

Fashion & Globalization

English in Context 7 | Topic 4 | Name: _____ | Date: _____

The True Cost of Fast Fashion

Walk into any high street store and you'll find trendy clothes at incredibly low prices. A T-shirt for €5, jeans for €20 – it seems like a bargain. But have you ever stopped to think about the true cost of these clothes?

The fashion industry is the second most polluting industry in the world, right behind oil. Fast fashion – the mass production of cheap, disposable clothing – has transformed the way we shop. Brands release new collections every few weeks, encouraging consumers to constantly update their wardrobes. As a result, the average person now buys 60% more clothes than they did 15 years ago, but keeps them for half as long.

The environmental impact is staggering. It takes approximately 2,700 litres of water to produce a single cotton T-shirt – that's enough drinking water for one person for two and a half years. The fashion industry is responsible for 10% of global carbon emissions, more than all international flights and maritime shipping combined. Moreover, synthetic fabrics release microplastics into the ocean every time they're washed.

But the human cost is equally disturbing. Most fast fashion is produced in developing countries where workers – often women and children – labour in unsafe conditions for poverty wages. The 2013 Rana Plaza disaster in Bangladesh, where a garment factory collapsed killing over 1,100 workers, brought international attention to these issues. Yet exploitative practices continue.

So what's the alternative? The Fair Fashion movement advocates for sustainable and ethical production. This means using organic or recycled materials, ensuring fair wages and safe working conditions, and producing clothing designed to last. Some brands have embraced circular fashion – creating clothes that can be fully recycled at the end of their life.

However, fair fashion comes with a higher price tag. A sustainably produced T-shirt might cost €30-40 instead of €5. Critics argue this makes ethical fashion a privilege only the wealthy can afford. Supporters counter that if we buy fewer, higher-quality items and care for them properly, the long-term cost is actually lower.

The real question is: can we change our relationship with clothing? Instead of viewing fashion as disposable, perhaps we need to return to valuing craftsmanship and durability. After all, the cheapest option isn't always the most economical – especially when you factor in the hidden costs to people and planet.

A) Reading Comprehension

1. What percentage of global carbon emissions does the fashion industry produce?

2. How much water is needed to produce one cotton T-shirt?

3. What was the Rana Plaza disaster and why was it significant?

4. According to the text, why do fast fashion brands release new collections so frequently?

5. What is meant by "circular fashion"?

B) Critical Thinking

6. The text mentions that sustainable fashion is more expensive. Do you think this is fair? Why / Why not?

7. What solutions does the text suggest for reducing the negative impacts of the fashion industry?

8. The text says "the cheapest option isn't always the most economical." Explain what this means using examples from the text.
