



FACILITATOR GUIDE

Fixing a Tear

GRADES

9–12

SKILL

4 of 4

Empowering students to extend the life of their clothes and reduce textile waste.

GUIDE OVERVIEW

This guide provides educators with a complete framework for teaching how to **fix a tear** to high school students (grades 9–12). Beyond repairing fabric, this lesson encourages students to see value in restoration and promotes understanding that mending something torn can be both practical and symbolic. Through this hands-on experience, they connect personal agency with sustainability and develop habits that prioritize care over replacement.

By the end of this lesson, students will not only know how to fix a tear but will also understand how repair and customization skills connect to creativity, sustainability, and self-reliance.

DID YOU KNOW?

Extending the life of clothes by just nine extra months reduces their carbon, water, and waste footprints by up to 30%. The [Wear Longer Project](#) reinforces that repair and customization skills are a practical way to make fashion more sustainable.

1. ENGAGE

Start the lesson by asking students if they've ever snagged a sleeve or torn a pocket on their favorite item of clothing. What happened to it? Was it thrown out, left in the closet, or repaired? Lead a short discussion about how tears and rips are a normal part of wear and tear, not always a reason to discard clothing.

Share that one of the leading reasons consumers discard clothing is minor damage, such as a tear or a broken seam. This damage can make the item unsaleable, leading directly to the landfill. Explain that knowing how to mend a tear helps students save money, preserve memories attached to favorite clothes, and reduce waste. Emphasize that repair is not only practical but can also be stylish and creative.

FACILITATION TIP

Use this information to form small learning groups. Encourage students with stronger fine-motor skills to mentor peers, reinforcing collaboration and building confidence before the main activity begins.

Pre-Assessment: Fixing a Tear

Before starting the tear-repair lesson, identify what students already know about sewing seams, joining fabric edges, and understanding fabric structure. This review helps you to adapt the demonstration depth and ensure all learners start with confidence.

Discussion Prompts

Ask a few quick questions to open up conversation and assess familiarity.

- "What do you think causes most tears or rips in clothing?"

- “Have you ever tried to fix a rip? How did it go?”
- “Why do you think some tears are easier to fix than others?”

Quick Skills Check

1. Give students a piece of scrap fabric with a pre-cut slit and ask them how they might repair it.
2. Have them practice aligning the fabric edges and pinning them together.
3. Observe how students approach solutions and who may need step-by-step guidance.

2. MATERIALS

Gather a range of tools and fabrics so students can explore different repair techniques. Each student will need:

- Needle and spool of thread
- Pair of scissors
- Straight pins
- Practice fabric with small cuts or tears
- (Optional) Small fabric scraps for reinforcement, if needed
- (Optional) Iron and ironing board
- Copies of the **Wear Longer Project: Tear Repair Challenge** Student Handout
- Basic Stitches Guide (for reference)

FACILITATION TIP

Encourage students to bring old clothing or fabric scraps with tears. Having real materials helps them see how the technique applies to daily life.

3. DEMONSTRATION

Explain that fixing a tear requires understanding the fabric type and tear direction. Some rips are clean (along the grain), while others are jagged. The approach will differ depending on the type.

Step-by-Step Resource

How to Fix a Tear Guide

Step-by-Step Demonstration

Use a visible example and the step-by-step resource to model each step. Demonstrate both a subtle **invisible repair** and a creative **visible mend**.

- **Assess the tear:** Show students how to identify the fabric direction and determine whether the edges can be aligned easily. Trim loose threads if necessary.
- **Align and secure:** Bring the torn edges together and secure them with pins or temporary basting stitches. Explain the importance of maintaining the natural fabric grain.

FACILITATION TIP

Move slowly through each step and repeat as needed. Demonstrate both subtle and expressive methods to show how repair can align with function or fashion.

- **Stitch the repair:** Demonstrate both the invisible and visible stitches.
 - *Invisible stitch:* Use small, close whipstitches or ladder stitches from the underside of the fabric.
 - *Visible stitch:* Use embroidery floss to create a repair pattern using decorative stitching.
- **(Optional) Reinforce:** For high-stress areas, add a small patch of matching or contrasting fabric on the back side to strengthen the repair.
- **(Optional) Press and finish:** Use an iron to flatten the repaired area. Inspect for durability by gently tugging the seam.

4. PRACTICE

Invite students to practice on pre-cut swatches before attempting to repair real garments. Encourage them to start with small, manageable tears and work up to longer or uneven ones.

Practice Flow

- Guide the class through each step together, from assessing the tear to finishing.
- Circulate to check progress and troubleshoot common issues, such as misalignment and puckering.
- Once students feel comfortable, have them work in pairs to teach each other the process.

ENCOURAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Remind students that precision improves with patience. Each tear repaired is one less item headed to the landfill.

Peer-to-Peer Learning

Pair students to take turns sewing and observing. One student can check alignment and stitch tension while the other practices stitching.

Troubleshooting Tips

Common Issue	Quick Fix
Edges won't stay aligned	Pin closer together or baste temporarily before stitching.
Stitches pull fabric together	Loosen thread tension slightly for a smoother seam.
Thread breaks mid-stitch	Use shorter thread lengths and rethread securely.
Repair looks uneven	Focus on smaller stitches and keep spacing consistent.



5. CHALLENGE

Transform the lesson into an engaging, high-impact experience with the **Wear Longer Project: Tear Repair Challenge**. Each student (or team) selects an old garment with a visible tear and repairs it using either a **functional or decorative approach**. Encourage them to consider aesthetics: Can they make the repair a feature rather than a flaw?

Provide each student with the [Wear Longer Tear Repair Challenge Documentation Handout](#) to track their process and capture their before-and-after photos.

How It Works

- **Source the Flaw:** Select an old garment or fabric piece that has a clear tear (straight, L-shaped, or irregular).
- **Design the Mend:** Determine the best strategy: a functional repair (to hide the mend) or a decorative repair (to highlight the mend, e.g., using darning or contrasting thread).
- **Apply the Technique:** Use the learned tear-mending skills to securely and neatly close the tear, improving both the item's longevity and its look.
- **Document the Flip:** Complete the documentation handout, capturing the transformation process, challenges faced, and sustainability reflection.

This challenge allows students to demonstrate mastery by taking an item that would be discarded due to damage and rescuing it through thoughtful repair.

After completing their repairs, students will share their projects in a brief **Mending Showcase**. They can explain what technique they used, why, and how it improved both the look and longevity of the item.

6. REFLECTION

Close with reflection questions that help students connect repair to sustainability and self-expression:

- "How did repairing a tear change your perception of clothing durability?"
- "What choices did you make to balance function and style in your repair?"
- "What impact do you think repair culture could have on fashion and the environment?"

Encourage students to consider how learning to mend empowers them to value quality, craftsmanship, and creativity over convenience.

7. COMMUNITY PROJECT

Design Lab: Tear into Repairing

Extend the learning beyond the classroom with a collaborative **Wear Longer Repair Rally**. Students will set up an organized effort to collect damaged garments from the school community and host a repair workshop, setting up sewing stations to fix simple tears while teaching others how to do the same.

This project allows students to apply their skills, understand the importance of repair education, and foster a culture of resourcefulness within the school. Student teams will collect damaged garments from the community and then host a repair workshop where they set up sewing stations to fix simple tears while offering peer-to-peer instruction. They will document their efforts by tracking the number of repaired items and calculating the potential waste diverted, and finally, share stories behind the repaired pieces, emphasizing the personal and environmental benefits of repair.

This project encourages communication, collaboration, and advocacy for sustainability while providing tangible support to the local community.

Other Project Ideas:

- **Repair Café Partnership:** Collaborate with a local maker space to join community mending events.
- **Story Stitch Project:** Have students collect short stories about meaningful garments they've repaired and compile them into a digital booklet.
- **Before & After Exhibit:** Display repaired garments around the school to inspire others to learn repair skills.

Encourage students to track how many items they repair over time and estimate pounds of clothing diverted from landfills.

8. ACTIVITY EXTENSIONS

Connect the concept of mending to broader learning opportunities across subjects and extracurricular activities:

- **Science Teachers:** Explore the **physics of forces and tensile strength**. Have students examine the structure of different fabric weaves (e.g., plain, twill, satin) and discuss how the fiber arrangement affects how a tear spreads. They can then test the effectiveness of different stitching patterns (e.g., whipstitch, backstitch) to see which one provides the most durable repair for a given fabric type.
- **Art Teachers:** Focus on **line and form**. Have students learn to mend a tear using a darning technique. This process of weaving thread across a hole can be approached as a drawing exercise, creating a new and intricate texture on the fabric. They can use different colors of thread to highlight the repair and create a unique artistic pattern.
- **Math Teachers:** We can apply **data analysis and geometry**. Students can measure the length and shape of a tear and then calculate the amount of thread and time needed for the repair. They can create charts comparing the efficiency of a machine repair versus a hand-stitched repair, analyzing the pros and cons of each method.
- **Social Studies Teachers:** Investigate **circular economy and community repair initiatives**. Students can research local and global repair movements, such as community workshops or shared repair resources. They can explore how these initiatives promote sustainable practices and challenge "throwaway" culture and then create a

presentation or infographic to share their findings with the class. Alternatively, students can research how post-war and economic hardship eras influenced repair practices and attitudes toward clothing longevity.

- **English Teachers:** Analyze how the term "mending fences" is a metaphor for fixing a relationship. Students can write a short story or a persuasive essay that compares the physical act of fixing a torn piece of fabric to the social and emotional act of mending a personal relationship.
- **Speech & Debate Club:** Use textile waste and fast fashion as a **debate topic**. Students can research the ethical issues and then craft arguments for or against policies that promote sustainability in the fashion industry.

9. FACILITATION SUPPORT

Facilitators can lead this lesson confidently—with or without sewing experience—by focusing on pacing, modeling, and student encouragement.

Facilitation Tips:

- Demonstrate slowly, narrate clearly, and use examples of both functional (strong) and artistic (decorative) repairs. Highlight the value of patience and precision.
- Encourage peer collaboration for shared learning and troubleshooting.
- Be sure to demonstrate both the invisible, functional stitch (matching thread, small whipstitches) and the visible, decorative stitch (contrasting floss, intentional pattern). This approach clarifies for students that fixing a tear is both a practical skill and an aesthetic choice.
- Teach students to use painter's tape or pins to meticulously line up the torn edges before stitching. This precision is critical for preventing the fabric from shifting and distorting the mend.
- Show students how to use a backing piece of fabric (or even paper) underneath the tear before starting the repair. This technique prevents the fabric from shifting and provides hidden reinforcement.
- Instruct students to stitch perpendicular to the original fabric grain for maximum strength and longevity. Remind them that weaving thread (darning) is the best way to rebuild a frayed area.
- Teach students to stitch past the visible ends of the rip. This technique reinforces the highest stress areas and prevents the tear from running further when the garment is worn.
- Briefly demonstrate the simple darning technique (weaving thread back and forth) as the most effective way to mend larger, frayed sections or holes in knit items.

For additional inspiration on creative repair, customization, and sustainable fashion practices, explore [here](#). This resource provides real-world examples of how individuals transform clothing through mending, design, and personalization. It's perfect for sparking ideas for classroom projects or student-led creativity, demonstrating that repair is not just about saving clothes, but about self-expression and modern style.

Classroom Integration Ideas

- Pair this lesson with academic units in environmental science or economics to analyze the waste and resource cost of discarding torn items.
- Encourage students to log their repairs in a sustainability journal, noting the skills gained and materials saved.



- Partner with the Theater or Athletics Departments to offer a repair day for jerseys, costumes, or team bags, applying skills to professional maintenance.
- Lobby for a permanent "Mending Station" in the school library or common area, positioning it as a campus-wide sustainability resource.

Assessment & Reflection

- Observe student participation and progress during practice and challenge sessions, focusing on stitch density and the flatness of the final mend.
- Assess the documentation handout to evaluate whether the student chose the best mending skill for the specific type of tear.
- Ask for brief written or photo reflections documenting their repair process and what they learned about resilience and sustainability.

WEAR LONGER PROJECT

TEAR REPAIR CHALLENGE DOCUMENTATION & REFLECTION

STUDENT CAPTURE SHEET

Driving Question: How can we apply design and repair techniques to transform donated garments?

Student(s) Name: _____

Original Garment: _____

Mending Skill Focus (Circle One): Tear Fixing / Darning / Other _____

The "Before"	The "After"
PHOTO 1 Please insert or paste a photograph of the garment BEFORE any cutting, mending, or alteration took place.	PHOTO 2 Please insert or paste a photograph of the finished garment, modeled or displayed to show the repair and renewed life.

Initial Condition & Diagnosis

What was wrong with the garment (type of **tear, hole, or damage**)?

What was the planned repair (e.g., **functional mend, decorative mend, darning method**)?



WEAR LONGER PROJECT

TEAR REPAIR CHALLENGE DOCUMENTATION & REFLECTION

STUDENT CAPTURE SHEET

The Transformation Narrative

Describe your process. What steps did you take to fix the tear? Did you encounter any challenges, and, if so, how did you overcome them?

Sustainability & Final Reflection

Sustainability Value. How does repairing this tear contribute to a sustainable wardrobe or the circular economy?

Final Takeaway. What is the most important lesson you learned about making things last?

