

# IS AFFORDABLE ‘FAST FASHION’ CLOTHING WORTH THE ETHICAL COST?

*THIS ACTIVITY SHOULD TAKE ABOUT 90 MINUTES. IF LEARNERS ARE ABLE TO REVIEW MEDIA PRIOR TO THE LESSON, ACTIVITY TIME SHOULD BE 45 TO 60 MINUTES.*

## INVESTIGATE

Read, watch, and listen to the three media resources on the Thinkalong module. Learners can use the Investigate graphic organizer to summarize each piece of media and record new information. Below are summaries of the three pieces of media curated in the Thinkalong module.

### TAILORING A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE FOR FASHION

PBS NewsHour | September 8, 2019 | Video

8:12 minutes

Hari Sreenivasan sits down with author Dana Thomas to discuss fast fashion’s impact on the environment and cheap labor involved in production.

- Thomas defines fast fashion as “trendy clothes made in vast amounts at lightning speed, sold at rock bottom prices in thousands of stores worldwide.” She says this includes retailers like H&M, Zara, and Forever 21.
- Inventories can be created in a few weeks, which brings customers into a store more often to see what the “new thing” is.
- Thomas notes that cheap clothing means cheap labor, and that sweatshops exist in places like Bangladesh, Ethiopia, The Philippines and the United States, where workers are not paid a living wage for their labor.
- Despite the trends toward fast fashion, some companies are looking for sustainable alternatives through science, including one that makes bio-fabricated leather and another creating lab-created silk.
- Thomas says that automation may eliminate low-wage jobs, but will help create better, safer, higher-paying jobs in the fashion industry.
- The average garment is worn 7 times before it is thrown away, but Thomas says that ideas like rentals, swaps, and hand-me-downs and taking better care of clothing can be a more sustainable practice.

### ARTICLE TITLE 2

SCITECH NOW | December 3, 2018 | Video

5:22 minutes

Scientists looked to plants and solar energy for a new way to create nylon and reduce the environmental impact of fast fashion.

- Nylon is a preferred fabric because it’s strong, wrinkle-resistant, and shrink-resistant. It’s also cheap to produce, but is created from chemicals from petroleum in a process that uses fossil fuels like coal and natural gas, so it’s not environmentally friendly.
- Researchers at NYU are creating nylon from plants and power the production using solar energy.
- Miguel Modestino, who heads the research, says that they can take waste from food production and use it for more products, like bio-diesel and nylon.
- Modestino says that if all nylon was created from plants, 4.7 million tons of carbon dioxide wouldn’t be produced by the process. He says that solar energy can also reduce emissions during the production process.
- The nylon created in the lab is molecularly the same as nylon currently being used in the clothing industry.

*Using public media — video, audio and digital reports — about newsworthy topics, these classroom-based exercises help learners to think critically about media messages, develop informed opinions, and practice how to take a stand.*

## WHAT HAPPENS WHEN FASHION BECOMES FAST, DISPOSABLE AND CHEAP?

NPR | April 10, 2016 | Article

1313 words

Some companies and grassroots organizations are seeking to change the way people look at clothing to reduce waste.

- One report puts the global fashion industry worth \$1.2 trillion with \$250 billion spend in the United States. In 2014, the average household spent nearly \$2000 on apparel and related services.
- Journalist Elizabeth Cline says that people are more likely to dispose of cheaper clothing than more expensive ones. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, 12.8 million tons of textile waste was discarded.
- Used clothing in the U.S. is often exported to other countries like Russia and India, but some clothing retailers have created recycling programs to help end waste. Companies like H&M and Patagonia repurpose returns into new products.
- Social media influencers are encouraging audiences to swap clothes with friends or 'upcycle' old clothing.
- Other companies, like Rent the Runway, offer clothing rentals for a fee. Others encourage spending more to get longer lasting, more durable clothing.

### KEY WORDS

Look out for these important keywords in the news stories. Discuss the definitions with your learners and see how they affect the understanding of the story.

- Textile
- Fabrication
- Apparel

### CONTEMPLATE

Learners will use media literacy questions to critically engage with news by thinking about its purpose, searching for bias and discussing missing perspectives. They will answer the 5 Key Questions of Media Literacy created by the Center for Media Literacy, which are:

1. Who created this message?
2. What creative techniques are used to attract my attention?
3. How might different people understand this message differently than me?
4. What values, lifestyles and points of view are represented in, or omitted from, this message?
5. Why is this message being sent?

A graphic organizer is included in this guide and the Thinkalong website to help learners answer these five questions about each piece of media.

### DEBATE

Use the debate tool on the module webpage to help form evidence-based responses to the debate question.

Thinkalong is designed to help learners engage with real issues that are relevant to their lives. [Structured discussions](#) allow learners to practice their critical thinking skills through evidence-based debate with their peers. Discussions are designed to take about 30 minutes. Educators are encouraged to modify aspects that work best for their learners.

To encourage civil discourse, please review the [Code of Conduct](#) with your learners.

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