

*Disclaimer: This is a machine generated PDF of selected content from our databases. This functionality is provided solely for your convenience and is in no way intended to replace original scanned PDF. Neither Cengage Learning nor its licensors make any representations or warranties with respect to the machine generated PDF. The PDF is automatically generated "AS IS" and "AS AVAILABLE" and are not retained in our systems. CENGAGE LEARNING AND ITS LICENSORS SPECIFICALLY DISCLAIM ANY AND ALL EXPRESS OR IMPLIED WARRANTIES, INCLUDING WITHOUT LIMITATION, ANY WARRANTIES FOR AVAILABILITY, ACCURACY, TIMELINESS, COMPLETENESS, NON-INFRINGEMENT, MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR A PARTICULAR PURPOSE. Your use of the machine generated PDF is subject to all use restrictions contained in The Cengage Learning Subscription and License Agreement and/or the Gale Virtual Reference Library Terms and Conditions and by using the machine generated PDF functionality you agree to forgo any and all claims against Cengage Learning or its licensors for your use of the machine generated PDF functionality and any output derived therefrom.*

Title: Teens in sweatshops: who made the cloths you're wearing? was it someone your age?

Author(s): Victor Landauro

Source: *Junior Scholastic*. 106.8 (Nov. 24, 2003): p8. From *General OneFile*.

Document Type: Article

Copyright : COPYRIGHT 2003 Scholastic, Inc.

<http://place.scholastic.com/>

Full Text:

OBJECTIVES

Students should understand

\* Thousands of teens, adults, and illegal immigrants work in dangerous and unfair conditions in some U.S. factories and abroad.

TEACHING STRATEGY

Ask students to name their favorite brands of clothes, shoes, and sporting goods. Record students' responses on the chalkboard.

BACKGROUND

Congress passed the Fair Labor Standards Act in 1938. The set of laws established a minimum wage and eventually reduced the workweek to 40 hours for most U.S. employees. The act also required that laborers who worked overtime got paid wages at a rate of 1 1/2 times their regular pay scale. In addition, the act banned children 15 years old or younger from working in factories during school hours.

THINKING SKILLS

MAIN IDEA: What is a "sweatshop"? (According to a consumer advocate, a sweatshop is any workplace that employs child laborers, pays low wages, or operates under poor working conditions.)

MAKING CONNECTIONS: Why do some businesses operate sweatshops? (Business owners want to maximize profits without increasing costs. Cost-cutting moves sometimes include paying workers low wages or not using safety measures that might reduce company profits.)

ACTIVITY

WHO SUPPORTS SWEATSHOPS?: Refer to the list the class made earlier in the Teaching Strategy section. Instruct students to form groups to investigate the labor practices of the company that makes their favorite product. Students can contact the company directly and request financial and labor reports. Information on sweatshops is also available on some Web sites. Students should create pamphlets describing the company's labor practices and whether this company supports its workforce.

"Rats were running all over the place. It was impossible not to step on them," Erica C. remembers. When she complained, she says, her boss told her to "shut up, get back to work, or quit."

In 2000, Erica, then 18 and an illegal immigrant from Mexico, had few options. So she stayed at her job as a seamstress. Erica worked in a garment (clothing) factory in Los Angeles, California, that supplied shirts to Forever 21, a teen-fashion company.

Earning \$250 dollars, or less, for a 50-hour workweek meant that survival was a struggle.

"I'd work 12 hours a day without any break," Erica told JS. "The bathrooms were disgusting and full of cockroaches. But I had to work. I needed money for rent, for food."

Erica was later fired from her job after working 60-hour weeks during the Christmas shopping season. She says she was dismissed for complaining that she did not receive her overtime pay.

What Is a Sweatshop?

U.S. laws protect worker safety and guarantee minimum hourly wages (currently set at \$5.15 an hour for most U.S. jobs). Still, many businesses operate "sweatshops" to increase company profits at laborers' expense.

"A sweatshop is any business that uses child labor, pays substandard [below minimum] wages, or creates an unsafe workplace," says Darlene Atkins of the National Consumers League, a nonprofit advocacy (support) group. "It involves a lot of different products, not just clothing. There are sweatshops for shoes, toys, jewelry, sporting goods, fruits and vegetables, and just about any kind of product."

Today, most U.S. sweatshops employ adults and illegal immigrants. The increased scrutiny (attention) from U.S. authorities has deterred sweatshop owners from hiring child laborers. According to Atkins, young workers are used mostly in sweatshops in Asia and South America.

"Many of the countries in those areas do have child labor laws. But there's not a lot of political will to enforce them," says Atkins.

In recent years, several well-known clothing brands, including the Gap, have been accused either of operating or profiting from sweatshops in the U.S. and overseas.

"No factory is perfect," admits Dan Henkle, a Gap Inc. executive.

In response to charges that the Gap profits from sweatshop labor, the company designed a "Code of Vendor Conduct" to ensure workers' rights. Should a manufacturer fail to comply with these principles over time, Henkle told JS, the Gap will cease to do business with that factory.

"People Are Afraid"

Jeanne Zhuo's family immigrated to New York City from China in the 1980s. At age 13, she began to work at the same garment sweatshop as her mom, aunt, and other relatives.

"It was very crowded," Jeanne says. "In the summer, there was no [air conditioning]. A lot of machines gave off heat, [and] the windows were always closed. It got so hot, it was hard to breathe."

Today, Jeanne works as an investigator for the New York State Department of Labor. She inspects garment factories throughout New York City.

"I know how bad life can be [in a sweatshop]," she says. "People are afraid to speak up, to stand up for their rights."

According to the department, about 50 percent of the city's 4,000 garment factories violate (break) the minimum-wage laws. Last year, the department recovered more than \$3 million in back wages for sweatshop workers.

The Struggle Continues

Today, Erica C. is 21 and continues to work as a seamstress, but for another company. She likes her new job and says that she is paid fairly. In 2002, Erica won part of a legal settlement from Forever 21.

But many other sweatshop workers are not as fortunate. In 2000, Antonio M. worked in a garden-hose factory in Brooklyn, New York. An illegal immigrant, Antonio, 42, was earning about \$300 dollars a week for 50 hours of work.

One night, he went to the hospital with a bloody nose. Doctors told him that exposure to the factory's toxic chemicals had damaged his kidneys.

"No one ever warned me about the chemicals," says Antonio. "A friend I worked with is now dead [from the exposure]. Another is dying in a hospital. I need a new set of kidneys or the same will happen to me."

Make the Road by Walking, an advocacy group in New York City, has filed a lawsuit on behalf of Antonio. Pray financial award or settlement he receives will go toward his urgently needed transplant.

"This is injustice," says Antonio. "What happened to me shouldn't happen to anyone. They didn't pay me much when I worked there [at the factory]. And now, I'm the one who's paying."

Your Turn WORD MATCH 1. garment A. support 2. substandard B. attention 3. advocacy C. break 4. scrutiny D. below minimum 5. violate E. clothing

THINK ABOUT IT

Were the clothes, games, or sports equipment you brought recently made in a sweatshop? How could you find out?

ANSWERS

1. E

2. D

3. A

4. B

5. C

Landauro, Victor

**Source Citation** (MLA 7<sup>th</sup> Edition)

Landauro, Victor. "Teens in sweatshops: who made the cloths you're wearing? was it someone your age?" *Junior Scholastic* 24 Nov. 2003: 8+. *Gale Power Search*. Web. 17 Jan. 2014.

Document URL

**Gale Document Number:** GALE|A111025050

---