

The Second-Hand Status Symbol

C1 | Adults / Teens | Reading + Vocabulary + Discussion | 60-75 minutes

BEFORE YOU READ

Talk with a partner. Can buying second-hand goods change consumer culture, or can it become another way to consume more?

1. Match the words (1-6) with the definitions (A-F).

- | | | |
|-----------------|-------|---|
| 1. stigma | _____ | A. limited and difficult to obtain |
| 2. curate | _____ | B. connected with a desired way of life or status |
| 3. scarce | _____ | C. replace or take the place of something |
| 4. displace | _____ | D. a negative social judgement attached to something |
| 5. aspirational | _____ | E. select and organise carefully |
| 6. circular | _____ | F. designed so materials are reused rather than thrown away |

2. Read the article. The bold words are the vocabulary from Activity 1.

1. For many years, second-hand shopping carried a **stigma**. It was associated with necessity rather than choice, and people often preferred new goods even when older ones were perfectly usable. Today, resale shops and online platforms present used clothing, furniture and electronics as individual, stylish and sometimes highly desirable.

2. Part of the change comes from presentation. Sellers **curate** collections, photograph items attractively and tell stories about where they came from. A used jacket is no longer simply old; it can be vintage, rare or connected to a particular period. When an item is **scarce**, its history can increase its appeal.

3. This development may have environmental benefits. A more **circular** economy keeps products in use for longer and can reduce the demand for new materials. It may also encourage people to repair, swap and think more carefully about ownership.

4. However, resale is not automatically sustainable. If shoppers buy several cheap second-hand items that they do not need, the practice may not **displace** new consumption at all. It may simply add another channel for buying. The environmental effect depends on whether a used purchase replaces a new one and whether the product is kept in use.

5. There is also a social question. As second-hand shopping becomes **aspirational**, popular charity shops and local markets may become less affordable for people who relied on them. A positive cultural change should not ignore who benefits, who is priced out and what happens to the less fashionable items that remain.

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UNDERSTAND, DISCUSS AND WRITE

3. Comprehension. Answer in complete sentences. Use the article to help you.

1. How has the image of second-hand shopping changed?

2. How do sellers increase the appeal of used items?

3. What environmental benefit can a circular economy bring?

4. Why is buying second-hand not automatically sustainable?

5. What social concern does the final paragraph raise?

4. Discuss. Talk in small groups. Give reasons and examples.

- What makes a used item more appealing than a new one?
- Should second-hand sellers describe an item's history?
- How can resale remain affordable?
- Does sustainable shopping require buying less, not only buying differently?

5. Homework: Write an opinion paragraph.

Write 180-220 words: 'Second-hand shopping is a solution to overconsumption.' How far do you agree? Use examples and consider a limitation.

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ANSWER KEY AND TEACHING NOTE

Vocabulary matching

1. **stigma** - D
2. **curate** - E
3. **scarce** - A
4. **displace** - C
5. **aspirational** - B
6. **circular** - F

Comprehension answers

1. How has the image of second-hand shopping changed?

It has moved from being associated mainly with necessity to being presented as stylish, individual and desirable.

2. How do sellers increase the appeal of used items?

They carefully select and photograph items and use stories about their history, rarity or period.

3. What environmental benefit can a circular economy bring?

It can keep products in use longer and reduce demand for new materials.

4. Why is buying second-hand not automatically sustainable?

It may not replace new consumption if people buy unnecessary items or do not keep them in use.

5. What social concern does the final paragraph raise?

Growing popularity may make second-hand goods less affordable for people who relied on them.

Teaching note

Compare vocabulary answers before reading. Help learners plan a response to the claim about second-hand shopping: examples and a limitation. Accept accurate comprehension paraphrases and supported personal responses.