The Repair Revolution

Broken phone. Favourite hoodie. Fix it or replace it?

Pick a side

1. Which is worse: a broken phone, lost headphones or a ruined favourite top?
2. Name something you keep although it is old.
3. Would you rather learn to sew, fix a bicycle or cook five meals?

Get the story

Your headphones stop working before a trip. Your favourite hoodie has a broken zip. Your phone works, but its battery does not last until lunchtime. Replacing everything sounds easy until you see the cost. Repairing sounds sensible until you discover you have neither the tools nor a nearby repair shop. These everyday decisions connect teenagers to a much bigger debate.

Imagine that your favourite jeans have a small hole. Would you repair them, ask someone for help or buy another pair? Many people choose the last option, even when the jeans could last much longer.

Repairing things used to be a normal part of daily life for many families. People mended clothes, maintained bicycles and kept basic tools at home. However, we should not imagine that every old product was better. We remember the strong items that survived and often forget the ones that broke.

Some American schools helped students learn practical skills. In traditional Home Economics classes, students might cook, sew or manage a household budget. In Shop classes, they learned to use tools or work with wood and metal. These classes were not identical in every school, and related courses still exist today under other names. Spain has Technology and vocational courses, but not an exact national equivalent of traditional US Home Ec.

Get the story / continued

Why repair less now? New products can be surprisingly inexpensive, while paying a skilled worker takes money. Some modern objects are also hard to open or need special parts. Even a simple repair can be frustrating when nobody at home knows how to do it.

A growing number of Repair Cafés offer another approach. Volunteers help visitors examine broken objects and sometimes teach them a skill. A successful repair saves an item from the bin. Even an unsuccessful one can help someone understand how a product works.

Perhaps schools should teach more life skills again. But which lessons should students lose to make time? And should it be a school's job to teach every practical skill? The answer may depend on what families, local businesses and community groups can already offer.

You can change repair culture without becoming an electronics expert. A school could run a clothes swap or invite someone to teach a safe sewing repair. Nobody should open batteries or electrical devices without suitable knowledge and supervision. Sometimes the useful skill is knowing when to ask for help. Before buying something new, what could you check about spare parts, durability and repair costs?

Word power

mend - repair clothes or other fabric

household - connected with the people and things in a home

budget - a plan for how money will be spent

workshop - a place where people build or repair things

replace - put a new thing in the place of an old one

spare part - an extra part used to repair a product

skilled - having the training or ability to do something well

volunteer - someone who works without being paid

practical - useful for doing things in real life

survive - continue to exist or work

Prove it

1. What is one reason repairs can be expensive?

A. Skilled labour costs money

B. Tools are always free

C. Every product lasts forever

2. What did traditional Shop classes often teach?

A. Only foreign languages

B. Tool use and practical construction

C. Only football

3. Does the article say these subjects have completely disappeared?

A. Yes, everywhere

B. No; related courses still exist

C. Only in Spain

4. What might a Repair Café offer besides a fixed object?

A. A free new product

B. A useful skill

C. A new school certificate

Quick mission: Repair triage

A jacket zip breaks, a phone battery fails and a bicycle tyre goes flat. Rank which you would repair first. Explain costs, safety and who could help.

This or that?

Choose a side. Give a reason. Respond to a different view. Opinions earn points for reasons, not agreement.

1. Repair for 40 euros or replace for 60?
2. Used premium phone or new basic phone?
3. Clothes swap or shopping trip?
4. Learn the repair or pay an expert?
5. One durable item or three cheap ones?
6. Keep your old style or follow a trend?

Watch / notice / question

Use the optional short video linked on your student page, or use the article as a report. Identify a main claim, supporting evidence and an unanswered question.

Student page: https://bilingually-curious.pages.dev/student/teens/repair-revolution/

Have something to say

1. When is replacement the sensible choice?
2. Would you buy a repaired phone? What would you check?
3. Who taught you a practical skill?
4. Should schools teach more repair skills?
5. How do trends encourage replacement?
6. Can cheap clothes be good value?
7. What makes a brand worth more?
8. Should repair prices be shown before purchase?
9. Who should pay when a product breaks unusually early?
10. Could sharing tools work locally?
11. How could repairing become fashionable?
12. What would persuade you to keep a phone another year?

Make your case

Your school has a fictional 200-euro budget for a repair event. Choose three activities, identify equipment or expert help, and include students without money or tools.

Plot twist: Your favourite activity involves electrical devices, but no qualified repairer is available. Find a safe alternative.

Final outcome: Pitch three activities, a budget, a safety rule and a way to measure waste avoided.

Useful language

I would choose ... because ...

One advantage is ..., but ...

I see your point. However, ...

What evidence supports that?

Could we agree on ...?

I used to think ..., but now ...

One more idea

Make a repair label for a fictional product: expected life, spare parts, repair costs and one honest limitation.

Exit ticket: one useful word, one idea you questioned and one question you still have.

Source links, optional media and the interactive game: https://bilingually-curious.pages.dev/student/teens/repair-revolution/