Ethical Fashion Choices ☐ - TEACHER NOTES

English in Context 7 | Topic 4 | Sample Answers & Assessment Criteria

☐ **Note for Teachers:** This worksheet has no "correct" answers. Assess based on:

• Depth of reasoning

• Use of subject-specific vocabulary

• Consideration of multiple perspectives

• Evidence of critical thinking (not just repeating slogans)

• Honesty and self-reflection

Part A: Dilemma Analysis - Sample Answers

1. Which option would you choose?

High-level answer example:

"I would choose Option B (second-hand jacket) because it has a lower environmental impact – no new resources were used, and it keeps clothing in circulation. The €5 saved could also be donated to the charity shop. However, I would present it as a 'vintage designer piece' to my friend, emphasizing its uniqueness rather than focusing on it being second-hand. This challenges the stigma around pre-owned fashion."

Assessment criteria: Good answers consider environmental impact, friend's feelings, and suggest ways to reframe the gift positively. Weak answers focus only on price or simply state an opinion without reasoning.

2. How could you convince your friend?

Sample answer:

"I could explain that vintage/second-hand fashion is actually trendy now, and that many influencers shop second-hand. I could also point out that the jacket is better quality (designer brand) than fast fashion, and that buying second-hand reduces waste. Plus, nobody else will have the same jacket – it's unique!"

3. Is it fair to expect everyone to buy ethical fashion?

Strong answer addressing complexity:

"No, it's not fair to expect people who are struggling financially to prioritize ethical fashion when they can barely afford the basics. The problem is systemic – ethical fashion is expensive because it reflects TRUE costs (fair wages, safe conditions), while fast fashion is artificially cheap due to exploitation. The solution isn't to blame poor consumers, but to make ethical fashion more affordable or to raise minimum wages so everyone can afford to shop ethically."

4. Who is responsible for solving this problem?

Nuanced answer:
"All three share responsibility. Governments should enforce labour laws and environmental regulations globally, so companies can't exploit workers abroad. Companies should prioritize ethics over maximum profit and be transparent about their supply chains. Consumers should buy less and choose quality, but we can't expect individuals to solve problems created by corporations and weak regulations. Blaming consumers alone lets companies off the hook."

Red flags in weak answers: "It's only the consumer's fault" or "only the company's fault" – real-world problems are rarely that simple!

Part B: Hidden Costs - Possible Answers

Examples of hidden costs students might identify:

1. **Worker exploitation:** Poverty wages (€2/day instead of living wage)
2. **Health costs:** Workers exposed to toxic dyes/chemicals without protection
3. **Environmental damage:** Water pollution from fabric dyeing
4. **Carbon emissions:** Transportation, production, heating factories
5. **Water usage:** 2,700 litres to make one T-shirt
6. **Waste:** T-shirt ends up in landfill after a few wears
7. **Child labour:** Children working in cotton fields or factories
8. **Microplastics:** Synthetic fabrics shedding plastic into oceans
9. **Loss of biodiversity:** Cotton farming using pesticides
10. **Future costs:** Climate change impact on next generations

Part C: Personal Reflection - Assessment Notes

5. Your last 5 clothing purchases

Look for:
• Honest self-reflection (not just saying what sounds good)
• Recognition of patterns (e.g., "I bought 3 things on sale that I never wore – I buy because it's cheap, not because I need it")
• Connection to course themes
• Willingness to acknowledge problematic habits

6. 3 realistic changes

Good realistic examples:
- *"Wait 24 hours before buying something to see if I really want it"*
- *"Repair ripped jeans instead of buying new ones"*
- *"Swap clothes with friends instead of always buying new"*
- *"Check charity shops before buying new"*
- *"Buy better quality items that last longer, even if more expensive initially"*

Red flags (unrealistic virtue signaling):
- "I'll never buy fast fashion again!" (too absolute, probably not honest)
- "I'll only buy sustainable brands" (ignores cost barrier)
- Generic statements without personal commitment

Extension Task - Assessment

Research on sustainable brand

Strong answers include:
- Specific brand name and website
- Concrete examples of sustainable practices (not just vague "they're eco-friendly")
- Evidence of research (e.g., "uses 80% less water than conventional cotton")
- Critical thinking (e.g., "However, items are expensive, which limits accessibility")

Example brands students might research:

Patagonia, Veja, Eileen Fisher, Reformation, Thought Clothing, People Tree, Allbirds, Everlane, Kotn

☐ **Discussion Tip:** After students complete this worksheet, facilitate a class discussion where different viewpoints are shared. Emphasize that there are no easy answers – ethical consumption involves trade-offs, privilege, and systemic barriers. The goal is to think critically, not to achieve moral purity.