

**Lesson Topic: Tackling Your Laundry Pile**

**Supplies Needed:**

* See University of Nebraska-Lincoln resource “Oh No! Stains”! Activity Sheet for a list of supplies.

**Concepts and/or Learning Objectives:**

* Washing your clothes – sort, plan, dial, fold, iron
* Learning what the symbols on clothes labels mean
* Laundry Stain Remover – Stain Activity
* Fabric Softening

**Introduction:**

**Washing your clothes**

Some of you may have grown accustomed to having someone else do your laundry (thanks, mom!). The time is quickly approaching when you're going to have to cart that massive pile of clothes you've let sit in the corner of your room, down to the laundry room and give it a go. Don't panic. We'll cover the basics, share a few tips, and get you on your way. Let's start with what you'll need.

Simply rinsing clothes in water will not clean them. Without soap or detergent, water remains on the surface of the fabric. The water drops clump together and do not spread, mix with dirt, or pentrate the fibers.

**Activity:**

**Step One: Sort**

 Many of your clothes can be washed. The first step in learning about laundry is sorting. Incorrect sorting can cause clothing to become gray or stained. These problems require more work and energy to solve. While you are sorting clothes, check for items left in pockets, like pens, tissues, or lip balm. When you sort your clothes, combine items of similar color, fabric type, and soil level into loads of the proper size for the washer you are using. Sorting makes it easier to select the right laundry products, water temperature, and wash cycle.

Organize your clothes into four basic piles:

1. Whites/Lights
2. Darks
3. Delicates
4. Towels/Jeans

**#1 RULE: Do not EVER mix a new dark colored item in with your lighter colors or whites.**

**Activity continued:**

**Step two: Plan**

**Pretreating**. Accidents will happen! Frequently, garments become stained and need special attention. The earlier you treat spots or stains, the easier they are to remove.

For greasy stains, like shirt collars, treating with one of several commercial pre-wash products may be helpful. They are available as sprays, liquids, or sticks. Pre-wash products are effective for food and oily stains.

**Detergents** have several functions. They remove, emulsify, dissolve, and suspend soil in a washing solution. Detergents contain two important ingredients – surfactants and builders. Surfactants are wetting agents. They lower the surface tension of water. Wetting agents permit water to spread out, penetrate fabrics more evenly, and remove many water-soluble soils.

Detergents come in several forms – liquids, powders, and tablets. They may be low or high sudsing. Detergents, not the amount of suds, get clothes clean. Too many suds can interfere with the washing action and be difficult to rinse from clothes.

**Laundry additives** may also be helpful in laundering. Bleach helps remove problem stains, keeps white fabrics white, disinfects, and deodorizes. Chlorine bleach performs all of these functions. Oxygen bleach does not offer as much bleaching power as chlorine bleach, but it is safe to use on most washable fabrics, finishes, and colors. All bleaches are designed for use with detergents.

**Step three: Dial**

You should check the tags on any pieces of clothing that you are unsure how to wash. There's a secret code on there that will tell you things like water temperature, bleach or no bleach, whether or not it can be ironed, and so on. Check out a cool cheat sheet handout from [http://onegoodthingbyjillee.com/](http://www.onegoodthingbyjillee.com/).

**Setting the washing machine** is not an exact science. The clothes need to circulate freely in the wash basket during washing and rinsing. To save water and detergent, adjust the water level to fit the size of the load. Experience will help you decide what level to select.

Read permanent care labels when selecting the water temperature and wash cycle. Warm water is a 50/50 mix of hot and cold water. Cold water is ineffective for removing heavy, greasy soil. If you want to save energy, use cold water for lightly soiled, delicate fabrics.

Here's a general guide to choosing water temperature:

* hot for whites, linens and towels
* cold for anything you don’t want to shrink or fade (including any whites that fall into this category)
* warm for everything else

**Handwashing** - Washing machine action may be too rigorous for some sweaters and delicate garments. Wash them by hand using cool to warm water and a mild liquid detergent. Rinse thoroughly and dry according to label instructions. Lay sweaters flat to dry. Once your load is washed, it's time to hit the dryer. Choose the setting that best describes your clothing. Not sure? Choose “normal.”

**Step four: Fold**

This is where things can easily start to fall apart. You've washed like a champ, now you need to fold and put it all away like a champ. Wrinkles are no fun. It just means having to iron, and nobody wants to deal with that step if you don't have to.

**Do not overdry.** Overdrying can shrink garments. To avoid wrinkling, hang or fold them immediately. Most dryers give you several choices of heat slections and drying time. Follow care labels to determine drying requirements.

**Activity Continued:**

**Step five: Iron**

Have to give a presentation in class today? Or did you skip step four and now you're paying the price? Either way, ironing isn't hard, it's just another step.

**Iron and press if needed.**  Many permanent press fabrics and those with special fabric may not need ironing. If garments need ironing, remove them from the dryer while they are slightly damp. Or dampen them with a sprinkle bottle.

**PRO TIP:** You can also use a tabletop with a folded towel on top of it if you're short on room to store an ironing board. Just remember to shut off your iron when you're done.

**Laundry Stain Removers**

Let’s face it. Spills will happen from time to time, no matter how careful you are. Fortunately, laundry stain removers are available to clean up new and set-in stains. Even blood, grass, make-up, chocolate, oil, grease, and dirt stains can’t stand up to some of the best stain removers on the market.

**What Is Laundry Stain Remover?**

Laundry stain removers are designed to remove stains from your laundry. They are usually available in powder, spray, or gel form. Usually, you apply the stain remover to the spot, let it set for a few minutes, and then wash the item normally. The sooner you can treat the stain, the greater chance you’ll have of clearing up the stain for good.

**Fabric Softener**

**Fabric softeners** help make clothes softer, minimize wrinkling, and reduce static cling. They come in liquid or disposable sheets. Fabric softeners can build up on the fabric if you use too much or if used every time the fabric is laundered. Using too much fabric softener reduces the absorbency of the fabric.

**Work through the Activity Information on these pages followed by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln’s “Oh No, Stains!” activity.**

**Discussion Points/Reflection Questions:**

We’ve learned today about washing clothes: sort, plan, dial, fold, and iron, along with laundry stain removers and fabric softener.

What are ways you can start helping with various steps right now?

What do you need to practice becoming more comfortable completing on your own?

How can you share this information with your family and friends to increase their laundry care knowledge?

**Sources:**

* Indiana 4-H Beginning, Intermediate, and Advanced Consumer Clothing Manuals
* <https://adulting.asu.edu/living>

* <https://www.onegoodthingbyjillee.com/>
* <https://www.wisebread.com/the-5-best-laundry-stain-removers>
* <https://child.unl.edu/5393c8d7-ed44-4bbd-8932-7a0f121ab009.pdf> - University of Nebraska-Lincoln “Oh No, Stains” Activity

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