NEWS LESSON

The Charity-Shop Bag Nobody Wants



BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. What makes you stop wearing something that still fits?
2. Would you buy fewer clothes if each one cost more?
3. What do you imagine happens after you donate clothes?

2 Key words

These words are in the article. Write the letter of the meaning (A to H) in each box.

1	**garments**	☐	A	a sudden wish to do something without thinking
2	**resale**	☐	B	pieces of clothing
3	**impulse**	☐	C	a duty to deal with something and its results
4	**fibres**	☐	D	selling something again after someone else owned it
5	**recycling**	☐	E	thin threads that cloth is made from
6	**exceptions**	☐	F	cases that a rule does not cover
7	**responsibility**	☐	G	using old materials to make new things
8	**affordable**	☐	H	not too expensive for ordinary people

3 Read

Read the article and underline the key words from task 2. The paragraphs are numbered.

The bag outside the shop carries a comforting promise. In the sorting room, staff find clothes too worn or too cheap to sell to anyone.

1 A bag left outside a charity shop carries a comforting promise: these clothes will find new owners and help a good cause. Inside the sorting room, the story can be very different. Staff open the bag and discover damaged seams, weak fabric and garments with almost no resale value. The donation has not removed the waste. It has transferred the difficult decision, and sometimes the disposal bill, to the charity.

2 A hospice charity in south London told a reporter that up to 100 bags can arrive in a single day. Only around a quarter of the items inside were suitable for sale. Every item still had to be checked and handled. Meanwhile, resale apps allow people to sell their most desirable pieces directly, potentially leaving charity shops with a greater share of the clothes nobody wants. A generous gesture can therefore become an unexpected expense.

3 The situation reflects the growth of fast fashion, an industry built around low prices and rapidly changing trends. Clothing can be advertised online, bought within seconds and replaced before it has worn out. Social media encourages impulse purchases by showing shoppers a constant stream of new looks. In its 2026 State of Style report, Oxfam found that 64% of people surveyed in Britain had bought clothes they were not actively looking for after seeing something online. The charity also estimated that nearly a third of clothing in British wardrobes was never worn.

4 That creates an enormous environmental cost. Producing garments requires water, energy and raw materials. Transport and packaging add to the impact, while synthetic fabrics may cause further problems when washed or discarded. Recycling is not always possible because many garments contain combinations of fibres that are difficult to separate. Donating unwanted clothing is better than throwing away usable items, but it does not undo the resources used to manufacture them.

5 Governments have begun to respond. Since July 2026, large companies in the EU have been prohibited from destroying most unsold clothes and shoes, with limited exceptions for goods that cannot safely be reused or sold. The rules encourage businesses to repair, donate or resell products instead. However, preventing destruction does not necessarily reduce the number of cheap garments being produced in the first place.

6 Consumers can make a difference by cutting back on new purchases, repairing clothes and choosing second-hand items, but it would be unfair to place all responsibility on shoppers. Affordable clothing matters, and not everyone can pay more for supposedly sustainable brands. Retailers must also consider durability and the volume of new products they put out. The simplest question may be one we rarely ask while shopping: will this still be worth wearing after the excitement of buying it has disappeared?

Sources: The Guardian. Picture: AI illustration.

4 True, false or not given

Circle **T** (true), **F** (false) or **NG** (the article does not say).

1. Most of the British people Oxfam surveyed had bought clothes they were not looking for after seeing them online. (T) (F) (NG)
2. Charity shops in Scotland report the same problem. (T) (F) (NG)
3. The EU rules prevent cheap garments from being produced. (T) (F) (NG)
4. Some clothes cannot easily be recycled because of the mix of fibres they contain. (T) (F) (NG)
5. Staff at the south London hospice charity could sell most of the items in the bags. (T) (F) (NG)

5 Vocabulary

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed.

comforting	desirable	disposal	prohibited	reduced	reliable	synthetic	transferred

1. The doctor's calm voice had a _____ effect on the nervous patient.
2. When the company moved abroad, it _____ most of its production to a cheaper country.
3. A phone in a limited colour can become _____, so fans queue to buy it.
4. Many councils charge a small fee for the _____ of large items such as old sofas.
5. Since the new law, shops have been _____ from selling knives to children.
6. Clothes made from _____ fibres such as polyester can release tiny pieces of plastic when washed.

6 Verb forms

Write the correct form of the verb in brackets.

1. By the time staff opened the bag, the donor _____ the shop. (LEAVE)
2. Clothes _____ so cheaply now that people buy far more of them. (PRODUCE)
3. A charity shop _____ the problem of overproduction alone. (CAN / NOT / SOLVE)
4. Oxfam _____ that nearly a third of clothes in British wardrobes were never worn. (ESTIMATE)
5. If shoppers _____ fewer items, the charity would receive less rubbish. (BUY)

7 Language focus: prepositions

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. Many verbs, nouns and adjectives take a fixed preposition. After it, use a noun or an -ing form, for example object to paying.

at for in of on to with

1. Retailers should take responsibility _____ the waste their products create.
2. Constant new releases often result _____ clothes being thrown away after a few wears.
3. Many young shoppers depend _____ social media to find new styles.
4. Some people object _____ paying more for clothes that last longer.
5. Few shoppers are aware _____ how much water a T-shirt needs.

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

Discuss in pairs or small groups. Give reasons for your answers.

1. What should someone check before putting clothes in a donation bag?
2. Would you rather own ten reliable outfits or lots of cheap choices?
3. Who could make the biggest difference to clothing waste?

9 Role-play: what to do with the old clothes

Work in pairs. Read your card, then have the conversation. Swap roles and do it again.

Student A · the housemate who wants to donate

You and your housemate have six bags of old clothes. You want to give everything to a charity shop this weekend. Explain why, and listen to your housemate's idea.

Student B · the housemate who wants to sell

You want to sell the best clothes online and give the rest to charity. Explain why, and ask what the charity shop will do with damaged items. Try to agree on a plan.

Useful phrases

I'd like to give everything to the charity shop.
That's a fair point, but it'll take a lot of time.
What if we sell the best pieces online?
I'm not keen on that, because it's a lot of work.
How about we split the bags in two?
Let's check every item before we decide.

Afterwards, tell the class: what did you decide to do with the clothes, and why?

ANSWER KEY

2 Key words

1 B · 2 D · 3 A · 4 E · 5 G · 6 F · 7 C · 8 H

4 True, false or not given

1 T · 2 NG · 3 F · 4 T · 5 F

5 Vocabulary

1 comforting · 2 transferred · 3 desirable · 4 disposal · 5 prohibited · 6 synthetic

6 Verb forms

1 had left · 2 are produced · 3 cannot solve or can't solve or can not solve · 4 estimated · 5 bought

7 Language focus

1 for · 2 in · 3 on · 4 to · 5 of

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