



Second-Hand Fashion

Why Used Clothes Are Cool Again

How thrift shopping became the hottest trend in sustainable style

■ B1 Reading ■ 30 min ■ Everyday Life

Level	B1 (Intermediate)
Skill	Reading
Topic	Everyday Life
Duration	30 minutes
Age Group	Teens & Adults

Learning Objectives

- ◆ Read and understand a text about second-hand fashion and sustainability
- ◆ Learn 15 key vocabulary items related to fashion and the environment
- ◆ Identify the environmental impact of fast fashion
- ◆ Discuss personal fashion choices and ethical consumption
- ◆ Write about personal fashion habits and values

1 Before You Read — Fashion Habits

Think about your clothing habits and discuss:

1. How often do you buy new clothes? Where do you usually shop?
2. Have you ever bought second-hand clothing? How did you feel about it?
3. Do you think the fashion industry has a responsibility to protect the environment?

2 Reading: The Thrift Revolution

The Thrift Revolution: Fashion With a Conscience

Open your wardrobe and count how many items of clothing you own. If you are like the average European, the answer is somewhere around 100 pieces. Now ask yourself: how many of those do you actually wear regularly? Studies show that most people wear only about 20 to 30 percent of their wardrobe, which means the majority of our clothes sit untouched for months or even years. In a world where the fashion industry produces over 100 billion **garments** every year — more than twelve for every person on the planet — the question is clear: do we really need so many new clothes?

A growing number of people are answering "no" — and they are turning to **second-hand** fashion as a smarter, greener, and often more stylish **alternative**.

The Problem With Fast Fashion

Fast fashion — the business model of producing cheap, trendy clothing at high speed — has transformed the way we dress. Major high-street brands release new collections every few weeks, encouraging consumers to buy more and throw away quickly. The result is a system that is devastating for the environment. The fashion industry is responsible for approximately 10 percent of global carbon **emissions** — more than all international flights and shipping combined.

The environmental damage goes beyond carbon. Producing a single cotton T-shirt requires approximately 2,700 litres of water — enough for one person to drink for two and a half years. Synthetic fabrics like **polyester** release microplastics into the ocean every time they are washed. And when clothes are thrown away — an estimated 92 million tonnes globally each year — most end up in **landfills**, where they can take up to 200 years to decompose.

The Rise of Thrift Shopping

Against this background, second-hand fashion is booming. **Thrift** shops, vintage stores, and online resale platforms have seen enormous growth in recent years. The global second-hand clothing market is expected to double in size within the next five years, driven largely by younger consumers who see **sustainability** as a core value rather than a passing trend.

Online platforms have made buying and selling used clothes easier than ever. With just a few taps on your phone, you can browse thousands of items, filter by size and style, and have pre-owned clothing delivered to your door. For many young people, scrolling through a resale app has replaced the traditional trip to the shopping centre. The **stigma** that once surrounded wearing "someone else's clothes" has almost completely disappeared among younger generations.

The Appeal of Vintage

Second-hand shopping is not just about saving money or being **eco-friendly** — it is also about style. Vintage clothing — items from previous decades — offers something that fast fashion cannot: **uniqueness**. In a world where millions of people wear identical mass-produced outfits, owning a one-of-a-kind 1980s leather jacket or a 1990s band T-shirt makes a personal statement. It says: "I did not just follow the trend — I created my own."

Fashion designers themselves are embracing this movement. Many luxury brands have launched their own **resale** programs, encouraging customers to return old items in exchange for store credit. The message is clear: the most fashionable thing you can do in 2025 is not buy something new — it is give something old a second life.

What You Can Do

If you want to reduce your fashion footprint, the steps are simple. Before buying anything new, ask yourself: do I really need this, or do I just want it? Check second-hand shops and online platforms first — you might find exactly what you are looking for at a **fraction** of the price. Take care of the clothes you already own — repair them, wash them less frequently, and store them properly. And when you are finished with something, do not throw it away — donate it, sell it, or swap it with friends.

The fashion industry will only change when consumers demand better. Every time you choose a second-hand item over a new one, you are sending a message: style does not have to cost the Earth.

3 Key Vocabulary

Word / Phrase	Definition	Example Sentence
garments	items of clothing	The fashion industry produces over 100 billion garments every year.
second-hand	previously owned by someone else; not new	Second-hand clothing is becoming more popular than ever.
alternative	another option or choice; something you can do instead	Thrift shopping is a greener alternative to fast fashion.
fast fashion	cheap clothing produced rapidly to follow the latest trends	Fast fashion encourages people to buy more and throw away quickly.
emissions	gases released into the atmosphere, especially CO ₂	The fashion industry produces about 10% of global carbon emissions.
polyester	a synthetic fabric made from chemicals, not natural fibres	Polyester releases microplastics into the ocean when washed.
landfills	sites where waste is buried in the ground	Most discarded clothing ends up in landfills for centuries.
thrift	spending money carefully; also: a second-hand shop	Thrift shops sell used clothing at very affordable prices.
sustainability	using resources without harming the environment	Young consumers see sustainability as a core value, not a trend.
stigma	a feeling of shame or disapproval from society	The stigma of wearing used clothes has almost disappeared.

Word / Phrase	Definition	Example Sentence
eco-friendly	not harmful to the environment	Buying second-hand is one of the most eco-friendly choices you can make.
uniqueness	the quality of being one of a kind; unlike anything else	Vintage fashion offers uniqueness that mass-produced clothes cannot.
resale	the selling of something previously bought	Many luxury brands now have their own resale programs.
fraction	a very small part of something; much less	You can find designer items at a fraction of the original price.
swap	to exchange one thing for another	Instead of throwing clothes away, swap them with friends.

4 Useful Collocations

fast fashion · second-hand shop · vintage clothing · carbon footprint · sustainable fashion · clothing industry · online platform · brand new · throw away · fashion trend · mass production · shopping habit · ethical choice · eco-friendly · wardrobe clearout · price tag

5 Reading Comprehension

1. What percentage of their wardrobe do most people actually wear?

- a) About 10%
- b) About 20-30% ✓**
- c) About 50%
- d) About 80%

2. How much of global carbon emissions does the fashion industry produce?

- a) About 2%
- b) About 5%
- c) About 10% ✓**
- d) About 25%

3. How much water is needed to produce a single cotton T-shirt?

- a) About 500 litres
- b) About 1,000 litres
- c) About 2,700 litres ✓**
- d) About 5,000 litres

4. What has driven the growth of the second-hand clothing market?

- a) Government laws banning new clothes
- b) Younger consumers who value sustainability ✓**
- c) A shortage of cotton and fabric
- d) Celebrities refusing to wear new clothes

5. Why do people enjoy vintage fashion?

- a) Because it is always cheaper than new clothes
- b) Because it offers uniqueness in a world of mass-produced fashion ✓**
- c) Because vintage clothes are more comfortable
- d) Because old clothes last longer than new ones

6. What message does the text say you send by buying second-hand?

- a) That you cannot afford new clothes
- b) That you do not care about fashion
- c) That style does not have to cost the Earth ✓**
- d) That you prefer online shopping

6 Vocabulary Exercise — Fill in the Blanks

Complete the sentences with the correct word from the box:

garments · emissions · landfills · sustainability · stigma · fraction · alternative · uniqueness

1. The fashion industry produces over 100 billion _____ every single year.
2. Fashion accounts for approximately 10% of global carbon _____.
3. Most discarded clothing ends up in _____ and takes centuries to decompose.
4. Young people see _____ as a core value, not just a passing trend.
5. The _____ of wearing second-hand clothes has almost disappeared.
6. You can find quality items at a _____ of the price of new clothing.

7. Thrift shopping is a greener _____ to buying from fast fashion brands.
8. Vintage fashion offers _____ — something mass-produced clothes cannot provide.

7 Answer Key

■ Vocabulary Exercise Answers

1. garments
2. emissions
3. landfills
4. sustainability
5. stigma
6. fraction
7. alternative
8. uniqueness

8 Speaking & Writing Tasks

■ Speaking Task: Discussion

Discuss these questions with a partner or your teacher:

- Would you feel comfortable wearing second-hand clothes? Why or why not?
- Do you think fast fashion brands should be forced to produce less? How?
- What is your opinion on 'clothing swaps' — exchanging clothes with friends?
- If you could only buy 10 new items of clothing per year, what would you choose?

■ Useful Phrases for Discussing Choices

- **I would rather** buy one high-quality item than five cheap ones.
- **The problem with fast fashion is that** it encourages waste and harms the planet.
- **What appeals to me about vintage is** finding something nobody else has.
- **I think consumers should** ask where their clothes come from before buying.
- **One simple change we can all make is** checking second-hand shops before buying new.

 **Writing Task: My Fashion Philosophy**

Write a paragraph (120–160 words) about this topic:

"Describe your attitude towards fashion and clothes. Do you follow trends, prefer classic styles, or not care much about fashion? Would you change your shopping habits after reading this text? Why or why not?"

Use vocabulary from this lesson. Include specific examples and explain whether sustainability influences your choices.