

Middle School Lesson: Fast Fashion Detectives, Day 1

Target Ages: 11 - 14 years old

Overview: This lesson allows students to step into the role of a fast fashion detective whose job is to learn more about where and how modern clothing is produced. Students will explore the history of clothing production, investigate modern supply chains, and practice reading clothing tags while thinking critically about the clothing they use.

Lesson	Time	Essential Questions	Activity	Conclusion
Fast Fashion Detectives, Day 1	40 Minutes	What is fast fashion? How many people and stages are involved in the process of making clothes? How has clothing production changed over time?	Warm Up Question Investigation Stations Class Discussion	By the end of this unit, students create a Fast Fashion Case File documenting their investigation and recommending solutions. The lessons draw heavily from the concepts in the background document, including supply chains, materials, consumption, and clothing waste.

Materials Needed:

- A plain T-shirt
- Clothing Content Label Tags*
- A cheap shirt (~\$5) and an expensive shirt (~\$50)*
- Article of clothing brought from students' homes
- EARTHDAY.ORG Fast Fashion Day 1 Worksheets

*If material unavailable, Fast Fashion Day 1 worksheets document provides an alternative resource

Additional [EARTHDAY.ORG](https://www.earthday.org) Resources:

[Fashion for the Earth](#)

[How to Swap for the Earth](#)

[How to Sustainably Shop for Your Clothes](#)

[How to Care for Your Clothes](#)

[How to Create a Capsule Collection](#)



DAY 1: CASE #1- WHERE DID MY SHIRT COME FROM?

Objectives:

- Define fast fashion.
- Trace a garment through the fashion supply chain.

Introduction: To prime your students to think about where their clothing comes from, start by displaying a plain T-shirt. This shirt can be one that you bring in or ask your students to bring in for the lesson.

Ask the group to write down individually:

“How many people do you think helped make this shirt?”

After students have written their guesses, reveal:

"The average shirt may involve workers and materials from several countries before it reaches a store."

Let the students know that over the next three lessons, they will be stepping into the shoes of **“fast fashion detectives”** where they will be investigating where and how clothes are made.

Main Activity: Evidence Station Investigation (20 minutes)

In this activity, students will rotate through 4 stations, spending about 5 minutes per station. Each activity introduces a key topic related to fast fashion.

Station A: The Tag Clue

Provide students with content label tags (the tag that lists the type of fabric used and where it was made) cut out from real clothing. If no tags are available **Fast Fashion**

Worksheet 1.1 has example tags that can be used.

When at the station, direct students to investigate the:

- Country of origin
- Fiber content

Students will answer:

- “Where was it made?”
- “Is it close to where you live?”

Station B: Supply Chain Puzzle

Modern clothing production involves many steps, often involving severely underpaid workers and harmful chemicals. Students will reconstruct this process from start to finish using cards cut from the **Fast Fashion Worksheet 1.2**. The final order should be:

Cotton Farm → Fiber Processing → Textile Mill → Dye House → Garment Factory → Warehouse → Store → Customer

Station C: Fashion Timeline

At this station, students use **Fast Fashion Worksheet 1.3** and make observations about how the clothing industry has changed over time. The worksheet shows how clothing production went from:

- Handmade clothing
- Industrial Revolution
- Department stores
- Shopping malls
- Online shopping
- Fast fashion today

Students will answer:

"What changed over time?"

Station D: Price Detective

Students will compare two similar shirts that can be bought at different price points. One shirt should be exceptionally cheap (~\$5) and the other more expensive (~\$50). If you are unable to bring in examples, **Fast Fashion Worksheet 1.4** can be used instead.

Show two similar shirts:

- \$5 shirt
- \$50 shirt

Students will answer:

"What might explain the price difference?"

Whole-Class Discussion (10 min)

Once students have rotated through all five stations, come together to have a group discussion. Introduce the concepts of:

Fast Fashion: inexpensive clothing produced with cheap materials and cheap labor to keep up with trends.

Sustainable Fashion: Clothing designed and produced with less harm to people and the environment.

Ask the group,

“What are some ways fast fashion differs from sustainable fashion?”

“What are some of the ways fast fashion impacts the environment?”

Case File Entry #1

To wrap up the lesson's activities, students complete **Fast Fashion Worksheet 1.5**. Each fast fashion lesson will conclude with a case file entry so by the time all three lessons are completed, students will have a complete 'detective's file' containing what they learned about fast fashion.

In this case file, students will answer the following questions about the clothing article they brought from home:

- My garment came from:
- It traveled through these stages:
- The most surprising clue I found today:

Collect or instruct students to save their worksheet to be added to their total case file collection later.