ACTION ON FAST FASHION

AIMS

Students will:

- define fast fashion and articulate the environmental & human costs of producing and consuming clothes in this way
- learn about the Rana Plaza disaster and locate its root causes in unsustainable global supply chains
- weigh responsibility for unsustainable fashion practices among different groups and appraise different responses we can make as citizens
- explore the root causes and consequences of unsustainable fashion supply chains
- Plan an action project to challenge fast fashion

ACTIVITIES

Students will:

- Define fast fashion
- Map where their clothes come from
- Role-play working conditions in a clothing factory
- assign responsibility for the Rana Plaza factory
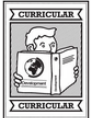- identify and discuss ways they can take action on fast fashion

MATERIALS

Action on Fast Fashion Powerpoint file
Role-play cards – 1 copy per 5 students, cut

TIME

There are approximately 3x 40-minute lessons here. These activities can also be done individually as part of other lessons.

JUNIOR CYCLE CURRICULUM

Applied technology
3.8 - evaluate the impact of technologies on their lives, society and the environment

Business studies
1.1 - analyse the extent to which realising their needs and wants may impact on individuals and society
1.9 - Debate the ethical and sustainability issues that arise from their consumption of goods and services and evaluate how they can contribute to sustainable development through consumer behaviour
3.7 - Debate the implications of globalisation of trade, including the benefits and challenges of international trade

Home economics
3.6 - demonstrate ways in which clothing and/or textile household items can be repaired, reused, re-purposed, recycled, and upcycled

Science
3.10 - evaluate how humans contribute to sustainability through the extraction, use, disposal, and recycling of materials

CSPE
2.1 - communicate how they are connected to and dependent upon eco-systems, people and places, near and far

NOTE TO TEACHERS

- When exploring this topic, be mindful that you may touch on topics that are sensitive. Check who is in the room and adapt lessons accordingly.
- Always try to link the local to the global and prevent 'othering' of people or places.
- Discuss with your students what language is appropriate to use when discussing 'rich' and 'poor' countries. See the glossary on p. 5 for a discussion of terms.

Clothes audit – 10 minutes
- Project **Slide 2** onto the board.
- Tell students to check the label of their bag or jacket. Where was it made?
- Mark the country of origin on the map. Do this for all students. If more than one person has something from the same country, count the total. (e.g. China - 5).
- Ask:

  1. What do the countries marked all have in common? (Likely answers: developing countries, outside Europe/in the Global South).
  2. Why do many of our clothes come from these countries? (lower labour standards, cheaper labour, less government oversight)

- NOTE: Fast fashion isn't just made in countries in the Global South. Clothes made in the EU or the UK can also involve workers with zero-hour contracts and poor working conditions, "Made in Ireland" isn't the same as "Made ethically"!

Defining fast fashion – 5 minutes
- Students work in groups. They have 2 minutes to think of as many words as possible associated with "fast fashion". One person in each group should write them down.
- After two minutes, ask each group to share their words.
- Read the definition of fast fashion from goodonyou.eco on **slide 3.**
- Ask:
  1. How many of your words were in the definition you read?

Lifecycle of a pair of jeans – 15 minutes
- Distribute the cut-up cards from **Handout 1**. Ask students to arrange the cards in order and match them to the pictures.
- When the students have completed, tell them to read the facts on each card. What are the environmental costs at each stage? (e.g. water, fossil fuels, human labour, etc.)
- Ask:

  1. Why does the short life of fast fashion make these costs worse?
  2. Why is buying better-quality clothes better environmentally?
  3. What should we do with clothes when they reach the end of their life?

- You can problematise clothes 'recycling' by showing Textile Mountain (from 1:00 - 6:20).
- Ask:

  1. How much do people get paid at each stage of clothes production?

- Students work in groups to estimate how much people get paid at each stage. Check against the graphic on **slide 4.**

Reflection - 5 minutes
- Use **Slide 9** at the end of each lesson to reflect on student learning.

Role Play – 20 minutes
- Tell students they will be exploring the conditions in a factory in one of the countries that makes our clothes. Don't tell students about the Rana Plaza disaster yet.
- Put students in groups of five. Give each student one **Role card from Handout 2** and some time to read it. When they have finished reading, they should put the card on the table, face down.
- Introduce the scenario by reading this aloud:

  "You all work in a factory that is home to five different companies. These companies make clothes that are sold to major brands. One day, you are sent home from work because you hear there is a problem in the building and it is not safe. The next day, everybody comes to work in the morning. You are all standing outside the factory gates. Introduce yourself to the rest of the group by saying your job. Then discuss: should you go to work today?"

- Give the students some time to discuss. If they are getting off topic, remind them that the clock is ticking, and every moment they delay is costing them money. They need to decide what to do about the problem.
- After all students have made their decision, ask them to share with the group. What did they choose to do? Why did they make that decision?

Discussion – 10 minutes
- Show the video (5 minutes) from Human Rights Watch about the Rana Plaza disaster (**Slide 5**).
- Ask:
    1. Why did the workers continue to work in the factory, even though they knew it was dangerous? (No choice, they may not be paid, physical force e.g. Beauty)
    2. According to the video, what other problems do Bangladeshi garment workers experience? (Uncomfortable environment, risk of low pay, threats of physical harm, required to work overtime, pay delayed)
    3. The video suggests forming a union is a solution to these problems. Why would that help? What stops workers from unionising?
    4. Why don't companies work harder to make better conditions for garment workers?

NOTE: This video contains descriptions of injury that some students may be uncomfortable with. You may want to warn them first.

Responsibility – 10 minutes
- In the same groups, ask students to decide who bears responsibility for the Rana Plaza disaster. They should represent their answer in a pie chart and apportion blame in percentages for different groups (see right). They should include the following groups:
    1. Garment workers
    2. Building owners
    3. Government of Bangladesh
    4. Clothing companies (e.g. Penney's, Adidas, etc.)
    5. Consumers in wealthy countries (e.g. You)
- Give the students some time to draw their pie charts, then ask them to share with the class.
- Show the quote from the clothing company executive (**Slide 6**). Ask:
    1. Does this change their pie charts?
    2. Do you agree that consumers are responsible for companies' behaviour?
    3. Is it true that people prefer inexpensive clothes over human safety or the environment? If so, why?

Problems and solutions tree - 20 minutes

1. Distribute the **Problems and Solutions Tree.**
2. On the trunk of the tree, write fast fashion. This is the main issue we are exploring.
3. Students identify some root causes of the fast fashion industry and write them on the roots. Encourage students to dig deeper - each root always has a deeper cause.
4. Students identify some consequences of climate change and write them on the branches.
5. Students discuss solutions and put them on the leaves of the tree. Encourage students to connect solutions to root causes, not problems.

Taking Action - 10 minutes

- Discuss the solutions from the Problems and Solutions Tree, or show **Slide 7**.
- Ask:
    1. How could these actions change the fast fashion industry?
    2. Which of these actions can you take individually? Which of these would be more impactful as a group?
    3. What else could you do?

Other action ideas:

- Set up a swag shop or repair shop in school.
- Research where your school uniform was manufactured. Are there more ethical other alternatives?
- Research a fast fashion brand. What does their website say? Is it different to information from goodonyou.eco or Changing Markets Foundation?
- Start a campaign to reduce fast fashion in school.

Action planning - 15 minutes

- Project **slide 8**. These are some roles involved in school-based action projects. Assign roles for the action plan. Encourage students to set realistic deadlines.

Reflection

This can be done at the end of each lesson - 5 minutes

- What did you learn in today's lesson?
- Do you feel differently now about clothing?
- What will you do differently now?

Every society in the world has a mixture of people with access to different levels of material and social resources. For this reason, we need to choose words carefully when comparing countries. The language we use can 'other' and reinforce stereotypes - or they can challenge these ideas. Here are some terms used to discuss countries - bear in mind that none of these are considered 'perfect'. It might be worth discussing all these terms with students and aggreeing meaning.

rich / poor	In any country, everyone has differing lavels of access to resources. This doesn't mean that any one country is 'rich' or poor - many of the wealthiest countries have very high poverty. The definition of 'poor' is often associated with wealth, and doesn't consider one's wellbeing.
Global North / Global South	This framing makes assumptions about countries income, population, infrastructure and relative marginalisation. Many countries in the Global North have benefitted from years of extractive colonial practices to build their economies at the expense of their colonies, a process that has continued under capitalist globalisation.
First world / Third world	This framing comes from the Cold War, when Western-aligned countries were the 'First World', Soviet-aligned countries the 'Second world' and others were the 'Third World'. Beside the fact that it's politically irrelevant, it also refers to outdated stereotypes.
Developed / Developing	This framing is problematic for several reasons. The meaning of 'developed' can vary depending on the metric used to measure it. Also, is it fair to suggest countries like Ireland are completely 'developed' and have nothing left to improve? Or that other countries need to catch up to our development, in the same way?

Land is cleared for cotton production.
- The cotton in one pair of jeans needs 7,400 litres of water to grow. The Aral Sea in Central Asia has almost completely disappeared because of clothes production!
- Cotton growers use lots of pesticides to keep away bugs. These can poison workers, communities, run into water, and kill beneficial insects.
- Land that is growing fabric for cotton can't be used to grow food for local people.

The raw cotton is processed into fabric.
- The cotton is often grown in a different country to where the fabric is produced, which uses fossil fuels to transport.
- Chemicals used in dying can cause harm to workers – especially the chemical washes used for distressed denim. Chemical runoff often finds its way into local water sources – the Pearl River in China has turned indigo-blue!
- Many modern jeans are a blend of cotton and polyester, a plastic derived from oil.

The fabric is made into jeans.
- 85% of garment workers are women who earn an average of €3 per day.
- 170 million children worldwide work within the clothes manufacturing industry.
- Conditions in garment factories are often poor, with low lighting and bad ventilation.

The Jeans are distributed around the world.
- The jeans we wear in Ireland are often made far away, so require lots of fossil fuels to transport.
- Washing jeans also requires large amounts of water.
- Microfibres of polyester, woven into the cotton, can be released and find their way into water systems.

When people are done with jeans, they don't just disappear...
- In landfill, jeans can take up to 40 years to decompose, or 200 years if they contain polyester.
- Jeans can be exported to the Global South, to be sold and worn. However, bad condition clothes can cause problems in countries that have poor waste disposal – and they take fossil fuels to transport.
- Reusing, upcycling, or buying second-hand clothes can save huge amounts of fossil fuels

The details for this role play were taken from <u>an article in The Guardian</u>. If you would like to know more about the disaster, you can read it before the lesson.

You are a **sewing machine operator.**
- You are originally from the countryside but have moved to the city because the money you earn at the factory is much more than working on a farm.
- You earn $60 per month, which is not enough to pay the rent. Therefore, you rely on overtime to make another $30 per month.
- It's hot and dark in the factory, where you stitch seams and pockets on denim jeans. You stitch 120 pairs an hour, 10 hours a day, six days a week.
- You have a very good relationship with your supervisor, and your manager seems nice, although you don't really know them.
- You have heard that the building is not in good condition, and may be dangerous.

You are a **supervisor.**
- You watch over 15 sewing machine operators and five helpers, all of whom you trust and have a good relationship with.
- Your manager is a well-mannered person, and you have no complaints about them.
- Your team has strict targets to meet, although because work was cancelled yesterday, you are behind on the current order of 500,000 pairs of jeans.
- You earn about $100 per day. This is just about enough for you to pay the rent and eat, although you don't have much money left over at the end of the month.

You are a **manager** of one of the clothes manufacturing companies.
- You currently have an order for 500,000 basic shirts at $6 per piece from a famous clothing brand.
- Your company needs to fulfil this current order on time, or the buyer may not pay in full. If that happens, you won't be able to pay the very high rates of rent that the owner of the building charges.
- Yesterday, someone reported a crack in a pillar in the building. In the interests of safety, you sent all your workers home. However, this means you are delayed on the current shipment, and need to catch up today.
- If your employees don't want to work, you can stop their overtime pay until the order is completed.

You are a **buyer for a clothing brand** that is very famous in Ireland.
- You have ordered 500,000 pairs of jeans from the company. These need to be in stores in Ireland in two months.
- This country has a lot of problems; electrical blackouts, political unrest, strikes and blockades all threaten to make your shipment delayed. You cannot afford any more delays to the production schedule.
- If the deal is late, your company will deduct 5% for every week that the clothes are overdue by. You will therefore lose some of your commission.

You are an **engineer** working for the local municipality.
- You know that the city has a poor power grid, and can't supply enough electricity to meet demand. Therefore, most buildings have generators to make sure they can work all day.
- Yesterday, a crack was discovered in the building. You were called in to inspect.
- You discovered that the owner of the building did not follow safety guidelines when building the factory. They put heavy electricity generators on the top floor, and when they vibrate, they shake the building and cause structural weaknesses.
- The cracks are in pillars that are essential to support the whole building. You are concerned that, if the generator turns on today, the building may collapse.

SOLUTIONS

CONSEQUENCES

PROBLEM

ROOT CAUSES