

Back to School: The Loose Threads of Fast Fashion

Middle School Edition

Overview/ Objectives:

This lesson plan is designed in collaboration with EARTHDAY.ORG's [Fashion for the Earth campaign](#) to educate students about the environmental and social implications of fast fashion and promote sustainable fashion choices. Here at EARTHDAY.ORG we aim to raise awareness about the detrimental effects of the fashion industry on the planet and advocate for more sustainable practices in the fashion world. Through a series of interactive activities, students will explore the fast fashion industry, its contributions to pollution and waste, and its impact on natural resources. They will also discover the environmental benefits of adopting sustainable fashion practices promoted by EARTHDAY.ORG's Fashion for the Earth campaign. By the end of the lesson, students will be equipped with the knowledge and critical thinking skills to make informed choices as conscious consumers during the back-to-school season.

Following the overview, the section details the objectives of the materials. After reading and completing this packet, students will be able to...

- Understand the concept and impact of fast fashion on the environment and society.
- Identify sustainable fashion alternatives and their benefits.
- Foster critical thinking skills and awareness of responsible fashion consumption, inspiring students to become advocates for sustainable fashion choices.

Information and Additional Resources:

Earthday.org's Fashion for the Earth Campaign

EARTHDAY.ORG's Fashion for the Earth Campaign is a global initiative dedicated to advocating for sustainable and environmentally responsible practices within the fashion industry. The campaign aims to raise awareness about the environmental impacts of fashion consumption and production. By encouraging individuals to adopt mindful and sustainable fashion choices, the campaign seeks to reduce the industry's ecological footprint and promote a more sustainable future.

Environmental Impacts of Fast Fashion:

Fast fashion, a dominant aspect of the fashion industry, has far-reaching environmental consequences. The demand for low-cost and rapidly produced clothing leads to overconsumption and increased textile waste. The production of synthetic fabrics, such as polyester and nylon, requires substantial energy and releases harmful chemicals into the environment. Moreover, the fashion industry is responsible for significant greenhouse gas emissions and water pollution, impacting ecosystems and biodiversity. Through the Fashion for the Earth Campaign,

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EARTHDAY.ORG aims to address these environmental challenges and inspire individuals to support sustainable fashion alternatives that prioritize planet-friendly materials, ethical labor practices, and extended product lifecycles.

EARTHDAY.ORG Additional Resources:

1. [Fashion for the Earth Campaign](#)
2. [Swap for the Earth Toolkit](#)
3. [Petition Against Fast Fashion](#)
4. [Toxic textiles, The Chemicals in our Clothing](#)
5. [How Does Oil Become Fabric](#)
6. [A Critical Lens on Shein's Extended Producer Responsibility Fund: Fast Fashion Greenwashing?](#)

These resources from EARTHDAY.ORG provide valuable information about fast fashion's environmental impacts and tips for adopting sustainable fashion practices. Students are encouraged to explore these resources to gain a deeper understanding of the issues and to support informed discussions during the lesson.

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Activities

Title: Introduction to Fast Fashion, Reflective Consumption

Estimate Time: 45 minutes

Subject/Course: Life Skills or Environmental Science

Grade: 6th - 8th grade

Topic: Fashion Industry, Consumerism, Environmental Impact

SDG Integration: [12](#)

Objective:

Introduce students to fast fashion's impact on clothing consumption and encourage reflection on personal buying choices through a clothing assessment activity.

Materials/Resources:

- Each student will need to bring two clothing items to school: one they genuinely like and wear often, and one they do not like or wear much

Established Goals:

The goal of this activity is for students to engage in critical thinking about their clothing choices and the impact of fast fashion on their consumption habits. It encourages self-awareness and discussions about sustainable alternatives.

Essential Question:

- How do our emotional responses, material choices, and frequency of wear reflect our consumption habits and contribute to fast fashion?

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<p><u>Students will be able to...</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Analyze their clothing choices and identify emotional, material, and frequency-related factors influencing those choices.• Reflect on the implications of their buying habits in the context of responsible and sustainable consumption.	<p><u>Vocabulary Words:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Reflective Consumption2. Material Quality3. Emotional Buying
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<p><u>Performance Tasks:</u></p> <p>Step 1: Prior to the activity, instruct each student to bring two clothing items to school: one they genuinely like and wear often, and one they don't like or wear much.</p> <p>Step 2: Begin by briefly explaining the concept of fast fashion and its characteristics, focusing on its influence on buying habits and clothing materials.</p> <p>Step 3: Start a class discussion. Ask students to share why they purchased each item, what emotions or factors influenced their choices, and what materials the items are made of.</p> <p>Step 4: Divide students into pairs or small groups and have them analyze each other's items using the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What emotions or situations led to purchasing these items?• Are there differences in material quality between the items?• How often are these items worn, and why?• Reflect on whether these items align with sustainable fashion values.
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Step 5: Lead a class discussion based on group reflections. Encourage students to share insights about their buying habits and how these items relate to fast fashion principles.

Consider asking the following questions during the discussion:

- How often do people buy clothes simply because it was on sale?
- What are some common themes with the clothes that people tend to wear the most vs. the least?
- Was there a time when you wore the least worn item the most?
- Do people tend to wear clothes until worn out or stop wearing them well before then?
- How often do people get rid of clothes and how?

Title: Unveiling Fast Fashion's Impacts

Estimate Time: 60 minutes

Subject/Course: Science or Environmental Studies

Grade: 6th - 8th-grade

Topic: Environmental Consequences, Pollution, Waste

SDG Integration: [14](#), [15](#)

Objective:

In this activity, students will explore the environmental consequences of the fast fashion industry through a structured worksheet. They will analyze the ways in which fast fashion contributes to pollution, waste, and water consumption, as well as the environmental impacts of producing cheap and disposable clothing. By completing the worksheet, students will develop an awareness of the detrimental effects of fast fashion on the planet. The objective is to foster critical thinking skills and engage students in research, helping them recognize the importance of environmentally responsible fashion choices.

Materials/Resources:

- 1 laptop per student

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Established Goals:

The goal of this activity is for students to analyze and recognize the environmental consequences of fast fashion, such as pollution, waste, water consumption, and the environmental impact of producing cheap and disposable clothing, fostering critical thinking and awareness of the industry's negative effects.

Essential Questions:

- How does fast fashion contribute to pollution and waste?
- What are the environmental consequences of producing synthetic fabrics?
- How does the fashion industry affect water resources and ecosystems?
- Why is textile waste a significant concern in the context of fast fashion?

Students will be able to...

- recognize and describe the environmental consequences of fast fashion, including pollution, waste, and water contamination
- explain the implications of producing synthetic fabrics and its contribution to environmental issues

Vocabulary Words:

1. Pollution
2. Textile Waste
3. Synthetic Fabrics
4. Water Contamination

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Performance Tasks:

Step 1: Distribute a worksheet that includes questions related to the environmental impact of fast fashion, such as:

- How does the fast fashion industry contribute to pollution and waste?
- What are the environmental consequences of producing cheap and disposable clothing?
- How does fast fashion contribute to water consumption and contamination?

Limited in time? Find an example worksheet [here](#).

Step 2: Have students work individually or in pairs to complete the worksheet.

Step 3: Review the answers as a class, allowing students to share their insights and perspectives.

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Title: Choosing Sustainability in Fashion

Estimate Time: 45 minutes

Subject/Course: Science, Design and Technology

Grade: 6th - 8th-grade

Topic: Home Economics, Ethics, or Life Skills

SDG Integration: [12](#), [8](#)

Objective:

Students will brainstorm and set personal goals for adopting sustainable fashion choices for the upcoming back-to-school season. Through guided discussions, they will explore alternative options such as thrifting, ethical brands, and clothing swaps.

Materials/Resources:

- Optional (per student):
 - Pencil
 - Notebook

Established Goals:

The goal of this activity is for students to explore and identify sustainable fashion alternatives and set personal goals for adopting these choices during the back-to-school season, empowering them to become conscious consumers and advocates for positive change in the fashion industry.

Essential Questions:

- What are sustainable fashion alternatives, and why are they important?
- How can individuals make mindful fashion choices to support sustainability?
- What role do ethical brands play in promoting sustainable fashion?
- How does promoting sustainable fashion align with broader environmental goals?

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<p><u>Students will be able to...</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• differentiate between sustainable fashion alternatives and conventional fast fashion choices• identify personal goals for making sustainable fashion decisions and explain the importance of ethical consumerism	<p><u>Vocabulary Words:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Sustainable Fashion2. Ethical Consumerism3. Upcycling4. Circular Fashion
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<p><u>Performance Tasks:</u></p> <p>Step 1: Introduce the concept of sustainable fashion and its positive impact on the environment and communities.</p> <p>Step 2: Lead a brainstorming session, encouraging students to come up with sustainable fashion choices they can make for the back-to-school season (e.g., thrifting, buying from ethical brands, swapping clothes with friends).</p> <p>Step 3: Have students set personal goals for adopting sustainable practices in their fashion choices.</p> <p>Step 4: Discuss potential challenges and solutions to implementing sustainable fashion habits.</p> <p>Step 5: Encourage students to support and motivate each other in making these changes.</p>

<p><u>Additional resources</u></p>

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Videos:

- The True Cost by Andrew Morgan
- RiverBlue by David McIlvride and Roger Williams

Books:

- Overdressed: The Shockingly High Cost of Cheap Fashion by Elizabeth L. Cline
- Slow Fashion: Aesthetics Meets Ethics by Safia Minney

If you want to share your student's activities, please take pictures and send them to education@earthday.org. Please share the photos on our social media platforms ([Instagram](#), [Twitter](#), and [TikTok](#)) using these hashtags #earthdayeveryday #earthday_education, #earthdayeduchampions, and #earthday_ed (include your name, grade level, number of students participating, and class subject).

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Alignment to NGSS / PARCC

Students who demonstrate understanding can:

MS-ESS3-3. Apply scientific principles to design a method for monitoring and minimizing a human impact on the environment.*
 [Clarification Statement: Examples of the design process include examining human environmental impacts, assessing the kinds of solutions that are feasible, and designing and evaluating solutions that could reduce that impact. Examples of human impacts can include water usage (such as the withdrawal of water from streams and aquifers or the construction of dams and levees), land usage (such as urban development, agriculture, or the removal of wetlands), and pollution (such as of the air, water, or land).]

The performance expectation above was developed using the following elements from the NRC document *A Framework for K-12 Science Education*:

Science and Engineering Practices	Disciplinary Core Ideas	Crosscutting Concepts
<p>Constructing Explanations and Designing Solutions</p> <p>Constructing explanations and designing solutions in 6–8 builds on K–5 experiences and progresses to include constructing explanations and designing solutions supported by multiple sources of evidence consistent with scientific ideas, principles, and theories.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Apply scientific principles to design an object, tool, process or system. 	<p>ESS3.C: Human Impacts on Earth Systems</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Human activities have significantly altered the biosphere, sometimes damaging or destroying natural habitats and causing the extinction of other species. But changes to Earth's environments can have different impacts (negative and positive) for different living things. Typically as human populations and per-capita consumption of natural resources increase, so do the negative impacts on Earth unless the activities and technologies involved are engineered otherwise. 	<p>Cause and Effect</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relationships can be classified as causal or correlational, and correlation does not necessarily imply causation. <hr/> <p>Connections to Engineering, Technology, and Applications of Science</p> <p>Influence of Science, Engineering, and Technology on Society and the Natural World</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The uses of technologies and any limitations on their use are driven by individual or societal needs, desires, and values; by the findings of scientific research; and by differences in such factors as climate, natural resources, and economic conditions. Thus technology use varies from region to region and over time.
<p><i>Connections to other DCIs in this grade-band:</i> MS.LS2.A ; MS.LS2.C ; MS.LS4.D</p>		
<p><i>Articulation of DCIs across grade-bands</i> 3.LS2.C ; 3.LS4.D ; 5.ESS3.C ; HS.LS2.C ; HS.LS4.C ; HS.LS4.D ; HS.ESS2.C ; HS.ESS2.D ; HS.ESS2.E ; HS.ESS3.C ; HS.ESS3.D</p>		
<p><i>Common Core State Standards Connections:</i></p> <p>ELA/Literacy -</p> <p>WHST.6-8.7 Conduct short research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question), drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions that allow for multiple avenues of exploration. (MS-ESS3-3)</p> <p>WHST.6-8.8 Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, using search terms effectively; assess the credibility and accuracy of each source; and quote or paraphrase the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation. (MS-ESS3-3)</p> <p>Mathematics -</p> <p>6.RP.A.1 Understand the concept of a ratio and use ratio language to describe a ratio relationship between two quantities. (MS-ESS3-3)</p> <p>7.RP.A.2 Recognize and represent proportional relationships between quantities. (MS-ESS3-3)</p> <p>6.EE.B.6 Use variables to represent numbers and write expressions when solving a real-world or mathematical problem; understand that a variable can represent an unknown number, or, depending on the purpose at hand, any number in a specified set. (MS-ESS3-3)</p> <p>7.EE.B.4 Use variables to represent quantities in a real-world or mathematical problem, and construct simple equations and inequalities to solve problems by reasoning about the quantities. (MS-ESS3-3)</p>		

Source: [MS-ESS3-3 Earth and Human Activity | Next Generation Science Standards \(nextgenscience.org\)](https://www.nextgenscience.org/MS-ESS3-3-Earth-and-Human-Activity)

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Students who demonstrate understanding can:

- HS-ESS3-4. Evaluate or refine a technological solution that reduces impacts of human activities on natural systems.*** [Clarification Statement: Examples of data on the impacts of human activities could include the quantities and types of pollutants released, changes to biomass and species diversity, or areal changes in land surface use (such as for urban development, agriculture and livestock, or surface mining). Examples for limiting future impacts could range from local efforts (such as reducing, reusing, and recycling resources) to large-scale geoengineering design solutions (such as altering global temperatures by making large changes to the atmosphere or ocean).]

The performance expectation above was developed using the following elements from the NRC document *A Framework for K-12 Science Education*:

Science and Engineering Practices	Disciplinary Core Ideas	Crosscutting Concepts
<p>Constructing Explanations and Designing Solutions</p> <p>Constructing explanations and designing solutions in 9–12 builds on K–8 experiences and progresses to explanations and designs that are supported by multiple and independent student-generated sources of evidence consistent with scientific knowledge, principles, and theories.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Design or refine a solution to a complex real-world problem, based on scientific knowledge, student-generated sources of evidence, prioritized criteria, and tradeoff considerations. 	<p>ESS3.C: Human Impacts on Earth Systems</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scientists and engineers can make major contributions by developing technologies that produce less pollution and waste and that preclude ecosystem degradation. <p>ETS1.B: Developing Possible Solutions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> When evaluating solutions, it is important to take into account a range of constraints, including cost, safety, reliability, and aesthetics, and to consider social, cultural, and environmental impacts. (<i>secondary</i>) 	<p>Stability and Change</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feedback (negative or positive) can stabilize or destabilize a system. <hr/> <p>Connections to Engineering, Technology, and Applications of Science</p> <p>Influence of Science, Engineering, and Technology on Society and the Natural World</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engineers continuously modify these technological systems by applying scientific knowledge and engineering design practices to increase benefits while decreasing costs and risks.
<p><i>Connections to other DCIs in this grade-band:</i> HS.LS2.C ; HS.LS4.D</p>		
<p><i>Articulation of DCIs across grade-bands:</i> MS.LS2.C ; MS.ESS2.A ; MS.ESS3.B ; MS.ESS3.C ; MS.ESS3.D</p>		
<p><i>Common Core State Standards Connections:</i></p> <p><i>ELA/Literacy -</i> RST.11-12.1 Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of science and technical texts, attending to important distinctions the author makes and to any gaps or inconsistencies in the account. (<i>HS-ESS3-4</i>) RST.11-12.8 Evaluate the hypotheses, data, analysis, and conclusions in a science or technical text, verifying the data when possible and corroborating or challenging conclusions with other sources of information. (<i>HS-ESS3-4</i>)</p> <p><i>Mathematics -</i> MP.2 Reason abstractly and quantitatively. (<i>HS-ESS3-4</i>) HSN.Q.A.1 Use units as a way to understand problems and to guide the solution of multi-step problems; choose and interpret units consistently in formulas; choose and interpret the scale and the origin in graphs and data displays. (<i>HS-ESS3-4</i>) HSN.Q.A.2 Define appropriate quantities for the purpose of descriptive modeling. (<i>HS-ESS3-4</i>) HSN.Q.A.3 Choose a level of accuracy appropriate to limitations on measurement when reporting quantities. (<i>HS-ESS3-4</i>)</p>		

Source: [HS-ESS3-4 Earth and Human Activity | Next Generation Science Standards](#)

(nextgenscience.org)