

# Textile waste: The Impact of what we wear

## INTRODUCTION

The creation and disposal of textiles can create a lot of waste. To introduce the issue to the classroom and get students thinking about ways they can make a change, watch this [short video](#). The following document provides three potential directions that teachers can explore with students. Each direction can be explored individually and modified as needed. Directions include resources, discussion topics, activities, and class challenges.

## CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

### Grades 7 & 8 Technology Education

- Learners will construct a solution to a design challenge.
- Learners will formulate possible improvements for an existing product.

### Gr 7 & 8 Social Studies

- Learners will plan an advocacy action in response to an issue.

### Gr 7 Textile Art and Design

- Learners will analyze factors that influence clothing choice.

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## KEY RESOURCES

**Fashion Takes Action:** Resources, workshops, glossary of terms, pledges, and challenges.

**Waste Reduction Week Canada:** Resources related to the environmental impact of textiles and reducing waste.

**Local Waste Educator:** Waste educators located across the province are available to provide resources about waste reduction.

## GLOSSARY

**Textiles:** Any material made of interlacing, woven or knitted fibres, including carpet, clothing, cloth, yarn, and many others.

**Fast fashion:** Low-priced clothing that is manufactured and distributed quickly to capture current fashion trends.

**Thrift shops:** Retailers that sell second-hand clothes and other household goods.

**Design for the Environment:** A concept that considers the whole life cycle of a product. Design decisions are based on reducing the product's impact on the environment.

# DIRECTION 1

## What can be done during textile design and production to reduce waste?

### BACKGROUND

Today's society is purchasing more clothes than ever before and only keeping them for half as long. Based on global demand, the fashion industry is creating garments quickly and cheaply, resulting in poor working conditions in factories, wasted fabric, and large demands for water and non-renewable resources.

Many clothing brands use "Design for Environment" to reduce their impact. Choosing sustainable fabrics or recycled material can help prevent waste. While designing clothing that can be adapted to fit growing bodies can reduce the need to buy new items.

### DISCUSSION TOPICS

- Research a clothing label. Where is it from? What materials is it made from? Think about the environmental impact of the clothing item (i.e., packaging, transportation, etc.).
- Investigate the clothing industry's efforts to design for environment, like eliminating hazardous chemicals and reducing water consumption. What should you look for on a label when buying new clothing?
- Analyze popular clothing brands to determine what brand has the most and least environmental impact.
- Reflect on how we can make sustainable shopping practices trendier.

## Classroom actions

### Suggestions for long-term projects or quick in-class activities.

**Design challenge:** Check your clothing tags and determine the brands and/or types of fabric in your clothing. Using the resources below, record how sustainable it is. Design a matching outfit with more sustainable options, and make your case for why that fabric or brand is more sustainable.

**Awareness campaign:** Use posters, social media, or other advertising to create awareness on sustainable clothing and how to care for clothing to reduce environmental impact.

**Contact a clothing brand:** Inquire about their sustainability practices and what they are doing to improve their impact.

**Create a pledge:** Encourage students to take the 7Rs of Fashion Pledge or make your own pledge that will motivate students to reduce textile waste.

#### Resources:

- **Good on You:** Provides clothing brands' sustainability ratings and information on sustainable fabrics.
- **ThredUp:** Calculate your closet's fashion footprint and learn about ways to reduce its impact.
- **Turning plastic bottles into polyester:** YouTube video showing how plastic bottles can be turned into clothing.
- **Ellen MacArthur Foundation:** Resources on making fashion more circular.
- **Sustain Your Style:** Information on different fabric materials and their sustainability.

**NOTE TO TEACHERS:** Instead of using student clothing, use clothing items from the school's lost and found, bring in clothing items or pre-select the brands or fabrics to research.

# DIRECTION 2

## What can be done to improve the longevity of textiles to reduce waste?

### BACKGROUND

The typical Canadian wears only 50% of the clothes in their closets. Despite this, Canadians buy 70 new articles of clothing on average, each year. Many fast fashion purchases are disposed of in under a year, leading to an abundance of textiles going to landfills. The longer we can extend the life of our clothes, the more we reduce our environmental impacts. Thrifting, laundering less, repurposing, and repairing will extend the life of textiles and reduce the need to generate new items. Thrifting one shirt rather than buying it brand new can save 700 gallons of water.

### DISCUSSION TOPICS

- Investigate the term “Fast Fashion.” How does marketing influence clothing choices?
- Research local opportunities to reuse clothing in addition to thrift shops.
- Discuss how your peers extend their clothes’ life compared to older generations. For example, do they mend, repurpose, shop second-hand, or follow care instructions?
- Research how to care for your clothing in an environmentally friendly way that helps extend its life.

## Classroom actions

### Suggestions for long-term projects or quick in-class activities.

**Host a swap:** Organize a clothing swap in your school or community. Consider a theme, such as formal attire or Halloween costumes.

**Organize a fashion show:** Repurpose clothes from home or partner with a local thrift shop to showcase second hand finds.

**Create a “repair” campaign:** Develop a campaign or tutorial to teach easy ways to repair clothing.

**Become a broadcaster:** Host weekly school announcements or develop media to share with your school about thrifting, swapping, and sharing.

#### Resources:

- [Swap It Toolkit](#): Support document to help you organize your own swap event.
- [Divert NS Swap, Share, Thrift, Repeat Guide](#): Find local swap, share, and thrift resources.
- [Stain Removal Guide](#): Search for the best ways to remove common stains, as well laundering tips.
- [Clothing Repair Tutorial](#): YouTube tutorials on common clothing repairs.
- [Repurposing Clothing](#): Ideas on how to repurpose old clothes.

# DIRECTION 3

Once clothing no longer has a use, what can be done to reduce textile waste?

## BACKGROUND

The average Canadian throws away 37 kilograms of textiles each year— and 95% of those clothes could be reused or recycled. In Nova Scotia, 25,000 tonnes of textiles are landfilled every year. 30% of that is clothing.

Some municipalities in Nova Scotia collect textiles at the curb, with many shipped overseas for reuse and recycling. There are also several charities that collect and resell used clothing or repurpose it into other products.

## DISCUSSION TOPICS

- Analyze the [2017 Divert NS Waste Audit](#) to understand the textiles component of what's going into landfill.
- Research what happens to end-of-life textiles in your community. What options are currently available?
- Investigate what clothing brands or charities are doing to keep textile waste out of landfills.

## Classroom actions

Suggestions for long-term projects or quick in-class activities.

**Contact a charity or thrift shop:** Interview a local organization that accepts clothing donations to understand what happens to end-of-life textiles.

**Organize a textiles collection event:** Partner with a local charity, organization, or business and organize a textile drive.

**Awareness Campaign:** Use posters, social media ads, or another medium to create awareness about local options to divert textiles from landfills.

### Resources:

- [The National Association of Charitable Textile Recycling](#): Resources and information about charities recycling textiles in Canada.
- [DirectioNS Council of Nova Scotia](#): A not-for-profit organization representing 29 member agencies throughout NS, many who run thrift shops and other textile programs.