



Global Voices Information Sheet

Where Your T-Shirt Comes From



Photo courtesy of www.bbc.co.uk

Sweatshops

- A sweatshop is a place where people work that has dangerous conditions and where workers have few rights.
- Sweatshop workers are paid low wages and must work long hours despite laws that regulate minimum wages, working hours and age.
- The factories produce many different types of goods including clothing and furniture.
- In recent years, some companies have received criticism and even faced boycotts for using sweatshops in the production of their goods.

Fair Trade

- This system of trading ensures workers receive living wages, opportunities and safe working conditions when they produce their goods.
- Terms of fair trade include a ban on forced and child labour, long-term trade contracts, sustainable production, equal employment opportunities and transparency in all operations.
- Goods can be labeled as fair trade by the Fair Trade Labelling Organization (FLO)

Key Terms

- **squalid** – foul or repulsive, as from lack of care or cleanliness
- **textile** – any cloth or goods produced by weaving, knitting or felting

Global Voices Elementary Educator Resources

Note to Educators:

The following activities are designed to stimulate a current events discussion. Generative in nature, these questions can be a launching point for additional assignments or research projects. Teachers are encouraged to adapt these activities to meet the contextual needs of their classroom.

In some cases, reading the article with students may be appropriate, coupled with reviewing the information sheet to further explore the concepts and contexts being discussed. From here, teachers can select from the questions provided below. Activities are structured to introduce students to the issues, then allow them to explore and apply their learnings.

Since these activities are designed as discussions rather than formal lessons, assessment strategies are not included.

Pre-reading Questions:

Before reading the Global Voices column, review the following activities with your class:

1. Ask students to examine the label of one piece of clothing they're wearing (or carrying) and locate the country of origin. Then, make a list of the countries on the board.
2. Challenge students to list the raw materials that may have been used to produce this article of clothing. Guess the number of people that may have been involved in the production process (from start to finish). Share examples.
3. Ask, "How often do we look at the country listed on the tags of clothing we buy? Should this influence our purchase decision?"

Post-Reading Questions:

After reading the Global Voices column, review the following activities with your class:

Note to teachers: It may be helpful to point out the location of countries mentioned in the column, particularly the former Soviet State of Uzbekistan. Show students with the use of tape or yarn the different production stages before the t-shirt ends up in Canada. Alternatively, a blank world map could be supplied where students can trace the route taken from raw materials to finished t-shirt.

1. What surprised you about this column?
2. What questions would you like to ask?
3. The column presents many different life experiences. What questions would you ask each of the people profiled if you could?

4. In a chart like the one below summarize the steps (and the countries) involved in the production of a t-shirt.

| Country | Who is Involved/How | Typical Wages | What Motivates the Workers |
|---------|---------------------|---------------|----------------------------|
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5. Looking at the final column in question #2, think about the perspective of the workers involved in each country. Why do they do this work under these conditions? (**Note:** Teachers should help students understand how living in poverty limits peoples' choices.)
6. Why does the worker in Bangladesh fear conditions getting better?
7. Why do you think the Uzbek government insists that no child labour exists?
8. The situations described in the column may seem unfair or unjust to people from a variety of countries. But, what is the dilemma for Canadian consumers (in other words, whose responsibility is this)?
9. Think about the consumer patterns of Canadian youth.
- What typically motivates a t-shirt purchase?
 - To what extent do youth consumers consider the countries of origin or the type of labour involved in production? Do you think it should matter? Why or why not?

Research/Writing Extensions:

- Learn more about child labour on the Free The Children website at www.freethechildren.com/learn-facts. Create (write or film) a one-minute public service announcement for youth on this issue and actions you can take.
- Choosing fair trade items are one way consumers can ensure that people along the production path are paid fairly for their work. Research other fair trade products that are readily available in Canada (i.e., coffee, chocolate, clothing, etc).
- Products marketed as fair trade can be more expensive. In a written reflection, build a persuasive argument for why Canadians ought to or should choose them over less expensive alternatives.

Additional Note: Elementary teachers may be interested in the novel series, *I Am A Taxi* and its sequel, *Sacred Leaf* by Canadian author Deborah Ellis. This series describes conditions in South America where farmers struggle to harvest coca crops. The novel presents the complexity of the issue when the needs of farmers conflict with the political agendas of governments.