



## **How Fashion was Rationed during the 1940s** **by Fatima Najm**

Ellen Rock returned home exhausted and excited after showing her designs at London Fashion Week.

Her grandmother hugged her and said, “Congratulations, we are all so proud of you. I heard on the BBC radio that London Fashion Week brings in £32 billion to the economy and employs over nine hundred thousand people. It’s a very important part of our economy. Now, would you like some tea?”

“Yes please. Grandma, was it always like that, was fashion always an important part of our economy?”

Ellen’s Grandmother smiled. She could tell Ellen wanted to listen to a story about her childhood.

“When I was a child, it was important that fashion was controlled by the British Government.”

“How?” Ellen asked looking puzzled.

“Elastic and zips were banned so men had to wear suspenders. People were also asked to wear white because of the blackout rules. During the war, cars weren’t allowed to have their headlights on, so if you wore white, car drivers could see you better.”

“Really? Tell me more,” Ellen said as she poured the tea into cups.

“Well, the Government needed factories to produce other things that we needed during the war, so in 1941, clothes were rationed and taxed. My mother had to look at how many coupons she had before even thinking of going out to buy a shirt.”

“How can the Government tell anyone what to wear?”

“They were fighting a war and they needed people to wear items that were more important than just everyday clothes. Siren suits actually became popular for men and women.”

“What are those?”

“You might call them onesies, shirt and trousers stitched all in one, so if there was an air raid, you could pull it on quickly over your pyjamas when you heard the siren and run for a shelter. Winston Churchill himself was photographed in his siren suit.”



**Suspenders**



**Onesie**



**Pyjama**

Ellen giggled.

“He must have looked very funny. What were the other trends?”

“The Government introduced a utility range which allowed only 15 styles of dresses for women. For men, only single breasted suits were allowed with double-breasted suits being banned. By doing this, the Government saved five million square metres of cloth every year!”

“Could you sew your own clothes?”

“The Government encouraged people to sew or mend their clothes rather than buying new ones or wasting something they could reuse.”

Ellen sighed, “Today we waste so much fabric, fuel and energy when we produce clothing. I want to make sure my clothing brand is produced in an ethical and responsible manner. I use locally made fabric and I have it all stitched here in Shoreditch. Grandma, have you heard of the zero-kilometre and zero waste trends?”

“No, my dear, tell me more.”

“I can use those trends to create a brand that supports charities, uses fair trade policies and encourages people to think before they buy. The idea is that we should all recycle and reuse everything we have so that we reduce the waste we are responsible for.”

“I would be even more proud of you if you could build a brand like that. I’ll drink to that.” Ellen’s grandmother said as they clinked cups.

# Questions

1. Do you know the differences between thousands, millions and billions? How many zeroes do they have after them? Fill in the blanks below:

One Thousand is 1,000

One Million is 1,

One Billion is 1,

Can you write £32 billion and 9 hundred thousand in figures (numbers)?

2. Who was Winston Churchill? (He was famous enough for his image to be printed on the £5 note).



3. What's the difference between single- and double-breasted suits?  
Do you know the current trend?
4. What do you do in your daily life that reduces waste and helps the environment?  
Do you recycle? If so, how?  
Do you re-use or up-cycle? If so, what have you done?



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