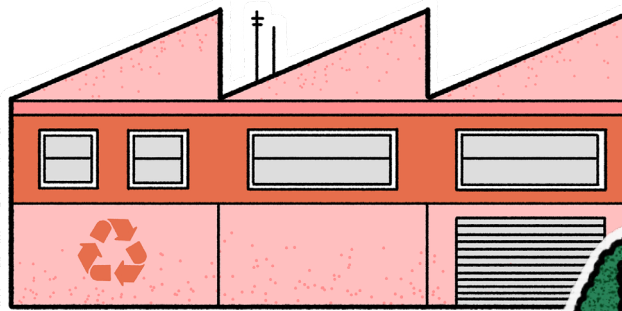


#5: Let's go round in circles



Summary

Much of fast fashion is made, worn and dumped. In some countries **up to 40% of all clothing bought is never worn**. This is known as a linear model and it means that massive amounts of resources are being used and then lost forever as they are buried in landfill sites or incinerated. However, there are a growing number of brands thinking of ways to extend the life of fabrics and shift to a more circular model.

This activity will encourage learners to explore recycling and repurposing, drawing on examples from both the 1940s and today.

At the end of this activity learners will

- be able to compare the experiences of factory workers in the past and present
- develop an understanding of chronology
- be aware of ways to ask brands for information about their sustainable credentials, with a focus on workers' rights
- develop critical thinking around historical sources of evidence

Time frame

45 minutes

Lesson format

- Ask the question: If you were to tell the story of your clothes, what story would you tell?
- Looking at the journey our clothes have been on.



- Looking at how this journey could be improved for people and planet through past examples.
- Looking at examples of circular models in the fashion industry today.

Note: We have included several ideas for extension activities to expand knowledge of the circular approach. Feel free to pick the one you feel is most relevant to your learners.

Key resource

- 5 Let's go round in circles Presentation

What to do

1. Ask the question. If you were to tell the story of your clothes, what story would you tell?

Slide 2: **Task 1** Sort the labels into the correct order on the flow chart to discover the journey of our clothes. Notice that it is a **linear model**. It's a straight line with a beginning and end. This linear model means that the clothing that is made ends up unable to be used again.



(Find the correct order below. The labels on slide 2 are jumbled. Drag them to underneath the diagram and place them into the order, then check your answer with slide 3)

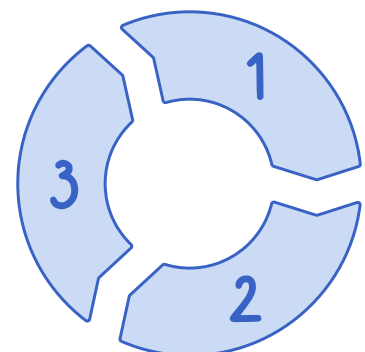
1. The raw material is grown (e.g. cotton) or made (e.g. polyester)
2. Fabric is made in factories
3. Fabric is cut and sewn together to make clothing
4. Clothing is shipped to warehouses
5. Clothing sold from shops or online stores
6. Clothing worn, washed and worn again
7. Clothing thrown away



2. Slide 4: Let's look at that another way. Using a key object from the Our Changing Planet Gallery (the green turtle shell) and other artefacts in the Birmingham Museums collection, we have created another linear model. What do learners think about this?

3. Slide 5: Is there another way?

Explain to the group that nature does things differently and there's not as much waste involved. Ask pupils to think of a leaf on a tree. Can learners sort the journey into the correct order on the flow chart? Notice that it is a circular model. The **circular model** means that things are constantly being reused and there is little / no waste.



1. The leaf grows
2. The leaf falls from the tree
3. The leaf decomposes and feeds the tree

4. How can the clothing industry be more circular?

Slide 6: **Task 2** Ask the learners to watch the Ellen MacArthur Foundation video (2 min) from the <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3iKHr-JnWYA&t=117s>

While watching, ask the group to note down the three elements that have been identified that will make a more sustainable fashion industry. Discuss the challenges that these may have.

(**Note:** The elements are:

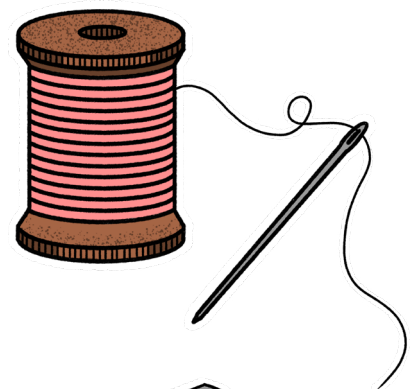
- Business models that keep clothing in use for longer (e.g, swapping, rental and repair)
- Materials that are safe and reliable (so they don't release microfibres or dyes which pollute our waterways)
- Solutions so used clothes are turned into new ones)

5. Making clothes last a long time is not a new idea. During and just after World War Two the government rationed clothing. Ask the group why they think clothes needed to be rationed in the 1940s. Ideas might include:

- Garment factories and workers were needed to make uniforms and parachutes – this also meant that raw materials were being used for these rather than fashion pieces.
- There were less garment workers due to them being called up to be soldiers

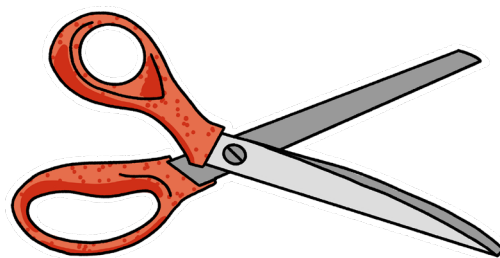
(**Note:** for information on clothing rationing check out the Imperial War Museum: <https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/8-facts-about-clothes-rationing-in-britain-during-the-second-world-war>)

Ask pupils how this might have changed the way people felt about and used their clothes. (For many it meant they respected, looked after and restyled what they had, learning new sewing, darning and knitting skills).



6. Slides 7 – 9: To introduce the idea of utility clothing that was made and worn during the 1940s, share images and information from the collection cared for by Birmingham Museums. Discuss the 4 items:

- Utility suit
- Dress made from parachute silk
- Patchwork housecoat
- Teddy made from an army blanket



Extension idea

If you have more time, challenge pupils to find out more about utility clothing and the Make Do and Mend initiative:

- During the 1940s Manufacturers had to conserve raw material (wool, cloth, leather etc) as it was in short supply. They also needed to be more efficient in how they worked and make hard wearing garments that would last

- Toys were also in short supply so off cuts of fabric were often used to make a new teddy bear

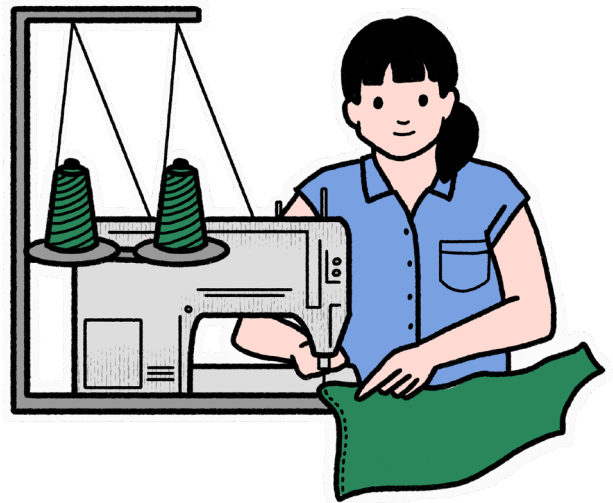
7. Slide 11: If we look at clothes that have survived from even longer ago in the past, we also see that people thought making clothing last was important. Show the following artefact:

- Evening dress

8. Circles in fashion today...

Not all clothing brands use a linear model. A growing number of environmentally conscious designers and makers are looking at how they can be more sustainable, use less fabric, recycle and repurpose used fabrics to extend the life of the threads.

Check out some interesting designers and brands:



- TeeMill – a t-shirt manufacturer who uses organic cotton and packaging that is 100% plant based (no plastic) They have a carbon neutral website and renewable energy powered factories. T-shirts are printed to order so no waste or surplus stock. Each garment has QR code on the label so that once you've finished with it you get a free post address to send it back. They then recover and remake cloth into new garments. This brand has been used as a case study by the UN as a great example of the circular economy. https://teemill.com/?cgi=1&camp=900&clid=EAlalQobChMIgpe7k7zj9AIVk-R3Ch126QzDEAAYASAAEgK_VvD_BwE
- Christopher Raeburn – repurposes parachute fabrics and military clothing in his designs. www.raeburndesign.co.uk

9. Slide 13: **Task 3** Revisit the three challenges set out in the Ellen MacArthur video:

- Business models that keep clothing in use for longer (e.g. swapping, rental and repair)
- Materials that are safe and reliable (so they don't release microfibres or dyes which pollute our waterways)
- Solutions so used clothes are turned into new ones

Discussion points:

- Reflect on the examples of linear and circular economies you have explored
- How has your understanding of the circular economy has changed?
- What could you start doing differently to approach the clothes you wear in a more circular way?

Extension ideas

- Check out some organisations and people who are supporting everyone to extend the life of their clothes and repurpose garments. You might want to start with:
 - Love Your Clothes – offers a fantastic website of hints and tips on how to make simple mends and look after your clothes for a longer life together. <https://loveyourclothes.org.uk>

- Companies/organisations helping people reduce the environmental impact of clothes:
 - Surfers against Sewage – a campaign group to create ocean activists for a plastic and pollution free sea. <https://sas.org.uk>
 - Cora Ball and GuppyFriend – ingenious gadgets you put in your washing machine to catch the microfibres your clothes shed in every wash. This helps prevent more microplastic entering our waterways and ocean. <https://www.coraball.com/> and <https://en.guppyfriend.com/products/guppyfriend-waschbeutel>
- If you have more time watch this 19 minute video with Dame Ellen MacArthur talking about her solo sail around the world and the power of circularity in the fashion industry. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nh8-fBpm0v8>
- Invite pupils to think about how many clothes they need a year. Challenge them to decide on what they can have in line with 1940s rationing (66 coupons a year).

Clothing	Number of coupons required
Dress	11
Pair of tights / stockings	2
Shirt	8
Trousers	8
Women's shoes	5
Men's shoes	7



- Do some quick and easy repurposing of used clothing in the classroom with a t-shirt and pair of scissors to make a shopping bag. Check out these simple instructions: <https://www.instructables.com/No-Sew-10-Minute-T-Shirt-Tote/> or <https://zerowastetips.com/what-to-do-with-old-t-shirts/>
- If you make lots of items, consider setting up a school enterprise and selling them, or writing instructions to share across the school and spread the ideas
- The circular economy model isn't just important to the fashion industry. Extend learners thinking and watch this 3 minute video. Ask pupils to identify what and how other industries are using the same key ideas of recycling resources https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A5wn_iinbxw
- Write to brands and ask them what they are doing towards shifting towards a more circular economy



Birmingham Museums



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