



FACILITATOR GUIDE

Hemming an Item

GRADES

9–12

SKILL

2 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 high school students (grades 9–12) how to **hem a clothing item**. Using simple sewing and adhesive techniques, students learn how to repair and resize garments for better fit and longevity. By mastering this essential skill, they gain a practical way to extend a garment's life, reduce clothing waste, and make more mindful decisions about the clothes they wear.

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

1. ENGAGE

Begin by asking students if they've ever had pants or sleeves that were too long or ever found an item they loved at a thrift store but didn't buy because it didn't fit perfectly. Use these ideas as a springboard for discussing how the fashion industry promotes constant buying instead of repairing or adapting what we already own.

Share that the average American throws away over 80 pounds of clothing each year, often due to easily fixed size or style issues. Emphasize that learning to hem clothing empowers students to take control of how their clothes fit and feel, turning "imperfect" items into favorites.

Encourage students to see hemming as a creative and sustainable act that also saves money, keeps clothes in circulation longer, and gives new life to what might otherwise be discarded.

DID YOU KNOW?

The U.S. generates nearly 17 million tons of textile waste every year, much of it from garments discarded simply because they don't fit right. The [Wear Longer Project](#) shows that learning simple repairs and customizations helps extend garment life and fight textile waste.

Pre-Assessment: Identifying Prior Knowledge and Skills

Before beginning the hemming activity, spend a few minutes assessing what students already know about measuring, folding, and stitching fabric. This review helps you anticipate which parts of the demonstration may need extra modeling or support.



Discussion Prompts

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

- "Have you ever tried to fix or shorten a piece of clothing?"
- "What tools do you think are needed to make a clean, straight hem?"
- "Why might someone choose to hem an item instead of buying a new one?"

Quick Skills Check

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

1. Provide a scrap of fabric and ask students to thread a needle with a length of thread, tying a knot at the end.
2. Ask students to sew a running stitch or a whip stitch on their fabric scraps.
3. Observe how comfortable and adept students are with sewing straight, even stitches.

FACILITATION TIP

Use this information to identify students who may need help with sewing the types of stitches needed for hemming. Consider pairing students so that those with better precision can mentor peers who are still developing fine-motor control.

2. MATERIALS

Before class begins, gather the necessary supplies and prepare demonstration materials. Each student will need:

- Needle and all-purpose thread (choose thread to match fabric color)
- Scissors or fabric shears
- Flexible measuring tape or ruler
- Straight pins
- Iron or fabric-safe adhesive tape (optional for no-sew method)
- Practice fabric or scrap pant leg/sleeve
- Copies of **Wear Longer Project: Hem & Style Challenge** Student Handout
- Basic Stitches Guide (for reference)

FACILITATION TIP

For demonstration, prepare one fabric example for sewing and one for the adhesive option. Using a contrasting thread for the demonstration can help students see the stitches clearly.



3. DEMONSTRATION

Introduce the demonstration by explaining that hemming is about precision and patience. Hemming can be used to shorten garments, as well as teach attention to detail and pride in craftsmanship.

Step-by-Step Resource

[How to Hem an Item Guide](#)

Step-by-Step Demonstration

This section provides a detailed breakdown for demonstrating the hemming process. Model each step clearly, using the partner's how-to resource as a reference and visual support. Demonstrate both the **hand-sewn hem** and the **adhesive tape hem** methods so that students can choose which technique best fits their comfort level.

- **Measure and mark:** Have students fold the fabric to their desired length, using a measuring tape or ruler for accuracy, and mark the fold line with chalk or a fabric pencil.
- **Press the fold:** Use an iron to create a crisp fold along the marked line. This crisp fold makes sewing or taping easier and ensures a straight edge.
- **Pin or clip:** Secure the fold with straight pins or fabric clips to hold it in place.
- **Sewing method:** Demonstrate a simple running stitch along the inside edge of the hem, keeping stitches small and even. Emphasize that neatness and consistency matter more than speed.
- **Adhesive method:** For those using hem tape, show how to place the tape along the fold and press with a hot iron to secure. Reinforce safety reminders for handling heat.
- **Finish:** Trim loose threads and inspect for evenness. Encourage students to check how the hem hangs when finished.

FACILITATION TIP

Move slowly through the demonstration and repeat any tricky steps. Emphasize measuring twice and sewing once. Encourage questions and remind students that precision comes with practice.

4. PRACTICE

Invite students to practice hemming on scrap fabric before attempting a real item. Model the rhythm of small, even stitches, and encourage them to focus on maintaining consistent spacing and alignment.

Practice Flow

- Guide the class through each step together, from measuring and marking to finishing.
- Circulate to check progress and troubleshoot common issues, such as uneven stitching or hems.
- Once students feel comfortable, have them work in pairs to teach each other the process.

ENCOURAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Encourage patience and self-assessment as every attempt builds skill and confidence.

Peer-to-Peer Learning

Pair students so that one sews while the other observes, checking stitch length and straightness. Then switch roles. Encourage pairs to discuss which techniques helped them stay accurate and patient.

Troubleshooting Tips

Common Issue	Quick Fix
Uneven hemline	Re-measure the fold and re-press with an iron before sewing.
Thread bunching	Shorten thread length and maintain gentle, even tension.
Visible stitches	Use smaller, closer stitches or a matching thread color.
Crooked fold	Use more pins or clips and work slowly along the edge.

5. CHALLENGE

Transform the lesson into an engaging, style-focused experience with the **Wear Longer Project: Hem & Style Challenge**. Each student (or team) takes a thrifted or old garment and transforms it by creatively adjusting its length. Their goal is to **upcycle the item** using the hemming skill (along with other alterations) to transform it. They might turn long pants into cropped styles, alter sleeves into shorter ones, or reimagine an oversized shirt for a new look.

Provide each student with the **Wear Longer Project: Hem & Style Challenge** Student Handout to track their process and capture their before-and-after photos.

How It Works

- **Source the Garment:** Find an item (e.g., jeans, skirts, wide-leg trousers) that is too long or has a damaged hemline.
- **Apply the Hack:** Use the learned hemming techniques (sewn or adhesive) to achieve a custom length and style, such as a perfect cuff or a trendy raw hem.



- **Document the Flip:** Photograph or model the finished item and share **before-and-after** photos to celebrate the creativity and craftsmanship involved.
- **Present the Result:** Present the final garment, explaining the repair techniques used and the sustainability value added.

Invite students to showcase their work through a class fashion show or gallery walk, celebrating the creativity and craftsmanship behind each transformation. This challenge highlights that repair and redesign go hand in hand.

6. REFLECTION

Conclude the activity with a reflective discussion that connects students' work to sustainability and personal expression.

Ask students questions like:

- "How did learning to hem change your perspective on clothing repairs?"
- "What was the most challenging or rewarding part of the process?"
- "How might this skill influence your future shopping or clothing choices?"

Encourage them to think of hemming not just as a fix but as a form of customization, empowerment, and environmental stewardship.

7. COMMUNITY PROJECT

Design Lab: Pop-Up Hemming Station

Extend the learning beyond the classroom with a collaborative **Wear Longer Hemline Hub**. Students can set up a pop-up hemming station during a school event or community fair, offering basic hemming services in exchange for donations of used clothing or fabric scraps.

This project allows students to apply their skills, build confidence in public demonstrations, and raise awareness about textile waste. Encourage students to record how many garments they repair and estimate how much material was saved from disposal.

Other Project Ideas

- **Hemming Help Desk:** Host lunchtime sessions where peers can bring clothes for repair.
- **Drama Department Partnership:** Help adjust costumes for school performances.
- **Sports Team Support:** Offer repair and hemming help for athletic uniforms, practice gear, or spirit wear.
- **Marching Band Collaboration:** Assist with maintaining and repairing band uniforms to keep them performance-ready.
- **Thrift Revive Project:** Collaborate with a local thrift store to repair and resell gently used items.

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 hemming concepts into their own subject area or to design a collaborative project with another class.

- **Science:** Explore the **physics of tension and drape**. Students can hem different types of fabric (e.g., cotton, polyester, denim) and compare how the material's properties, like density and fiber structure, affect the final hem. They can analyze which fabrics create a stiff or a soft drape and discuss the scientific reasons why.
- **Visual Arts:** Create mixed-media fashion pieces that combine stitching and design elements. Focus on **design and proportion**. Have students hem a garment to achieve a specific aesthetic effect, such as creating a high-low hem or adding a decorative stitch to the hemline. They can sketch their design ideas first, and then execute the hem and analyze how the length and style affect the garment's overall look.
- **Math:** Calculate proportional **measurements** and apply **geometry** for hems and alterations on different-sized garments. Students will measure the circumference and desired length of a garment, calculate the precise amount of fabric needed to fold the hem, and use geometric principles to ensure a straight line. They can also use their measurements to calculate how much material is conserved by hemming rather than discarding a garment.
- **Social Studies:** Investigate the **history of hemlines and fashion trends**. Students can research how hemlines have changed throughout history, from the long dresses of the Victorian era to the miniskirts of the 1960s. They can discuss how hemlines reflected social norms, economic shifts, and women's roles in different historical periods. Alternatively, students can research cultural traditions of tailoring and how access to clothing repair reflects social class and sustainability values.
- **English:** Analyze the symbolism of **clothing in literature**. Have students research a character's clothing descriptions from a novel and write a short essay on how the author uses a character's garments to reveal the character's personality, wealth, or inner turmoil.
- **Drama & Theater:** As part of a **costume design** project, students can be challenged to hem garments to fit actors for a play, ensuring that the length is appropriate for the character and era. This activity gives them hands-on experience with practical costume work.
- **After-School Organizations:** Partner with student groups such as fashion club, marching band, or sports teams to apply hemming skills in real contexts. Students might adjust uniforms, create upcycled fashion pieces, or host peer-to-peer repair workshops that extend learning beyond the classroom.



9. FACILITATION SUPPORT

This section is designed to support facilitators at all skill levels by focusing on pacing, clarity, and encouragement.

Facilitation Tips

- Move slowly through the demonstration, use visible gestures, and model steady stitching.
- Encourage students to share successes and challenges to build a supportive classroom culture.

Classroom Integration Ideas

- Pair this lesson with units in consumer science, engineering design, or sustainability.
- Encourage students to document their process in a portfolio or reflection journal.

Assessment & Reflection

- Observe technique and accuracy during practice and challenge activities.
- Ask for short written reflections about what students learned and how they might apply this skill outside of class.

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.

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

Student(s) Name: _____

Original Garment: _____

Mending Skill Focus (Circle One): Hemming / Patching / Other _____

The "Before"	The "After"
Please insert or paste a photograph of the garment BEFORE any cutting, hemming, or alteration took place.	Please insert or paste a photograph of the finished garment, modeled or displayed to show the new style and fit.
Photo 1: Original Garment	Photo 2: Final Transformed Garment

Initial Condition & Diagnosis

1. What was wrong with the garment (fit, length, damage)?
2. What was the planned repair (e.g., shorten length by six inches, create a raw hem)?



The Transformation Process

Repair & Design Narrative:

Describe the steps you took to repair and upcycle this item. Explain the specific hemming technique you used (sewn or adhesive) and any design decisions (e.g., adding a cuff, turning pants into shorts).

Challenges:

What was the most difficult step in adjusting the length, and how did you overcome it?

Sustainability Reflection

If you had not repaired this item, where would it have likely ended up?

How does this "Thrift Flip" contribute to a more sustainable wardrobe?

What is the final name of your upcycled creation?

