

What can we learn from the clothes we buy but never wear?

Level 3: Advanced

1 Warmer

a. Discuss these questions.

1. What is your favourite outfit or style to wear? Why do you like it?
2. What is one type of clothing or style that you never wear? Why do you dislike it?
3. How does your style change for different occasions: hanging out, work, a casual dinner, a night out?
4. How do you feel about 'retail therapy'?

2 Key words

a. Choose the correct word to match each definition below. Then find and highlight them in the article to read them in context.

1. a rough-textured wool fabric, typically with a pattern of small checks or flecks
 - a. spark
 - b. tweed
 - c. risotto
2. to abruptly cut off contact with someone without explanation
 - a. ghosted
 - b. unsettle
 - c. hound
3. various things of different types, usually small and not important or of little value
 - a. tweed
 - b. crimson
 - c. odds and ends
4. to cause to feel anxious or nervous; disturb
 - a. unsettle
 - b. ghosted
 - c. judgement call
5. to pursue, harass or badger persistently
 - a. side-eye
 - b. crimson
 - c. hound
6. an Italian dish of rice cooked in broth with other ingredients
 - a. magpie
 - b. risotto
 - c. side-eye
7. a decision someone has to make using their own ideas and opinions
 - a. disconnected
 - b. spark
 - c. judgement call

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8. a sideways glance expressing disapproval, suspicion or criticism
- a. side-eye b. glean c. prompt
9. a deep red colour
- a. spark b. crimson c. glean
10. not related to or connected with the things or people around
- a. odds and ends b. retail c. disconnected
11. a feeling or quality that causes excitement
- a. hound b. spark c. ghosted
12. to cause or bring about an action or feeling
- a. prompt b. unsettle c. odds and ends
13. the selling of goods to the public, typically through shops
- a. crimson b. magpie c. retail
14. a person who collects or hoards items, especially bright or shiny objects
- a. magpie b. odds and ends c. hound
15. to obtain information, typically in small amounts and with difficulty
- a. side-eye b. glean c. disconnected

b. Complete the sentences with some words from the previous activity. You may have to change the form of the word.

1. He felt devastated after his friend of five years _____ him and didn't call him back without any explanation.
2. The strange noises from upstairs continued to _____ the new residents.
3. The journalists kept _____ the celebrity for comments about the scandal.

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4. The chef's mushroom _____ became the most famous dish at the restaurant.
5. When she spends too much time alone, she feels _____ from other people.
6. When their eyes met across the room, there were _____ immediately.
7. His inspiring speech _____ many audience members to volunteer for the cause.
8. The _____ sector has faced significant challenges with the rise of online shopping.
9. Like a(n) _____, she collected all sorts of colourful trinkets for her apartment.
10. The research team _____ valuable information from the ancient manuscripts.

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I've set myself a project to wear the neglected items in my wardrobe – from a crimson silk skirt to a mustard coat

Jess Cartner-Morley

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- 1 Most of us have clothes in our wardrobe that we never wear but can't quite let go of. I have a daffodil yellow tweed shift dress with buttons down the front that I bought about five years ago and have worn, I think, three times. Every time I open my wardrobe, it catches my eye and I feel bad. I feel guilty that I bought a dress that I didn't need and don't even really seem to like. But I also feel bad for the dress, because it really is very pretty, and what has it done to deserve being ghosted by me? That part sounds crazy, I know. But I try to be honest about the thought process of buying clothes and choosing what to wear, even when the truth makes no sense.
- 2 Like lots of us, I hate seeing stuff go to waste. I go to unnecessary lengths to make dinners using up whatever is in the fridge. I tell myself this is because it is healthier and more sustainable than takeout, but it's also a kind of mental game to me, to use everything up. Odds and ends in the salad drawer unsettle me, like missing pieces in a jigsaw puzzle, and I have to find a place for them. Even if I suspect no one is going to be hounding me for my celery and beetroot risotto recipe, I find these dishes strangely satisfying.
- 3 I don't want to give up on the yellow dress. I want to make it work, because not wearing it makes me doubt myself. Why did I buy it if I don't want to wear it? If I don't even know what I want to wear, what hope do I have of making good judgment calls on more important matters? And how can I make sure this doesn't happen again?
- 4 So a while ago, I set myself a project, of wearing the clothes in my wardrobe that I hang on to but never actually wear. As well as the yellow dress, there's a sky blue blazer in there giving me side-eye, a crimson silk skirt and a mustard coat. I'm a couple of months in now, and here is what I've learned.
- 5 Firstly: the key to finding your way back to clothes that you feel disconnected from is to try to find the spark that drew you to them in the first place. Think back to what it was that you saw in the changing room mirror that prompted you to hand over your card.
- 6 This helped me with the yellow dress, because I realised that what it represented to me was getting dressed up – unnecessarily dressed up – for the kind of little outings I might do during the day at the weekend that could perfectly well be done in jeans and a jumper but would feel more of an occasion if dressed up for. I'm trying this, and you know what? That lady in the changing room, she was on to something. There is something oddly life-affirming about wearing a fancy pastel dress to go out and buy tomatoes.
- 7 Sometimes what you figure out is simply that you made a mistake. This is useful to know, because once you've faced that fact, you can stick it on the charity pile and move on. (Note to self: never, ever buy anything in an airport. Always a mistake, usually an expensive one.) But often, what the clothes you buy but don't wear teach you is that over time your taste has changed, and your retail instincts haven't quite caught up. You still reach automatically for pieces that feel as if they belong to someone familiar, but that person isn't the current version of you. If this is happening, you need to bring your retail instincts up to date.
- 8 What this looks like for me is that as I get older I wear colour a lot less, but the magpie in me is still drawn to colourful clothes. I am going to be mindful of not shopping for the person I was 15 years ago. But in the meantime, I am questioning my slide into beige and working on getting back in touch with my inner rainbow dresser.
- 9 At the very least, there is wisdom to be gleaned from the clothes that feel like mistakes. As the saying goes: sometimes you win, and sometimes you learn. Oh, and guess what I'm wearing today?

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3 Comprehension check

a. Answer the questions using information from the article.

1. What colour is the dress that the author rarely wears but can't let go of?
2. What two emotions does the author feel when she sees the rarely worn dress?
3. What project did the author set for herself regarding her unworn clothes?
4. Besides the yellow dress, what three clothing items does the author mention that she rarely wears?
5. According to the author, what is the key to reconnecting with clothes you no longer wear?
6. What did the author realise about why she was originally attracted to the yellow dress?
7. What advice does the author give about clothes that you recognise were mistakes?
8. Where does the author suggest a bad place to buy clothes?
9. What has the author noticed about how her relationship with colourful clothing has changed as she gets older?
10. What does the author say you can glean from clothing 'mistakes'?

4 Key language

a. Match the phrasal verb to its definition.

get in touch

give up on

hang on to

use up

catch up

think back

let go of

figure out

1. _____ : to stop holding something or someone
2. _____ : to finish a supply of something
3. _____ : to expect someone or something to fail
4. _____ : to remember something that happened in the past
5. _____ : to hold or continue holding onto something or to wait for a short time

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6. _____: to finally understand something or someone, or find the solution to a problem after a lot of thought
7. _____: to reach the same quality or standard as someone or something else
8. _____: to communicate or continue to communicate with someone by using a phone or writing to them

b. Complete the sentences with the phrasal verbs from the previous activity.

1. Please _____ with me with any questions about the assignment.
2. She decided to _____ her old laptop as a backup after she bought a new one.
3. When I _____ to my childhood, I remember fun times with the whole family getting together for holidays.
4. I finally _____ the answer to the last algebra problem on the worksheet.
5. Never _____ your dreams, even when things get difficult.
6. You need to _____ the old to make space for the new.
7. After missing three classes, Leo had to _____ on a lot of homework.
8. Don't _____ all the hot water when you take a shower.

c. Write four personalised sentences using the phrasal verbs above.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

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5 Discussion

a. Discuss these quotes.

- 'Out with the old, in with the new.' —Unknown
- 'The less you own, the less owns you.' —Chuck Palahniuk
- 'Letting go is even more important than adding.' —Marie Kondo

6 In your own words

a. Reflect on your personal style and fashion preferences. Answer these questions.

- How have your style and preferences changed as you age?
- What were your criteria for buying new clothing, shoes or accessories ten years ago? What are they now?
- How do you think your style and preferences will evolve in another ten years?
- What's a fashion mistake you made?
- What's one fashion trend you hope returns?

b. Share your reflections with the class. Compare styles, preferences and predictions with your classmates.