

# UNDERSTANDING COTTON

for Secondary Schools

**Part 1: Where does cotton grow?**

**Part 2: Where do our clothes come from?**

**Part 3: Trade**

## Part 1: Where does cotton grow?

### **Aims:**

Reading and using world maps.

### **What to do:**

Ask pupils to look up in an atlas and mark on the outline map the following countries where cotton is grown:

China; Pakistan; Turkey; Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS - formerly the Soviet Union); USA; Tanzania; Zambia; Uzbekistan;  
Senegal\*; Mali\*; India\* Cameroon\*, Egypt\*, Brazil\*, Burkina Faso\* and Kazakhstan\*

\* Fairtrade Cotton is grown here

Ask pupils to pick three countries from the list above and research the following topics

- Why does cotton grow in your chosen countries?
- Are there any difficulties of growing this crop?
- What are the main 3 exports for your chosen countries?
- How important is exporting to your economy?

### Photo captions – from seed to shop

The cotton growing process - match the processes below with the right picture, and place them in order.

1. **PLANTING AND HARVESTING.** Cotton seeds ripening four months after they have been planted. The seed pods pictured are called bolls. Each boll contains about 30 seeds. The seeds are covered in thousands of cotton fibres, which give the bolls a white, fluffy appearance.

2. **GINNING.** Separating the seeds from the cotton fibres. This is called ginning. When cotton is harvested, the seeds and the fibres are picked together. The seeds must be taken out to leave just the cotton fibre, which is called lint. Ginning takes place at a cotton mill. The seeds and impurities are taken out by machines and the pure lint is carried and loaded on a truck to be sent to the next stage. The work at the cotton mills is heavy work.

3. **SPINNING.** Before the cotton can be used for making cloth, it has to be spun into thread, or yarn. The tangled lint is stretched and twisted around the wheel until it forms a continuous thread. There are lots of different ways to wind the yarn, depending on what it will be used for. Here we see yarn being wound into large cones.

4. **WEAVING.** Weaving cotton on a hand-loom. In India, about 17 million people work as hand-loom weavers.

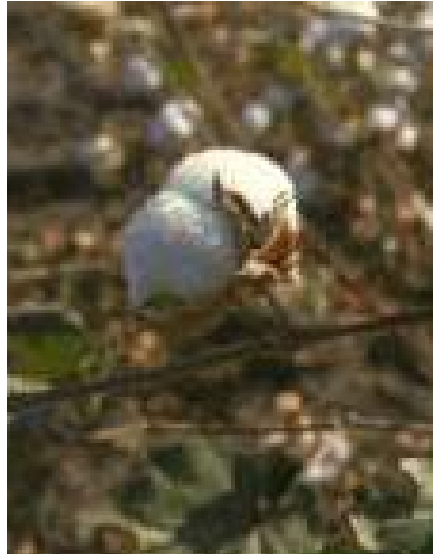
5. **DYEING.** This cotton is being dyed by hand. Cotton can be dyed at many different stages, before or after printing. A finished cloth hangs on the line, waiting to be spread out to dry. There are over 300 different plants in India which give colours for dyes.

6. **PRINTING.** Printing a pattern onto the cotton using a wooden block into which a design has been carved. Designs are often based on flowers. The block is dipped into a tray of dye and then pressed directly onto the cloth by hand. Most block printing is done in the north-western states of India, such as Gujarat. Screen printing is another option for printing onto fabric.

7. **STITCHING.** Sewing cotton cloth to make clothes. About eight million people work in the clothing industry around the world. Factory conditions are tough. Women tend to get paid less for the work that they do.

8. **SHOPPING.** Choosing clothes in a shop in the UK. The clothing industry makes a lot of money, but how much of it goes to people in the country that makes the clothes?

## Part 1: Where Does Cotton Grow?



## Part 2: Where do our clothes come from?

### **Aims:**

To understand the journey of an item of clothing

To understand that we rely on a number of different countries for the clothes we wear

To collect evidence as a way of investigating a topic

### **What to do:**

#### **Clothes labels**

In the classroom, ask pupils to carry out a survey and look at the origin of as many different items of their clothing as they can. As a class draw up a list of all the different countries that have been traded with. Now draw a graph to illustrate the most common countries of manufacture. Pupils may also like to think of other questions in their survey. They may also find that their clothes may have been made in the UK, for instance, but from products which were not grown here, such as cotton.

#### **Jeans**

Denim (which is used to produce jeans) is made out of cotton. It is then weaved in a particular way to result in the jean fabric.

If possible provide the pupils with a pair of jeans (or ask them to bring some jeans in). Working in groups, ask pupils to list all the different parts of a pair of jeans: zips, stitching, buttons, fabric (dyed, weaved etc). Ask pupils to record their answers.

Do they think one person is responsible for all of this? Different processes are done in different countries. Ask pupils to guess how many countries a pair of jeans has travelled before reaching a UK consumer. Ask them to give reasons for their answers and list possible countries involved. If they're struggling, begin by telling them there can be up to 10 countries involved in the production of a pair of jeans. You can start by breaking down the process (cotton picking, spinning, weaving, dyeing, buttons, labels, sewing). See map below for answers (you can distribute to pupils after they have tried to come to their own conclusions).

#### **Discussion Questions:**

- Why does one pair of jeans need to travel so much in its production?
- How does global production affect the environment?
- How does the global production effect country economies or people in each country?
- How does global production influence working conditions?

## Part 2: Where do our clothes come from?

### Resource A: The journey of a pair of jeans



### Resource B: Consider the costs of a pair of jeans



## Part 3: Trade

### Aims:

- To help pupils understand the concept of trade as a world-wide activity.
- To explore the costs involved in producing an item of clothing, and who makes money at different stages
- To question the fairness of the distribution of revenue

### What to do:

Use resource B (or any picture of a pair of jeans) and ask pupils to write around the edge, listing the costs of a pair of jeans. They may list materials, workers wages, transport etc. At this point, it is a useful exercise in getting pupils to think about the various different costs and different stages of production. (An extension for older pupils could involve listing social and environmental costs also, and exploring those issues).

Provide pupils a copy of the supply chain of who makes money along the production of a pair of jeans (resource C). Split class into groups of 5, each person represents a different part of the supply chain. They can wear sticky name badges so that the others know who they are.

#### **Answers**

Retailer – 50% (£15)  
International Clothing Company (trademark) – 25% (£7.50)  
Shipper – 11% (£3.30)  
Factory Owner- 13% (£3.90)  
Worker – 1% (30p)

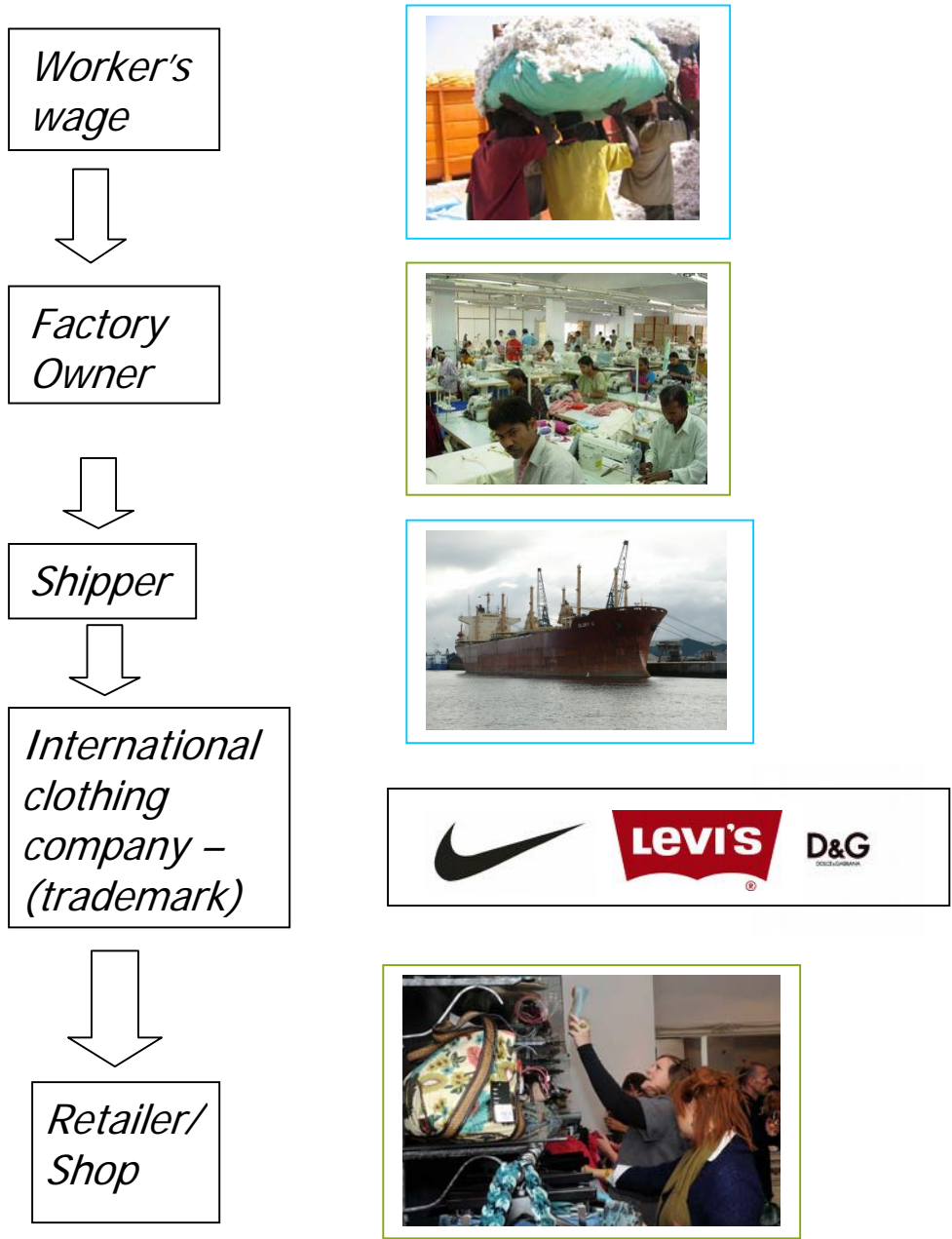
- Ask pupils to discuss in groups how much each person should get from production of a pair of jeans. Tell them not to worry about the total price yet. Pupils should record each amount in the 'Initial Proportion' column of the chart (resource D).
- Now tell pupils price of the jeans is £30, and they must renegotiate to ensure the total adds up to no more and no less than £30. Each person should put their case across, using the role cards. Encourage them to justify why they've made their choices. When agreement has been reached, record each negotiated amount in the 'Negotiated Proportion' column of the chart
- You can then reveal the actual proportions received by each stage of the production sequence by listing the 'Actual Proportion' column.
- Ask each group whether they are satisfied by the actual proportion of the selling price they have received.

### Plenary

Who makes the most profit from the global production in garments and is this situation fair?

**Resource C: Breakdown of the trading process**

(photocopy this page for pupils undertaking role play)



**Resource D**

	Initial Proportion	Negotiated Proportion	Actual Proportion
<i>Worker's wage</i>			
<i>Factory Owner</i>			
<i>Shipper</i>			
<i>Trademark</i>			
<i>Retailer/Shop</i>			

### Resource E: Role Cards

#### Cotton Pickers

You live in a rural area and pick cotton for 14 hours a day, working the longest hours. The work you do is hard physical labour in hot conditions. You have to plough the land, sow the seed, thin the seedlings, weed the land, adding fertilizer. The fertilizers you have to use are often dangerous, and can cause you health risks. You have to pick the cotton by hand. The money earned from exporting cotton is important for your country's development. You worry about having enough money to buy food, pay medical bills or to send your children to school. You may not be able to meet together with other workers to complain about your pay, the way you are treated at work or where you live. You will be discouraged from joining a trade union.

#### Factory Owner

It is your responsibility that the garments are made. They have to be made well and on time. You need money to buy the materials; fabric, beads, buttons, labels, zips etc. Your workers are responsible for cutting and sewing the final garments together. You work in an office negotiating prices, coordinating shipments of various different materials and managing factory workers. You will have to promise the clothing companies and retailers that you will be able to meet their clothing demands each week. You will have to keep the promises, even if something goes wrong in the supply chain and you are let down.

#### Shipper

You work 6 days a week and have a family with 3 children. Your costs may include:

Ships: Big cargo ships are very expensive to buy and keep in working order.

Fuel: You need to pay for fuel for the ships which may be at sea for up to five weeks.

Insurance: If a cargo is lost or damaged, it may be your fault and you may have to pay for it.

License fee: You will have to pay for an import license to bring your products into the European Union.

Port fees: You will have to pay for your ships to be in port at both ends of the sea journey.

#### International clothing company/Trademark

Every year you try to gain a larger market share, but consumers are more and more demanding, wanting to buy good quality clothes at cheaper prices. You have marketing specialists working for your brand, but the price is the factor that attracts consumers' attention, especially discounted products, which also need to make a profit to satisfy investors. The most profitable way forward is to move production to a poorer country with fewer employment regulations, where governments are willing to give tax concessions and don't seem concerned about the environment or working conditions in factories so they can remain in power. Generally, you don't care about the working conditions in factories. You work in a high powered job and are responsible for getting clothing lines out on time and meeting customer demands. You also have to make sure you are the leading brand.

#### Retailer/Shop

As the retailer you have no guarantee that people will buy your clothes. You have to sell the clothes that people want to buy when they want to buy them, which may mean keeping a large stock. To sell your clothes you need a shop in a central location, in the city centre or shopping centre for example, but these sites are not cheap. You also have to make your shop attractive which means expensive decoration. You are at the end of the production process and most vulnerable to consumer demand, you need to make a good profit on your clothes to cover the bad times.



## Cotton farming problems – the causes

### Why why why?

#### Aim:

- Encourage pupils to consider the problems facing the cotton farming industry.
- Encourages pupils to consider causes and consequences.

#### What to do:

Present pupils with 5 different problems arising in cotton production (Resource G). Ask pupils to read the problems and think about why they occurred.

#### Ball throwing – looking at causes

*Note: You can either do the ball throwing activity before the worksheet, to stimulate thoughts around causes, or after the worksheet (Resource H) to consolidate thoughts about causes.*

- Resource G shows the 5 main problems of current practices in cotton farming, but explain to the pupils that we want to look at a breakdown of all the different causes.
- Pupils stand in a circle. Teacher has a ball and begins by calling out one of the 5 problems listed in resource G. These problems are the consequences of cotton farming. Ask pupils to put their hand up if they can think of a cause - why does this problem occur?
- Throw the ball to one of the pupils with their hands up and ask them to say their reason. Ask the class to think of the next cause from the one just shouted out by the person with the ball. Instruct the person to pass the ball to the person with their hands up. Carry on until the class can think of no more.

*\* Note, if the class aren't used to the format, you can try them with an issue they are familiar with. For example, I got detention today in school 'why?' 'because I didn't do my homework' 'why' 'because I got a late night' 'why' because I spent time with my friends' why 'because I've been sad lately' why 'because my dog died'. Saying the word 'why' between each one can help.*

Use the worksheet (resource H) and ask pupils to fill in the blanks with possible causes.

#### Discussion Questions:

Looking at causes and consequences should encourage understanding of different parts of the process and raise questions, e.g. many causes of the problems may be linked to westerners, such as the demand for quick and cheap fashion. Has the consequences chain raised awareness of how the lives of people in one part of the world can have an impact on the lives of people in another part of the world?

## Resource G: Five different problems caused by cotton production

### Adapted from Environmental Justice Foundation (EJF)

#### Child labour

In Uzbekistan - the world's 2nd largest cotton exporter - the government orders hundreds of thousands of children - some as young as seven - to harvest the annual cotton crop. Hard work for little or no pay. Cotton does not benefit the rural poor, but the ruling dictatorship, which derives millions from the export of cotton. In Andhra Pradesh, India, over 100,000 children have been documented working for 13 hours a day for just US50 cents. In West Africa, children are trafficked to work in cotton fields.

#### Pesticides

Nearly half of the chemicals used for cotton production are considered toxic enough to be classified as 'hazardous' by the World Health Organisation. An estimated 1 million to 5 million cases of pesticide poisoning occur every year, resulting in 20,000 reported deaths among agricultural workers and at least 1 million requiring hospitalisation. Aldicarb, a powerful nerve agent, is one of the most toxic pesticides applied to cotton, yet it is also the 2nd most used pesticide in global cotton production. *A single teaspoonful of aldicarb on the skin would be sufficient to kill an adult.*

#### US Subsidies

Subsidies are when governments pay farmers extra money for their crops. Governments might do this to ensure that the crop sells well and to make jobs for people in their country. The US government gives cotton farmers in the US subsidies (extra money), which makes it hard for other farmers to compete. It drives the prices down, and the result is devastating for developing countries. Up to 99% of the world's cotton farmers live and work in the developing world. Even though Malian cotton farmers, for example, actually produce cotton more efficiently and more cheaply than their US counterparts, farmers struggle to pay for the basics of life, like healthcare and education for their children and are forced into extreme poverty.

#### Debt and Suicide

Cotton farmers are being forced into debt. Big Multi National companies charge a fortune for the fertilizers that are needed, they then only buy the cotton for a fraction of the price it costs to produce the cotton. Farmers are forced to borrow money with high interest rates. Cotton farmers in India were committing suicide because they were not able to meet their debt payments. Furthermore, to kill themselves they were drinking the poisonous chemicals they used to spray their crops.

#### Workers Conditions

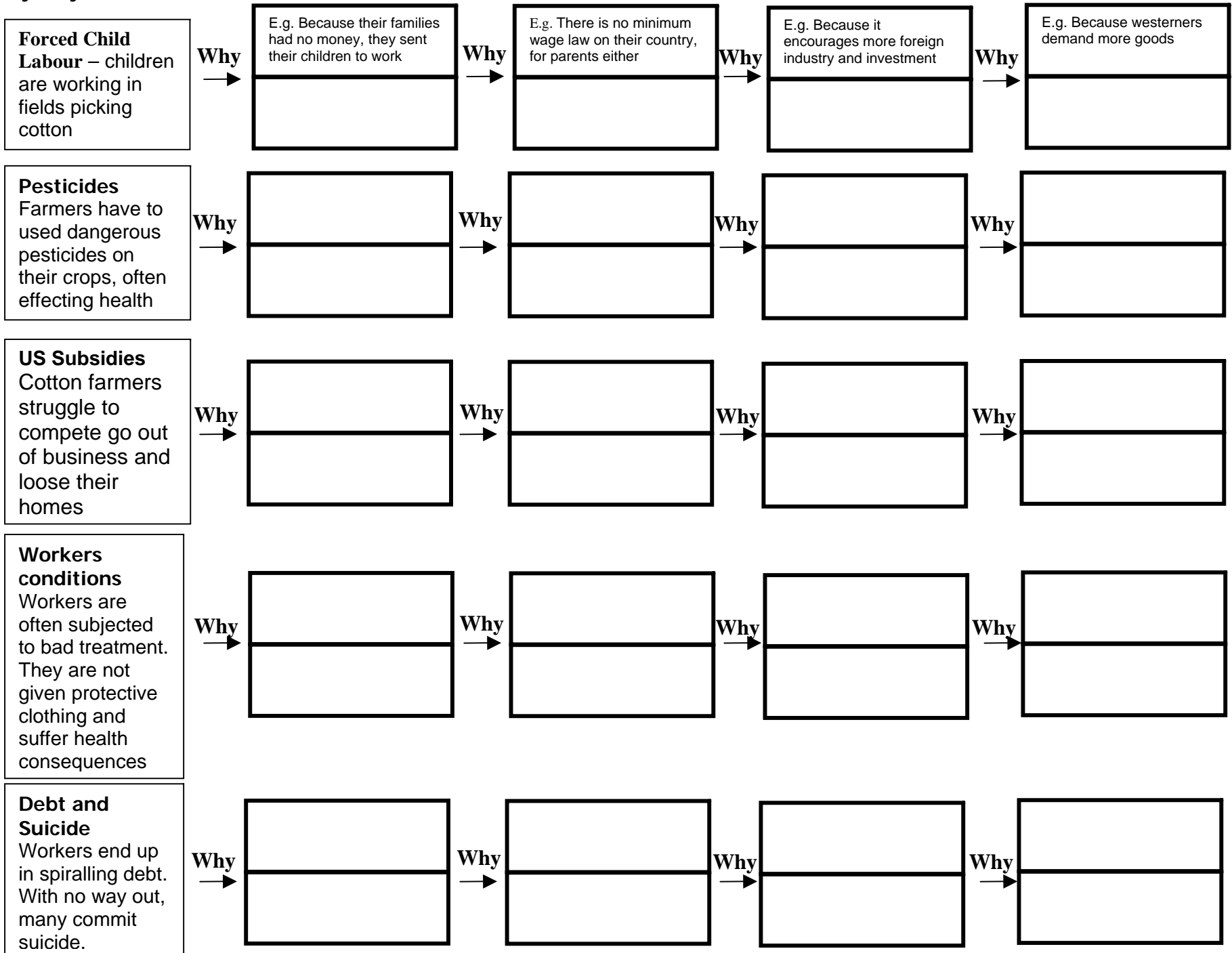
Many workers are not given protective clothing while picking cotton. In Uzbekistan, workers have to drink straight out of irrigation canals (i.e drinking the same water that is used for the crops). They are often found wearing sandals, and no protective clothing. The cotton is picked by hand, and workers are expected to carry heavy sacks. They are forced to work by the government, and have no choice. They receive very little money, not enough to live off.

For more information visit: [www.ejfoundation.org](http://www.ejfoundation.org)

Resource H: Why why why Chain

Best reproduced A3 size

Exploring issues in the cotton industry – looking at causes



# Fairtrade

Fairtrade is an alternative trading mechanism, through which workers receive a fair and stable price.

## Aims:

To help pupils identify some actions they can take around the issues of trade and poverty

Understanding the topic of Fairtrade can help pupils identify a tangible way of making a difference.

## What to do:

Ask pupils to research 5 guarantees of Fairtrade and link them to an issue or problem from cotton farming (resource G). They may find it useful to use the internet to research more about the 5 Fairtrade Guarantees below. How does the guarantee from Fairtrade help to avoid the problems faced by farmers?

- 1) Fair and stable price
- 2) No child slavery
- 3) Safe working conditions
- 4) Protection for the environment
- 5) Social premium



A useful website:  
[www.fairtrade.org.uk](http://www.fairtrade.org.uk)

Problem faced	Fairtrade Guarantee, how does it help to tackle the problem faced?

### Things you can do that make a difference

There is a list below. Writing letters can form part of an English lesson, using persuasive language and literacy skills.

- ❖ Ask your favourite clothes shop to sell more Fairtrade clothing items
- ❖ Look into Fairtrade school uniforms
- ❖ Become a Fairtrade School, this involves 5 goals:

- Set up a Fairtrade School Steering Group with at least half pupils and which meets at least once a term.
- Write and adopt a Fairtrade Policy which has the support of the board of Governors and is signed by the Head teacher.
- Use and sell Fairtrade products as much as possible.
- Learn about Fairtrade in at least three subjects in two year groups.
- Take action for Fairtrade at least once a term in the school and once a year in the community.

- ❖ Hold a Fairtrade awareness raising day in school
- ❖ Link with your local Fairtrade town group

### Action: Write a letter to your favourite retailer

You can choose to write a letter about fashion clothes or about stocking Fairtrade school uniform.

#### A 'clean clothes' code

We will only buy from manufacturers who:

- Pick their cotton carefully
- Do not use forced child labour anywhere in the supply chain
- Treat their workers fairly
- Give all workers secure jobs
- Ensure that reasonable wages are paid throughout the supply chain
- Rather than refuse to buy from places that don't meet these conditions, we would encourage manufacturers to work with suppliers (factories and cotton producers) to change their practices.

### From Labour behind the Label

Writing a letter to a company about workers' rights is possibly the most powerful way to achieve changes in working conditions. Why? Because it tells companies that consumers care, and responding to consumers' demands means making more money, which is how they are driven.

It's when consumers have told companies that they want their clothes to be produced in decent conditions that we have seen improvements: that's why the companies that were put under pressure in the 1990s, like Nike and Gap, have started to take steps to improve conditions in their supply chains. There is still a long way to go, so please keep writing!

### Letter writing tips

#### Ask specific questions

Most of the time companies will just respond with a stock answer from their Public Relations department, so you need to ask questions that can't be so easily avoided. Rather than "Please tell me what you are doing about workers conditions", you should ask questions like, "What proof do you have that working conditions are OK?" "Where are your clothes produced?", "How much are workers paid?", "How many Fairtrade items do you stock?", "Why don't you stock more Fairtrade clothes?" and "Do you have plans to stock more Fairtrade items?"

#### Make it clear that you expect a reply

You could end the letter with a phrase like: "I look forward to hearing from you shortly on the points raised" (Ensure that you have written your postal or email address at the top of the page).

#### Keep in touch with us

Send Fair Trade Wales a copy. It's good for us to know how many people are active on the issues. We can also chase it up for you and show bundles of letters to retailers and government officials, email the letter to us at [schools@fairtradewales.com](mailto:schools@fairtradewales.com)

#### Persevere!

If you feel the company hasn't responded adequately to your letter or you are not convinced by their reply then follow up with a response.

Make sure you address and date the letter

Dear (if you can spend some time in advance getting a name of someone to direct the letter to, your letter can have a bigger impact, as it's someone's responsibility to respond). You may be able to find a name for the customer service manager or their chief executive on their website. Alternatively you can phone and ask. If you can't find a name, write to the customer services department, the address will almost always be on their website.

Introduce yourself, your name, your age and which area you live in. Companies are more likely to respond to their own customers raising queries, so introduce yourself as a customer. If you have a label or receipt from something you have bought, you may want to include this with the letter.

In this paragraph you can go into more detail about why you are writing. You can include:

- What you have found out or read about
- Why you care about the issues

Try to use persuasive language but be polite and courteous. You can do this by phrasing the letter in a way that suggests you are interested in what they are doing on these issue and are open to what they have to say.

Finally in this section you can include what you think they can do about the problem. How you think they can help, and why you feel it's important for them to help on the issue.

Remember to ask specific questions, otherwise you may just get a stock reply.

Make sure you sign and print your name

### School Uniform

Start by doing a survey in school and seeing how many people would be willing to buy Fairtrade School Uniform. Some pupils may not be aware of the issues, so you may need to start by delivering an assembly on Fair Trade or telling them a bit about the issues. It may be best to pick one or two issues. Use a tally count on a table similar to below. Make sure you represent the views of the pupils and not your own views. If the pupils don't say the things you want them to, you may need to do some more awareness raising in the school. You may also need to raise awareness with teachers and parents.

Which type of School Uniform do you want?

Non Fairtrade Uniform	Fairtrade Uniform

When you have enough pupil, parent and teacher support, you should then approach your school uniform supplier and ask them if they will stock a Fairtrade option, showing them the support you have from the school. You can also investigate Fairtrade school uniform suppliers (list available from [www.fairtradewales.com/schools/resources/493](http://www.fairtradewales.com/schools/resources/493))