



ASSIGNMENTS AND RESOURCES

Consolata Anyango, cotton processor,
Rift Valley Products Kenya

ETHICAL FASHION

The True Cost of Our Clothes

selfhelpafrica.org/ie/education

ETHICAL FASHION

This activity series has been devised by Self Help Africa, an Irish international development organisation focused on supporting and empowering farming communities across Africa. SHA's vision is for sustainable livelihoods and healthy lives for all in a changing climate.



How much do we know about the clothes and shoes we wear? The supply chain is complex and features environmental and human rights abuses throughout - from growing and producing textiles, manufacture of garments, transportation, purchase decision, wearing and cleaning clothes, all the way through to how they are passed on and disposed of.

The fashion industry is the third leading contributor to climate change after fossil fuels and agriculture. Recent movements in the sector have brought about greater consumer awareness and brand accountability, but to realise a sustainable and moral fashion industry there is still a long way to go. Learn about the impact of the fashion industry in this resource and understand how to get involved and influence real change.

WHAT IS THE TRUE COST OF OUR CLOTHES?

"The true cost of our fast fashion purchases is being paid by the garment worker who can't feed or educate her kids, the cotton farmer whose lungs are poisoned by pesticides, the town with no clean water because of chemical dyes pumped into their river."

Carolyn Moore, TheJournal.ie (Sept 2020)

This article **Cheap Clothes and Fast Fashion** addresses how the government's Waste Action Plan relates to textile production and the fashion industry. The excerpt above displays connections with a variety of the Sustainable Development Goals:



EXERCISE

Read the full piece here -

<https://www.thejournal.ie/readme/cheap-clothes-and-fast-fashion-5198063-Sep2020/>

Considering all 17 of the Sustainable Development Goals, how many of them can you connect with Moore's article?



WHAT IS FAST FASHION?

<i>& other Stories</i>	€22	+€7 delivery	100% Organic Cotton	Made in Portugal
ASOS	€10.49	+€5.99 delivery	100% Polyester	Made in Turkey
DECATHLON	€6.00	+€5 delivery	100% Polyester	Made in China
H&M	€7.99	+€3.99 delivery	100% Cotton	Made in Bangladesh
lululemon	€48	Free delivery	92% Cotton / 8% Elastane	Made in Vietnam
NEW LOOK	€11.99	+€5 delivery	68% Recycled Polyester / 32% Viscose	Made in China
NIKE	€25.00	+€4.00 delivery	100% Cotton	Made in Vietnam
RIVER ISLAND	€10	+€4.99 delivery	50% Cotton / 50% Polyester	Made in the United Kingdom
SHEIN	€4.99	+€6.99 delivery	100% Polyester	Made in China
ZARA	€12.95	+€3.95 delivery	100% Cotton	Made in Bangladesh

Imagine you are purchasing a white t-shirt. Considering the options above, which would you choose and why?

How much of the cost do you think supports the wage of the garment worker?



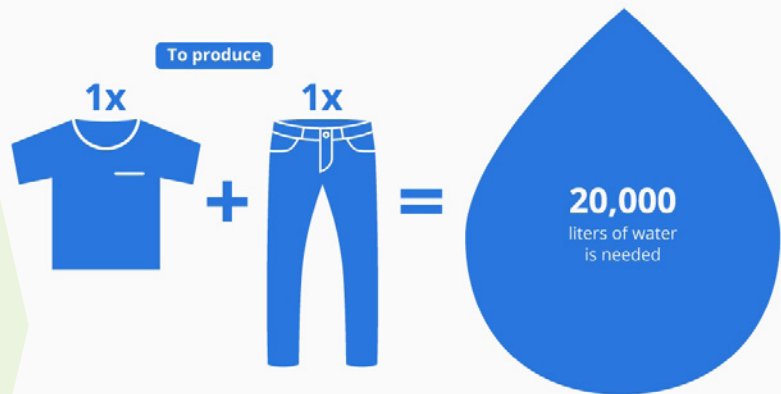
HOW MUCH DO WE KNOW ABOUT OUR CLOTHES?

Check the label on an item of clothing you are currently wearing. You may learn the country it was made in, material, and washing instructions, but what about where the fabric was produced, how much water and energy was required, or the hourly pay of the garment worker who made it?



The Insatiable Thirst of Fashion

Estimated water required in the production of cotton clothing items*



@StatistaCharts

* Items depicted: one t-shirt and one pair of jeans
Source: Oxfam

statista

Let's take a cotton t-shirt as an example.

Cotton is a water-intensive crop that typically requires a lot of pesticides to grow. Raw cotton must be spun then dyed to produce the desired textile which releases chemicals into the water, contaminating water sources of communities living in the region of these factories.

20% of industrial water pollution globally comes from the treatment and dyeing of textiles.

GoodOnYou.eco, 2022

Learn more from this TED-Ed video on the supply chain of the cotton t-shirt



EXERCISE

Read this article to learn how to distinguish between fast fashion and slow fashion. <https://440industries.com/slow-fashion-vs-fast-fashion-the-differences-impact/>

Can you categorise each of the t-shirts on the previous page as either fast or slow fashion?

Consider your choice of t-shirt from the table on the previous page. Based on the data in the infographic below, calculate how much the retailer, brand, factory and garment worker earn. What do you think about these figures?

How much does a worker make on a \$30 shirt?

Based on costs in European market, 2020.



ARE WE WEARING PLASTIC?

The majority of clothing purchased from shops on the high street will contain **POLYESTER** - a synthetic fabric that is usually derived from **PETROLEUM**.



Learn how and where polyester is manufactured at [SewPort.com](https://sewport.com)

In considering the images on the next page, how do you feel about wearing synthetic vs natural fabrics?

WHAT'S IN THE FABRIC?

Our clothes can be made from a range of different materials, natural or man-made. The manufacturing process requires three basic steps:

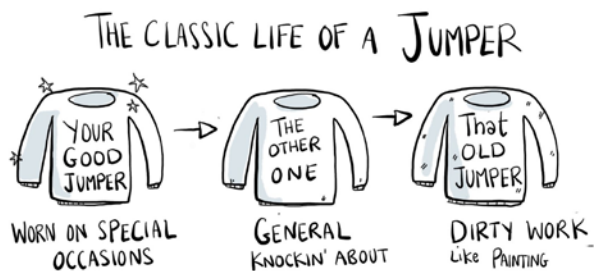
1. Producing the yarn
2. Weaving or 'knitting' the yarn together
3. Processing

Learn how some of these fabrics are made at [HowStuffWorks.com](https://www.howstuffworks.com)

For a guide on which fabrics are sustainable or not and why, visit [Eco-Stylist.com](https://www.eco-stylist.com)

From hide to leather - rather than the 3-step process above, leather is created through a process of tanning animal rawhide to preserve it and make it pliable when dry.

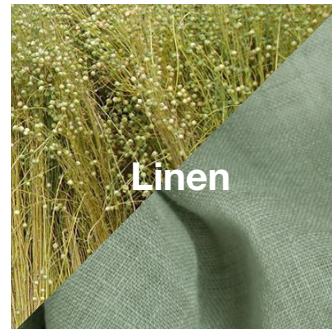
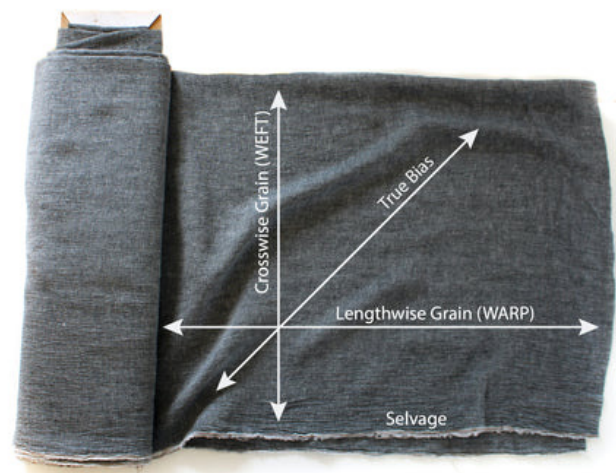
The Problem with Viscose - Although viscose is derived from wood pulp, a natural material, the process of making it uses a large amount of chemicals affecting the environment as well as the health of people who work in and live near factories in which it is made.



BUT FAST FASHION CHANGED THAT



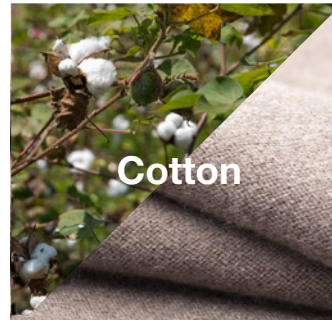
See more @TwistedDoodles on Twitter <https://twitter.com/twisteddoodles/status/1195265445139533825>



Linen



Acrylic



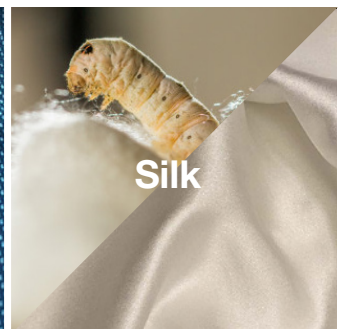
Cotton



Leather



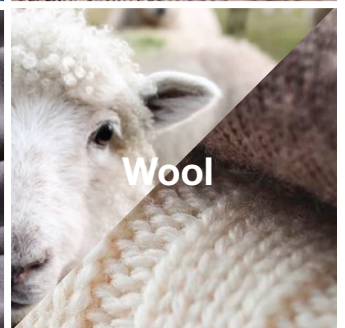
Polyester



Silk



Viscose



Wool

EXERCISE

Rate these eight fabrics in order from least sustainable to most sustainable. Share your rated list with a partner and see how they compare, and if you change your opinion on a particular fabric.

COTTON IN KENYA

Though once thriving, the cotton industry in Kenya had been unsuccessful for more than a decade, as prices for the crop slumped in the face of a market that became flooded by cheap imports from the West and Far East.

Rift Valley Products are among the cotton producers experiencing a revival in Kenya. Self Help Africa's **AgriFi Kenya Challenge Fund** is assisting the company to work directly with 7,000 farming families in Ol Karia Valley, helping them with training, inputs, and creating market interest in locally produced cotton.



Consolata Anyango,
cotton processor, Rift
Valley Products Kenya

Watch this video to learn more
and answer the following questions ▶



EXERCISE

- What changes did Wilson make farming to increase his produce?
- What is Consolata's vision for the future?
- According to Devan what does improved access to the market look like for farmers?



Farmer, Chamakwaro Group, South Uyoma

COTTAGE INDUSTRIES

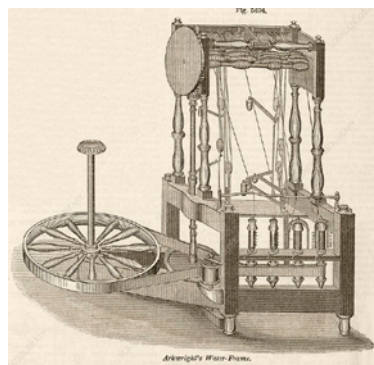
A **cottage industry** is a small-scale industry which uses simple equipment to produce handmade goods such as crafts, the name "cottage" due to the businesses often being run from people's homes and labour carried out by family members.

In Ireland, **linen**, **wool** and **cotton** were commonly produced in this manner in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with the production of fine linen being particularly successful in the north-east of the country.

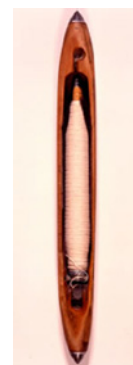


Cottage spinners ▲

These types of operations mostly went into decline as a result of the Industrial Revolution. With a greater availability of cotton and more advanced technology, labour moved away from spinning wheels and hand looms to more efficient inventions such as John Kay's flying shuttle (1733) and Richard Arkwright's spinning frame (1769).



Spinning frame ▲



Flying shuttle ▲

DISCUSS

- Can you think of any "cottage industries" existing in Ireland today? (consider handmade items, family businesses, small-scale producers...)
- Considering the revival of the cotton industry in Kenya, do you think linen production in Ireland nowadays could be financially sustainable?

Fast Fashion - clothes that are made and sold cheaply, so that people can buy new clothes often.

In the past there were only 2-4 fashion seasons per year. Brands now produce **up to 52 new collections annually**, encouraging consumption of clothes by releasing new items every week.

SOCIAL FABRIC



MacFarlane clan tartan pattern ▲

Tartan refers to interlocking stripes running in the warp and weft of cloth to form a pattern. It has an ancient history - any part of the world that has woven cloth, people have created tartan designs.

In Scotland, tartan has gained great cultural significance. Originally associated with the Highlands, tartan cloths were produced by local weavers from wool and using natural dyes. By the end of the 18th century as production became commercialised, large scale firms assigned names of Highland clans and towns to their standardised patterns.

In the 19th century, the clan names that had been assigned to tartan patterns by commercial weavers became affiliated and accepted as the traditional pattern of these clans, and though not traditional, every Scottish clan today has a tartan attributed to its name.

scottishtartanmuseum.org



Members of the Maasai tribe in their traditional dress ▲

The Maasai are a semi-nomadic people in the great Rift valleys in **Kenya** and **Tanzania** known for their unique customs. Their traditional fabric is the **Maasai Shuka** - a cotton fabric in the form of a blanket to protect them from the conditions of the savannah. They began wearing this clothing dominated by bright red colours in the 1960s.

afroculture.net

DISCUSS

Can you think of any other clothing or patterns synonymous with a particular country or area?

EXERCISE

BRAND CASE STUDY

Choose your favourite clothing brand or select an option from the list below. Using information from your chosen brand's website, third party websites **FashionChecker.org** and **GoodOnYou.eco**, and other resources you may find, research how **SUSTAINABLE** and **TRANSPARENT** the brand is.

BRANDS

• ASOS • GAP • LEVI STRAUSS & CO. • LULULEMON
• NIKE • RIVER ISLAND • SHEIN • INDITEX (ZARA, BERSHKA, PULL & BEAR) • URBAN OUTFITTERS

Have your views changed as a result of your research?
Did you find examples of greenwashing?

Greenwashing

- deceptively using green marketing in order to persuade the public that an organisation's products, aims and policies are environmentally friendly.

HUMAN RIGHTS OF GARMENT WORKERS

The intricacies of making clothes mean they must be made by hand. You likely found “**Made in Bangladesh**”, “**China**”, “**Vietnam**”, or another low-income country on the label of a garment you are wearing.

By hiring workers in these regions and paying them less, clothing brands can sell to customers at a cheaper price. But what is the cost to the workers, the majority of whom are women?

DISCUSS

Watch The True Cost documentary trailer and discuss the following. (The full documentary is available on YouTube.)

What challenges do they face? What changes do you believe are necessary to improve conditions?

Wages are not the only way costs can be cut. Low investment in buildings means the working conditions in the factories can be poor and present potential hazards for employees. As their families rely on their earnings for survival, striking is not an option.



The True Cost documentary trailer ▲

The Label Doesn't Tell the Whole Story

...in reality, just as important as fit and comfort is where clothes are made and how the people who produced them were treated in the process.

Eleanor Goldberg, Huffington Post

THE RANA PLAZA DISASTER

On 24th April 2013, an 8-storey factory known as the Rana Plaza collapsed in Bangladesh. The accident tragically killed a reported 1,132 people and injured more than 2,500.

The previous day, workers employed on the upper floors expressed concerns over cracks in the walls, but were assured by the owner that the building was safe and had to return to work or risk losing their income.

As the fourth largest industrial disaster in history the controversial incident extended to international media, and brands who contracted work to this and similar factories came under scrutiny for their practices.



The Rana Plaza factory collapse April 2013 ▲

A decade on - what has changed?

...over 30,000 inspections by engineers have taken place, 2 million workers have received safety training, and 92% of the 130,000 safety hazards identified have been fixed.

The Irish Mirror

Read interviews with survivors and with family members of victims in The Irish Mirror

<https://www.thesun.ie/fabulous/10592304/rana-plaza-disaster-decade-on/>

DISCUSS

What changes have been made, and do you think there has been enough progress?



#whomademyclothes campaign from Fashion Revolution in 2016 ▲

FASHION REVOLUTION

A movement emerging from this event has since become the world's largest fashion activism movement. They campaign for a **clean, safe, fair, transparent** and **accountable** fashion industry and their annual **Fashion Revolution Week** takes place each year around 24th of April.

Find out more about **Fashion Revolution Ireland**
- <https://www.fashionrevolution.org/europe/ireland/> -
which began in 2015 under the **Re-dress** organisation.

HOW TO DONATE CLOTHING

If we no longer have use for certain clothing, how can we ensure we extend the life of an item, as far as possible?

Consider what you are donating - is it good quality, is someone likely to pick this up from the shop floor? If not, consider disposing of it in an appropriate apparel recycling bin, or cutting it up to use as dust cloths. Animal shelters welcome donations of old towels and blankets.

WHERE TO DONATE

Charity shops in Ireland rely on donations from the public for revenue to support their charity's services. In order to determine if a shop is run by a registered charity, see if the CRI membership badge is displayed, or check with the Charities Regulator.

For women's clothing you can post photos on apps and sell your items on depop or swap with others on Nuw.



depop **nuw.**



WHERE DO OUR CLOTHES GO WHEN WE GET RID OF THEM?

What do you do with the clothes you no longer wear? Many people donate their unwanted clothes to local charity shops, in the expectation that the charity will make a profit from them, or if unsold, that they will be donated to someone in need. **In fact, only 30% of donations make it to charity shop floors in Ireland.** This profit is valuable, but what happens to the rest of the clothes?



Dead White Man's Clothes - the translation of the Akan expression **Obroni Wawu**, a common term for secondhand clothes in Ghana, comes from the idea that someone would have to die to give up so much stuff.



Mitumba are used clothes imported for sale in African countries (such as Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda and Burundi) from more developed western countries. It is a Swahili term, literally meaning **"bundles"**, used to refer to plastic-wrapped packages of used clothing.



Due to the rise of fast fashion in wealthier countries, the quality of garments in the second-hand markets has declined dramatically. The value and condition of the clothes inside bales cannot be checked by merchants before they have bought the stock, and on average 40% of the contents are not fit for sale.

What is the result of exporting poor quality garments?

- Merchants can't make the same income
- Clothes are dumped polluting rivers and oceans
- Clothes are burnt in landfill affecting the health of local communities

DEBATE

Carry out more research on the advantages and disadvantages of second-hand imports in African countries and come up with arguments **for** and **against** banning imports.

DONATED...

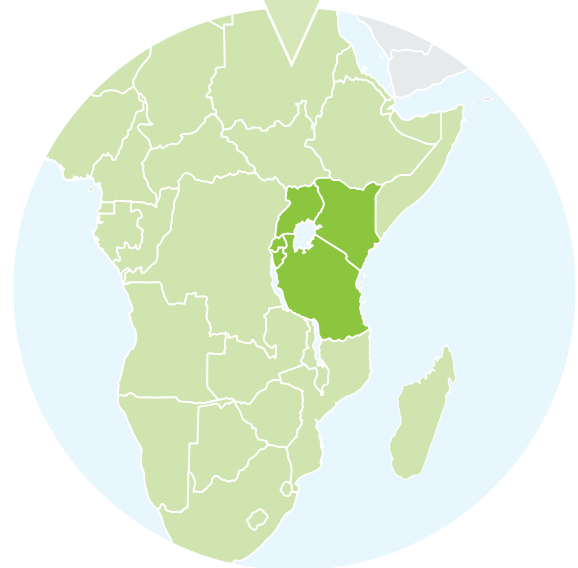
Between 10 and 20% of our donated clothes are purchased from charity shops.

RECYCLED...?

Of our unwanted clothes, only 13% get recycled into something else. Technology to recycle textiles is not widespread, and blended and synthetic fabrics are more challenging to process. **Less than 1% of used clothing gets recycled and turned into new clothes.**

SOLD!

Up to 70% of our discarded clothes are sorted, baled and sold to Global South countries for resale in second-hand markets such as Kantamanto Market in Accra, the capital city of Ghana.



In East Africa...

Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda and Burundi were to phase out the second-hand clothes trade by 2019, but only Rwanda has implemented the plan, introducing high taxes on mitumba imports to deter trade.

The East African, June 2022

<https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/business/region-wrestles-with-proposals-to-ban-imports-of-used-clothes-3854868>

THE EPIC JOURNEY OF A POLYESTER T-SHIRT

Using the information you have learned so far, create an **image, map or flowchart** to represent the typical journey a t-shirt will make. Consider showing the steps below and their locations.

Can you illustrate other elements such as microplastics in the ocean, paid and unpaid labour, carbon emitted and water used?

Oil Extraction > Polyester Production > T-Shirt made > Shipped to Retailer
> Purchased by Consumer > Worn and Washed > Donated to Charity Shop
> **UNSOLD** > Baled and Shipped to Global South > Bought by Merchant
> **UNSOLD** > Dumped > Washes up on Shore > Burnt in Landfill



WEAVING A WAY OUT

*Buy less. Choose well. Make it last.
Quality, not quantity. Everybody's
buying far too many clothes."*

Vivienne Westwood

DISCUSS

Considering the full supply chain of our clothes from production to disposal, who do you believe is responsible for environmental and human rights abuses of the fashion industry?

EXERCISE

Style a sustainable look for an upcoming event such as one below. Choose your items from:

Thriftify -

<https://www.thriftify.ie/>

(online platform of charity shops in Ireland and the UK)

United by Zero - <https://unitedbyzero.com/> (browser extension sustainable of brands vetted by scientists).

1. School graduation

2. Family barbeque

3. Internship interview

For an added challenge, try limiting your spend with a budget of €50 or €100.

SARAH LAZAROVIC'S BUYERARCHY OF NEEDS

Due to the complexity, interconnectedness and non-transparency of the fashion industry, it can be confusing for consumers are trying to adopt more ethical and sustainable habits.

Buying clothes supports people's income, **BUT** which companies should we support? Donating unwanted clothes can cause problems, **SO** what do we do with items we don't have a use for?

Sarah Lazarovic's **Buyerarchy of Needs** is a simple guide to what to do about our wardrobes from least sustainable (buying new items) to most sustainable (wearing what we already have in our wardrobes).



THE BUYERARCHY
of NEEDS
(with apologies
to Maslow)

BRAINSTORM

Come up with ideas for a sustainable fashion event in your school based on one or more of Lazarovic's suggestions. Consider including an educational campaign as part of your event.

- What skills would be required to manage this event?
- Which departments/teachers could be involved?



Discarded second-hand clothes line the beach in the fishing community of Jamestown in Accra, Ghana ▲

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Good On You article - Fashion's Water Impacts:

<https://goodonyou.eco/fashions-water-impacts/>

Oxfam blog: <https://www.oxfam.org.uk/oxfam-in-action/oxfam-blog/new-shocking-facts-about-the-impact-of-fast-fashion-on-our-climate/>

Self Help Africa article - Reviving the Kenyan Cotton Industry:

<https://selfhelpafrica.org/ie/reviving-the-kenyan-cotton-industry/>

The True Cost of Fast Fashion full documentary:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5-OzHqYGnlo&t=255s>

The Rana Plaza Collapse - A Short Documentary:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TcAAW6WBg9I>

Brightly.eco - 'The Most Popular Fast Fashion Brands, Ranked for Conscious Consumers':

<https://brightly.eco/blog/fast-fashion-brands-sustainability>

TheJournal.ie article - 'We can't export our way out of our fast fashion addiction':

<https://www.thejournal.ie/readme/opinion-fast-fashion-export-5591019-Nov2021/>

Green News - 'What really happens to our unwanted clothes?':

<https://greennews.ie/unwanted-clothes-feature/>

Fashionomics Africa - Investing in Africa's Creative Industries:

<https://fashionomicsafrica.org/>

Ellen MacArthur Foundation:

<https://ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/topics/fashion/overview>

UN Alliance for Sustainable Fashion:

<https://unfashionalliance.org/>

Ethical Fashion Initiative:

<https://ethicalfashioninitiative.org/>

Contact us with queries or to arrange workshops

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