carers and family members. For the many families in the UK living with poverty, buying second-hand or cheaper mass-produced clothing may be a necessity rather than an active lifestyle choice. Learners may also have personal connections to the fashion industry, for example through the jobs of family members in the UK or other countries. This resource aims to help young people learn about the issue of fast fashion and consider their own responses, rather than encourage them to unfairly critique or judge the actions and choices of others.



Photo: Andy Aitchison/Oxfam

## FAST FASHION CONSEQUENCES

The term 'fast fashion' can be used to describe clothing that is made and sold cheaply, rapidly bringing ideas from the catwalk and celebrity culture to the high street and online stores to meet consumer demand. It also refers to the speedy turnaround of clothing in people's wardrobes, where clothes are worn only once, or a couple of times, before being discarded in favour of new purchases. It has helped to fuel the massive growth in the fashion industry this century – an industry that is now valued at more than \$2.5 trillion and employs over 75 million people worldwide. While the low cost and increased accessibility of fast fashion clothing may appear desirable, the fast fashion industry also comes with high environmental impacts and poor working conditions.

The clothing and apparel industry accounts for four percent of global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Growing cotton requires large amounts of water, diverting water, which is often scarce, from other uses. The use of pesticides and fertilizers threatens soil and water quality, as well as the biodiversity of local habitats and the health of workers. Other stages of the manufacturing process, such as dyeing and bleaching, also have consequences for the environment. The fashion industry produces 20% of global waste water, and it is anticipated that water use by this industry will increase by 50% by 2030.



Photo: Jeannie O'Brien/Oxfam

## FAST FASHION CONSEQUENCES

In the UK, we buy more clothes per person than in any other country in Europe. Around 300,000 tonnes of clothing end up in household bins every year, with around 20% going to landfill and 80% incinerated. Synthetic fibres can take hundreds of years to degrade and when sent to landfill or incinerated, they can leach harmful microfibres into the environment. Some of this discarded clothing is sent to low-income countries for recycling or resale in second-hand markets. However, many of these clothes also end up being dumped in landfill or burnt, creating a waste crisis on the other side of the world.

Producing clothes cheaply often means low wages and poor working conditions for agricultural and garment workers. These are often people living in the communities with the lowest incomes around the world, and this unfair treatment makes it impossible for them to work their way out of poverty. With labour costs rising in countries like China and Bangladesh, garment brands are looking to new markets where labour costs are low, so that they can continue to source clothes cheaply. Governments in some countries are keen not to discourage foreign investment, so they don't impose a legal minimum wage. This leaves workers open to exploitation.

Racism and gender discrimination are also at the heart of fast fashion. Many garment workers are people of colour, and roughly 80% are women, employed under poor working conditions. The colonial roots of the fashion industry are still evident today, with the extraction of resources and labour from people in low-income communities across the world – those who form the majority of the global population yet are the first to be exploited.

'There is no beauty in the finest cloth if it makes hunger and unhappiness.'  
Mahatma Gandhi





## WHAT IS CLIMATE JUSTICE?

While the climate crisis is affecting us all, it's hitting some communities harder than others – and it's the people who have done the least to cause it who are suffering the most. People facing poverty in the world's lowest-income countries are the ones who suffer the most. They often don't have access to the support needed to survive and recover from extreme weather, such as having clean water on tap during a drought, or house insurance to help rebuild their homes after they have been destroyed by floods.

It's an injustice that our ability to cope with the climate crisis is based on where we live, what resources we have available, and what part of society we belong to. It's more important than ever to act now, to prevent this global crisis from becoming a global catastrophe.



Photo: Collin Leafasia/Oxfam

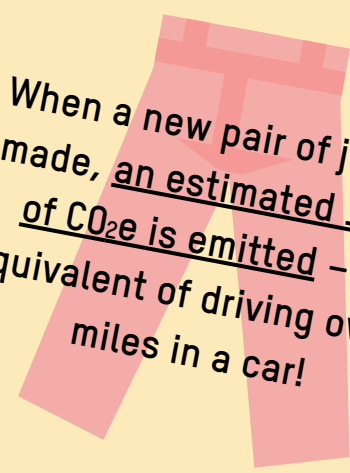
Lilisiana Village in the Solomon Islands is facing problems with rising sea levels inundating the town and eroding the cemetery.



# IMPACTS ON PLANET AND PEOPLE



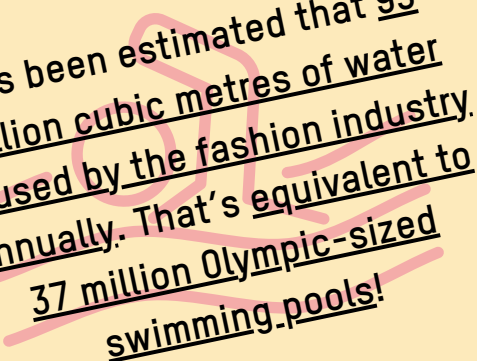
UK consumers send 6,461 tonnes of clothing a week to landfill; that's more than three times the weight of the London Eye!



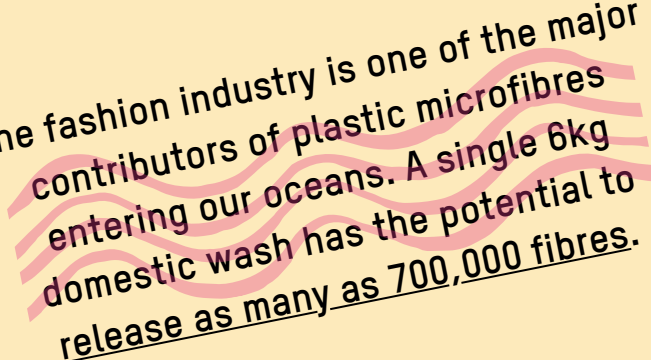
When a new pair of jeans is made, an estimated 16.2kg of CO<sub>2</sub>e is emitted – the equivalent of driving over 58 miles in a car!




Less than 1% of textiles and clothes are genuinely recycled into new textiles and clothes.



It's been estimated that 93 billion cubic metres of water is used by the fashion industry annually. That's equivalent to 37 million Olympic-sized swimming pools!



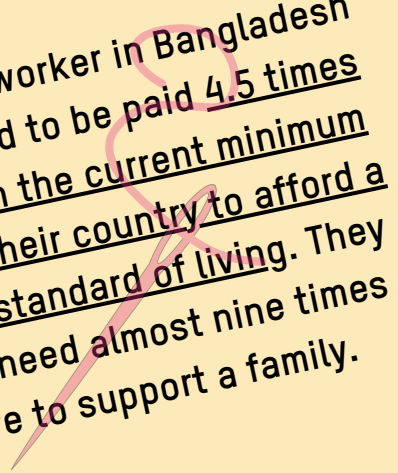
The fashion industry is one of the major contributors of plastic microfibres entering our oceans. A single 6kg domestic wash has the potential to release as many as 700,000 fibres.



Four percent of global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are caused by the clothing and apparel industry.



The average consumer now buys 60% more clothing than they did 15 years ago. In the UK, we buy more clothes per person than any other country in Europe.



A garment worker in Bangladesh would need to be paid 4.5 times more than the current minimum wage in their country to afford a decent standard of living. They would need almost nine times more to support a family.

## FURTHER INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

Here's a list of some suggested education resources, reports, articles and videos that may be of use in helping young people to learn about the impacts of fast fashion, as well as some of the ways in which individuals, organisations and businesses are taking action. Please note that this is not a definite list and there are many other examples that could have been included!

### LEARNING MATERIALS

- Educators 4 Social Change have put together this [useful list of suggested teaching resources, articles and web links](#) for teaching and learning more about the fast fashion industry and sustainable production.
- The Global Goals Centre have come together with a number of organizations and individuals to create these [free lesson plans](#) and an [online game](#) for exploring the environmental and social impacts of fast fashion.
- These [free educational resources from Fashion Revolution](#) include a trump card game, a quiz and a range of worksheets and activities to help young people learn about some of the issues connected with the fashion industry.
- [Behind the Seams](#) is a teaching resource produced by the charity TRAIID to support education for sustainability. It has a variety of activities to help young people to learn, think and take action.
- This [interactive story from BBC's Newsround](#) uncovers the story behind a t-shirt.
- The fashion industry is a major contributor to the greenhouse gas emissions which are causing our climate to change. These [Oxfam education resources for ages 9–16](#) use stories, films and role play to explore the human element of the climate crisis.
- This [video from Our Changing Climate](#) investigates the environmental impact of fast fashion.
- This [short learning resource and action guide for ages 11–16 from Oxfam Education](#) explores the environmental impact of cotton and provides support for running a school awareness-raising campaign.
- This [resource from the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment in Northern Ireland](#) provides a range of learning activities for ages 7–11 on the theme of textiles.
- This [online education toolkit from Redress](#) (a charity based in Hong Kong) explores the environmental impact of fashion and includes lots of ideas for positive actions to inspire young people.

- [The Geography of My Stuff](#) is a unit of work from the Royal Geographical Society for ages 11–14. It explores the interconnections and relationships that link consumers in the UK with communities and environments in other countries, where the goods they buy are made.
- This [video and accompanying resources](#) from the Fairtrade Foundation explore the story of cotton and some of the difficulties faced along the supply chain.

## ARTICLES, REPORTS AND VIDEOS

- This video from The Economist, [The True Cost of Fast Fashion](#), provides a useful introduction to the impacts of fast fashion as well as an overview of some of the alternatives.
- This article from the Environmental Audit Select Committee ([Fixing Fashion: Clothing Consumption and Sustainability](#)) provides some useful background information.
- This [BBC news article](#) and [video from BBC Earth](#) explore some of the environmental impacts of fast fashion and encourage people to do more to reduce their fashion footprints.
- Produced for learners aged 7–11, this [video clip from Rang Maher provides an introduction to fast fashion](#).
- This [BBC News video clip](#) explains how a small town in Italy is turning old clothes into new ones!
- This start-up company from Canada is aiming to transform the fashion industry by [turning food waste into clothing](#).
- The charity WRAP has published a range of [sustainable fashion and textile resources and reports](#). Learners could also find out about the action WRAP is taking to transform the way that textiles and clothing are bought.
- This article from the World Economic Forum includes a [useful video clip with some facts about how fashion harms the environment](#).
- This [BBC video clip](#) and [ABC News article](#) uncover how discarded clothing in one country can have devastating environmental and human impacts on the other side of the world.
- Young people are growing up in a consumerist culture. This paper from Global Action Plan suggests a [framework for student well-being and a healthier planet](#) that encourages a shift away from materialistic values.
- This blog post by Elizabeth Joy delves into the meaning of [decolonizing fashion and why it's crucial for sustainability](#).



## RESOURCES FOR TAKING ACTION

- [Second Hand September](#) is Oxfam's challenge to only buy second-hand clothes for 30 days or more.
- Since 2017, [Oxfam Australia's What She Makes campaign](#) has been asking big clothing brands to pay garment workers a living wage.
- Websites such as [Good On You](#) and [Ethical Consumer](#) rank different brands with respect to factors such as the environment, human rights and product sustainability.
- The [Love Your Clothes website](#), created by the charity WRAP, is packed with lots of tips, blog posts, videos and guides for reducing your fashion impact, from care and repair to upcycling.
- [Fashion Revolution](#) is a global movement of people who are working to change the fashion industry for the better. [Fashion Revolution Week](#) is their annual campaign which brings people together for seven days of action.
- The [Clean Clothes Campaign](#) is a global network of over 235 organizations in more than 45 countries who are taking action to improve the working conditions of workers in the garment and sportswear industries.
- [Repair What You Wear](#) is a free-to-access website with tutorials and resources to help people develop skills and techniques for mending their own clothes.
- [Labour Behind the Label](#) is a campaign that is pushing for change in the fashion industry to amplify the voices of garment workers and protect their human rights.

WE'RE TAKING PART IN OXFAM'S  
**SECOND HAND  
SEPTEMBER**



OXFAM

# CROSS-CURRICULAR ACTIVITY IDEAS

We've put together a short list of cross-curricular activity ideas to help support learning and thinking about the social and environmental impacts of fashion, as well as potential 'solutions'. We've tried to include a range of activities, some aimed at younger learners and some more appropriate for older students. These are just a starting point; we recommend checking out the useful links and resources (pp. 10-12) for more inspiration.

## ENGLISH

- Write about the journey of a cotton t-shirt from the field where the cotton is grown to the home the finished garment is taken to after having been bought. This [Oxfam Education resource](#) along with this [video from TED-Ed describing the lifecycle of a t-shirt](#) could be used to support this learning. Perhaps you could continue this story by imagining how this item of clothing could have been subsequently be reused or repurposed into something else.
- Explore advertising campaigns from brands such as [Patagonia](#) encouraging consumers to buy less. What do you think about these campaigns? Why do you think these companies used this advertising? Critically analyse adverts from other clothing companies using sustainability messages to attract consumers.
- Organize a debate to consider the positives and negatives of fast fashion. Points in favour could include cheaper clothes for consumers and more jobs, especially in low-income countries, where they're needed. Arguments against could include low wages for workers and the serious damage to the environment. How could each side counter the other side's arguments? What do you personally think about this issue?

## MATHS

- Look at the labels on your clothes to find out what countries they were made in. Present the data in a table, tally or bar chart. Perhaps you could calculate the 'clothing miles' – how far the items have travelled from their country of manufacture to reach your home.
- Go online to research the carbon footprints of the different things we buy and consume. For example, this [climate change food calculator from the BBC](#) could be used to investigate the climate impact of what you eat and drink. Older learners could use this [Fashion Footprint calculator from Thredup](#) to find out the carbon footprint of their fashion habits.
- Collect data about the types of material your clothes are made from. Maybe you could share your findings as a class and present the data in a pie chart. Which type of fabric is the most or least common? What percentage of your clothes are natural and what percentage are synthetic?

# CROSS-CURRICULAR ACTIVITY IDEAS

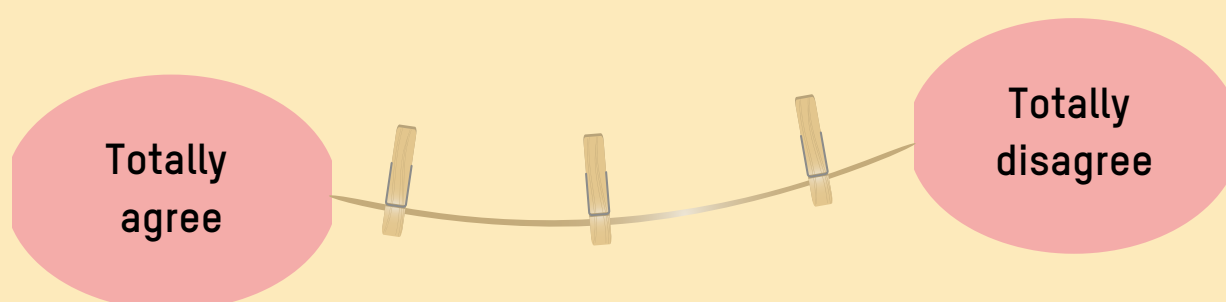
## SCIENCE

- Investigate the properties of different textiles such as strength, elasticity, durability and absorbency. Find out more about what clothing items different textiles are used for and try to give reasons why these materials are used.
- Delve into the science of cotton. Where in the world is cotton grown? How does the plant change from being a seed to producing the fibre we use in so many different things? What growing conditions does the crop need? How is cotton processed once it's picked? What is cotton used for and why? This [TED-Ed video](#) may provide a useful starting point for older learners.
- Research some of the other types of fabric our clothes are made of. Are they natural or synthetic? What resources were used to make them? What are the environmental impacts of producing these different materials?

## GEOGRAPHY/SOCIAL STUDIES

- Look at the labels on your clothes to find out what countries they were made in.\* Can you find these places on a world map? Do you know anything about any of these countries already? Pick a country and try to find out more about it. For example, a pair of jeans may be designed in one country before being sewn together in another (from cotton grown elsewhere). Other countries may then be involved in later stages of the supply chain, such as advertising and retail.
- Do some research to find out more about some of the social and environmental impacts of fast fashion. Write a report, create a slideshow, or give a talk to share your findings with others.
- Use a why-why-why chain to think critically about the environmental and human impacts of fast fashion. For example, 'Why does fast fashion contribute to climate change?' Alternatively, use an agreement line (opinion continuum) to explore different viewpoints on this issue. See pages 12 and 16 of Oxfam's [Global Citizenship in the Classroom teachers' guide](#) for further guidance.

\*It's worth remembering that clothing production is often spread between different countries and localities.





# CROSS-CURRICULAR ACTIVITY IDEAS

## HISTORY

- One way in which people can reduce their clothing consumption is by repairing and making the most out of the clothes they already have. Find out about the [Make Do and Mend](#) government campaign in the UK during WW2 that encouraged people to repair, reuse and reimagine their existing clothing. Maybe you could have a go at making and repairing some of your own clothes.
- Investigate how the production and consumption of fashion have changed over time. What impact did the industrial revolution have? How have social media and the internet affected our fashion habits? Perhaps learners could interview older family members to find out how their clothes shopping habits have changed during their lifetimes.
- The history of cotton is closely linked with centuries of European colonialism and the enslavement of African people, and the creation of industrial cities and a working class in the UK. Find out more about cotton's history and explore what conditions are like for workers in cotton agriculture and manufacture today. Can you make any conclusions?

## DESIGN & TECHNOLOGY

- Investigate the quality of different clothing items. What design features can help to make clothing last longer? Maybe you could design and make your own longer lasting clothes.
- Repurpose an old T-shirt to create something else. Perhaps you could make a [tote bag](#) or some bunting (see p. 17).
- Research alternative ways of creating textiles. For example, find out about this [company in Uganda which is creating textiles from discarded banana stems](#), or this start-up in Canada which is aiming to transform the fashion industry by [turning food waste into clothing](#).

## COMPUTING

- Design social media assets such as an animation or an infographic to share facts about some of the impacts of fast fashion.
- Investigate different clothing apps that have been developed to help promote sustainable and ethical fashion choices. This [article from pebble magazine](#) provides some examples. Perhaps learners could design and plan their own clothing app.
- Explore the growing world of digital fashion, where people can [‘wear’ digital clothing through augmented reality or digitally altered photos](#). Maybe learners could have a go at using photo-editing software to create their own digital outfit.

# CROSS-CURRICULAR ACTIVITY IDEAS

## ART & DESIGN

- Investigate the work of different designers who have tried to take a more responsible approach to fashion. For example, the designer Harris Reed created a collection in September 2021 where the majority of items were made using preloved clothes purchased from Oxfam. Unhidden Clothing is a fashion brand that aims to promote inclusivity by providing stylish and socially responsible clothing that is more adaptive for people with disabilities.
- Create a mural or piece of artwork to share the message about the impacts of fast fashion. Perhaps you could use discarded textile scraps to make a colourful collage to raise awareness.

## PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION

- Think about and discuss the different reasons why people buy clothes (or other items). Why might someone feel that they absolutely must have a new pair of jeans (or a toy, game or mobile phone)? How does buying clothes make you feel? Who or what might influence the clothes that people choose to buy?
- Use philosophical enquiry to delve more into the social and environmental impacts of fast fashion. Possible questions to start your thinking might be: Does fashion make the world a better place? Should we all stop buying new clothes? Who needs to take action – consumers or clothing companies? See the Sapere website for guidance on using philosophy for children in the classroom.
- Consider what we all need to do well in life – to grow, thrive and be happy. Write down or draw your ideas. Which of these things do you think are the most important? Are these all things we 'need' or are some of them just things we 'want'? What's the difference between something you 'need' and something you 'want'?

## CITIZENSHIP

- Find out more about the human impacts of fast fashion. For example, you could learn about the collapse in 2013 of Rana Plaza, a nine-storey garment factory in Bangladesh. See this lesson plan to find out more.
- Use the websites of different clothing companies to research the sustainability and ethical trading policies for different clothing brands. Now have a go at ranking the companies on the basis of their efforts to reduce the environmental and social impacts of the clothes they produce. Or take a look at the brand ratings on websites such as Good On You and Ethical Consumer.
- Investigate different ways in which people can take individual and collective action to bring about change for the better. Work with others to plan an action in your school community. See p. 18 for some action ideas.

# MAKE YOUR OWN BUNTING!

For this activity, you will need scissors, string, a stapler with staples, and some unwanted clothes or fabric.



## STEP 1

Cut some stretches of fabric from your unwanted clothes which you can use to make your bunting flags.



## STEP 2

Cut a triangle shape from a piece of card. You can use this as a template for your bunting flags, to ensure they are all the same size. Pin the template to the fabric and cut around it to create flags for your bunting. The more flags you cut, the longer your bunting will be.

## STEP 3

Place your flags in a line, face down. Cut a long piece of string and place it down across the top of your flags.



## STEP 4

Fold the top of each flag over the string, so that it is covered.



## STEP 5

Staple the folds down, to seal the string across the back of each flag.



## ... FINISHED!

Your bunting is now ready to hang!



## TAKE ACTION

There are lots of ways learners could choose to take action on this issue at school. Here are a few suggestions!

Hold a clothes or uniform swap event at your school. Invite people to bring in any old or unloved items they no longer want, so that they can swap them for something else.

Set up a lunchtime clothing repair café for people to share and learn repair skills. Perhaps you could invite people in your family or community to come and share their knowledge and skills.

Many people might not know about this issue so one of the best actions you can take is to raise awareness. Give an assembly, teach another class, write a blog post, put up posters, host a film screening ... there are lots of ways you can spread the message!

Organize a letter-writing campaign. Perhaps you could write to your school uniform supplier to find out what action they are taking to promote sustainable and ethical clothing.

Get in touch with a local charity shop to see if you could design a window display for them to share the message about sustainable fashion.

Contact your local Member of Parliament. Perhaps you could invite them into school to talk with them about the issue of fast fashion and what action you think is needed.

## TAKE ACTION

Organize a recycled fashion show. Have a go at making outfits out of 'waste' – scraps of material, plastic bags, magazines and plastic bottles. Or perhaps you could upcycle and repurpose some second-hand clothing to give it a new lease of life.

Set up a pop-up shop at school to sell second-hand clothing during a lunchtime or after school.

Research the social responsibility and sustainability policies of a high street or online fashion brand. Maybe you could write to the company suggesting changes.

Invite people in your school community to pledge to buy no new clothes for a month or longer.

Run an event to collect unwanted clothes to donate. For example, there might be an Oxfam shop near your school that you could donate to. There might be an organization collecting second-hand clothing to pass on to others in need in your local community.

One way to take action on an issue is to find out more about it. What questions do you have about the impacts of fast fashion and potential solutions? Carry out some research on your own or with friends.

# BE INSPIRED!

## FASHION FIX SCHOOLS PROJECT

Year 5 and 6 pupils from Our Lady's Bishop Eton Primary School, Liverpool took part in the Fashion Fix Schools Project. Funded by Merseyside Recycling and Waste Authority, this project was the creation of Liverpool World Centre and environmental charity Faiths4Change. Pupils participated in a mock UN textile and climate conference, as well as two in-school workshops: one on global learning and the Sustainable Development Goals, and another on upcycling old clothes.

The 'Fashion Fixers' raised awareness in school by delivering an assembly, inspiring their peers to think about clothing consumption. Having learned that some clothes that are donated through charity collections or recycling centres can end up in landfill in other countries, pupils really took the theme of preventing textile waste in the UK on board. So instead of holding a clothing collection, they decided to run a swap shop! The pupils also organized an 'old clothes' day where everyone was encouraged to wear upcycled, second-hand or swapped clothes.

As a result of this project, the young people participated in a film about the impacts of fast fashion which was shown at the Open Eye Gallery in Liverpool as part of their Look Photo Biennial Exhibition.



Photos: Our Lady's Bishop Eton Primary School

## UPCYCLE FASHION CHALLENGE



Photo: The City of Oxford College

Level 3 Creative Practice students at the City of Oxford College took part in an exciting project to upcycle and market a range of clothes for Oxfam. Students first chose garments at the Oxfam Superstore considered unsaleable. They then upcycled these items using various methods including screen printing, stitching, and overlocking to bring the clothes back to life. Some students also produced posters and stop motion films to market the items. The upcycled creations were then donated back to the Oxfam Superstore for reselling, helping to raise money for a better and more equal world without poverty.