



FACILITATOR GUIDE

Patching a Small Hole

GRADES

9–12

SKILL

3 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 **patch a small hole** to high school students (grades 9–12). Students learn to repair worn or damaged fabric using hand-stitching or adhesive patches, combining creativity with sustainability. This lesson highlights how visible mending can turn flaws into features while promoting repair as a practical and artistic act that helps reduce textile waste.

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

1. ENGAGE

Begin by asking students if they've ever noticed a small hole forming in their favorite hoodie, jeans, or backpack. Did they keep wearing it, throw it out, or try to fix it? Use this discussion to connect to the idea of waste: Most garments are discarded due to minor damage that could be repaired in minutes.

Share a few quick facts about textile waste, noting that over 11 million tons of textiles end up in landfills each year in the U.S. alone. Frame patching as a way to take ownership of one's wardrobe while reducing its environmental impact. Reinforce that visible repair can be a mark of creativity and individuality rather than imperfection.

DID YOU KNOW?

Surveys show that many people aren't confident repairing small holes, even though they're one of the top reasons clothes are thrown away. The **Wear Longer Project** emphasizes that repair skills empower people to save garments and reduce landfill impact.

Pre-Assessment: Identifying Prior Knowledge and Skills

Before beginning the patching activity, take a few minutes to see what students already know about sewing, repairing, or customizing fabric. This review helps you tailor pacing and support.

Discussion Prompts

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

- "Have you ever sewn or patched something?"
- "What tools or materials do you think are needed to fix a small hole in fabric?"
- "Who in your life has shown you how to fix or create something by hand?"



Quick Skills Check

Give each student a piece of scrap fabric, a needle, a spool of thread, and a pair of scissors.

1. Ask students to thread their needle with a length of thread and tie a secure knot at the end.
2. Have them practice sewing a simple running stitch, whipstitch, or decorative stitch on their fabric scrap.
3. Observe each student's comfort level and dexterity as they sew, noting familiarity with stitching techniques and areas where additional guidance may be helpful.

FACILITATION TIP

Use the results to adjust pacing. Spend more time demonstrating stitch control for beginners or introducing decorative stitching options for advanced students.

2. MATERIALS

Gather materials that allow students to explore both functional and decorative repair methods. Each student will need:

- Needle and all-purpose thread or embroidery floss
- Pair of scissors or fabric shears
- Small fabric patches cut from scraps or repurposed garments
- Straight pins
- Practice fabric with a pre-cut hole
- (Optional) Iron and ironing board
- Copies of **Wear Longer Project: Hem & Style Challenge** Student Handout
- [Basic Stitches Guide](#) (for reference)

FACILITATION TIP

Encourage students to bring old clothes or denim scraps from home to make the lesson more personal. Offer a few different patch styles, such as basic, decorative, or patterned, for variety.

3. DEMONSTRATION

Introduce patching as both a practical and creative repair skill. Emphasize that the goal is to strengthen the fabric while allowing for personal expression through color, pattern, or stitching style.

Step-by-Step Resource

[How to Patch a Hole Guide](#)

Step-by-Step Demonstration

This section provides a detailed breakdown for demonstrating the patching process. Model each step clearly, using the step-by-step resource as a reference. Demonstrate how to sew a running stitch as well as a whipstitch so that students can choose which technique best fits their comfort level.

- **Prepare the fabric:** Trim any loose threads around the hole to prevent fraying.
- **Choose and position the patch:** Select a patch slightly larger than the hole. For inside patches, align it behind the hole; for decorative patches, position it on top.

FACILITATION TIP

Move through each step slowly and check student progress frequently. Demonstrate both visible and invisible mending options so students can decide how to express their style.

- **Secure the patch:** Use straight pins to hold the patch in place.
- **Sew the patch:** For a clean look, use small whipstitches around the edge of the patch. For decorative mending, try running stitches or embroidery-style patterns. Reinforce the stitching on areas with more wear.
- **Finish and test:** Trim extra threads and gently tug the patch to ensure that it's secure. (Optional) Smooth the area with an iron, if needed.

4. PRACTICE

Invite students to practice patching on scrap fabric before attempting patches on their own items. Demonstrate the difference between functional mending that emphasizes neat, tight stitches and decorative mending that features colorful, expressive stitches.

Practice Flow

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

ENCOURAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Remind students to focus on precision first and then experiment with creativity once they're confident.

Peer-to-Peer Learning

Pair students to observe and support each other's progress. One can sew while the other checks for tension, spacing, and patch placement, and then they can switch roles.

Troubleshooting Tips

Common Issue	Quick Fix
Patch won't stay in place	Use more pins to keep the patch from moving around.
Fabric frays under stitches	Trim edges and use tighter stitches around the perimeter.
Patch puckers or bunches	Loosen thread tension and smooth the fabric as you sew.
Uneven stitches	Slow down and guide the needle in small, even motions.



5. CHALLENGE

Transform the lesson into an engaging, creative experience with the **Wear Longer Project: Patch Power Challenge**. Each student (or team) has the choice of repairing a real garment or designing a creative patch to address a hole or flaw. They might use contrasting colors, embroidery, or unique shapes to reimagine the piece. Their goal is to experiment with color and design by emphasizing that patches can contrast or complement the fabric.

Provide each student with the Wear Longer Project: Patch Power Design & Reflection Student Handout to guide their design process, document their material choices, and reflect on the success of their creative mend.

How It Works

- **Choose the Path:** Select either a real garment with a hole or a practice fabric square to create a "flawed" piece.
- **Design the Patch:** Experiment with color, shape, and fabric to design a patch that is both functional and expressive.
- **Document the Design:** Complete the planning portion of the **Patchwork Design Template**, detailing the design choices made before starting the physical repair.
- **Apply the Technique:** Use the learned patching and stitching skills to securely and neatly apply the patch.
- **Document the Flip:** Complete the reflection portion of the Patchwork Design Template, detailing the specific techniques applied and the project's outcome.

This challenge allows students to demonstrate mastery by turning a damaged garment into a unique, wearable work of art, celebrating the flaw rather than hiding it.

Presentation Option

Host a **Patchwork Parade** to showcase students' repaired and redesigned pieces in a gallery-style display or a peer-voting event. Provide slips of paper and pens for each exhibit so visitors can leave written compliments, reflections, or notes of appreciation for the creators. This presentation highlights how every visible mend tells a new story, adding lasting value to every piece.

6. REFLECTION

Conclude the activity with reflection questions that help students connect personal expression with environmental impact:

- "How did your patch choice reflect your personality or creativity?"
- "What did you notice about the strength or look of your stitches as you practiced?"
- "How might visible mending change how you think about clothing and waste?"

Highlight that visible mending allows students to literally weave their own story and personality into their clothes, making each piece completely unique.



7. COMMUNITY PROJECT

Design Lab: Renewing and Reusing

Extend the learning beyond the classroom with a collaborative **Wear Longer Repair & Share** where students collect gently used clothes with small holes or tears and repair them to donate to a local shelter, thrift store, or community closet.

This project allows students to apply their skills, understand the circular economy in practice, and directly address textile waste while supporting those in need. Teams will collect garments with minor flaws, assign tasks (such as sorting, choosing patches, or checking quality), execute functional or decorative repairs to make the items durable and wearable, and include handwritten notes with the donations about how mending reduces waste and supports sustainable fashion.

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

Other Project Ideas:

- **Patch Party:** Host an after-school event where students teach peers how to patch small holes or fix tears on their own clothes.
- **Art for Change:** Turn repaired fabric into a large art installation that visually represents waste reduction and the power of collective mending.
- **Repair Pop-Up Booth:** Offer on-the-spot mending services during school events (like sports games or fairs) to raise awareness and practice diagnostic skills.

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

8. ACTIVITY EXTENSIONS

Encourage teachers across disciplines and leaders of after-school clubs to integrate patching and mending concepts into their own subject area or to design a collaborative project with another class.

- **Science Teachers:** Explore the **material science of adhesives and fasteners**. Have students experiment with different patching methods (sewing vs. fabric glue) on various fabrics. They can test the durability of each patch by washing and wearing the garment, and analyze which method and material creates the strongest, most lasting repair.
- **Art Teachers:** Focus on **visual storytelling and decorative repair**. Have students use patching to create a unique piece of wearable art. They can choose fabrics, colors, and patterns that not only fix the hole but also add a personalized design element, turning the "flaw" into a feature.
- **Math Teachers:** We can explore **estimation and geometry**. Students can estimate the size of a hole and then calculate the minimum amount of fabric needed for a patch, adding a specific seam allowance. Or estimate how much fabric area is "saved" by each patch and calculate the total material preserved. They can also work with geometric shapes, using different shapes for their patches and explaining their choice based on the location and type of tear.
- **Social Studies Teachers:** Investigate the **history of mending and thrift culture**. Students can research how cultures have traditionally viewed patching, from the visible mending of Japanese **boro** to the "Make Do

and Mend" campaigns of World War II. They can discuss how these traditions reflected resourcefulness and a culture of anti-consumerism.

- **English Teachers:** Have students write a short narrative from the perspective of a garment that has been patched. The story could explore themes of being "reclaimed" or "given a second chance," with the patch symbolizing a new beginning.
- **After-School Clubs:** Invite fashion club, sustainability club, or art club members to design signature patches that represent their group identity. Students can apply these patches to uniforms, tote bags, or jackets, both repairing holes and creating a visible symbol of belonging. This makes patching a way to combine repair with creativity and community pride.

9. FACILITATION SUPPORT

Facilitators don't need to be expert sewers to lead this activity. They just need to be patient and encouraging by focusing on helping students to feel confident in experimenting and expressing themselves through repair.

Facilitation Tips:

- Move slowly, demonstrate both function and creativity, and showcase examples of visible mending. Model every movement clearly, and narrate what you're doing. Use a document camera for visibility.
- Encourage collaboration and peer mentoring to support different learning paces.
- Anticipate and troubleshoot common frustrations (threading, tension, or securing knots).
- Help students understand that when patching, the choice they make defines the aesthetic outcome and the overall message of the garment. There are two main approaches:

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.

Functional Patch (The "Invisible" Fix)	Decorative Patch (Visible Mending)
The goal of a functional patch is reinforcement and concealment . You are repairing the damage in a way that is neat, secure, and as unobtrusive as possible so the patch is either not visible or barely noticeable.	The goal of a decorative patch is creative expression and celebration . This technique is often called Visible Mending (like the Japanese technique of <i>Sashiko</i>). Here, the mend becomes a deliberate part of the garment's design.
Placement Sewn on the inside (underside) of the garment.	Placement Sewn on the outside (top side) of the garment or used to frame the tear.
Material A piece of fabric that matches the original garment's color and weight closely.	Material A piece of fabric that contrasts with the original garment's color, texture, or pattern (e.g., a bright floral patch on dark denim).



Thread Thread that matches the color of the garment.	Thread Contrasting thread (bright yellow on blue, red on black) to make the stitches stand out as a design element.
Purpose To hold the torn edges together and prevent the hole from getting larger without drawing attention to the mend.	Purpose The purpose is to transform a flaw into a feature, adding character, personality, and a visible story to the garment.
When choosing a patch: ask yourself if you want the mend to be a secret (Functional Patch) or a statement (Decorative Patch).	

Classroom Integration Ideas

- Pair this lesson with units in sustainability, global studies, or art and design.
- Have students document their work in a “Mending Journal” that includes photos, notes, and reflections.
- Use the repair skill as a subject for a quick photography or media project, challenging students to create a photo essay or short GIF demonstrating a specific technique.

Assessment & Reflection

- Observe students' technique, focusing on stitch security, fabric handling, and neatness during practice and challenge activities.
- Assess the **Patchwork Project** Student Handout to check the forethought and intent behind the material and color choices (functional vs. decorative).
- Review with short written reflections to evaluate what students learned and how their design choices reflect sustainable thinking and personal creativity.

WEAR LONGER PROJECT

PATCH POWER CHALLENGE DESIGN & REFLECTION

STUDENT CAPTURE SHEET

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

Student(s) Name: _____

Garment/Flaw Type: _____

Patch Goal: (Check One)

- ☐ Functional: Hide or reinforce the damage with matching fabric.
- ☐ Decorative: Highlight the repair as a feature (Visible Mending).

Part 1: The Design Plan

Design Concept: Briefly describe your vision (e.g., "Use a bright yellow star patch and outline it with black thread for contrast").

Patch Placement Sketch (Use this space to sketch the garment and mark where the patch will go. Note colors and stitch lines.)



WEAR LONGER PROJECT

PATCH POWER CHALLENGE DESIGN & REFLECTION

STUDENT CAPTURE SHEET

Part 2: Technique & Materials

Component	Choice/Type Used	Why did you choose this?
Patch Material	 (e.g., Denim scrap, cotton, felt)	
Thread Color	 (e.g., Contrasting red, matching blue)	
Stitch Type	 (e.g., Running stitch, whipstitch)	
Adhesive?	 (Yes/No)	

Part 3: Reflection

Design Success: How well did your finished patch match your original sketch, and what does the final design communicate about the item?

Challenge Overcome: What was the most difficult part of the actual patching process, and what did you learn?

