



**Global
Young
Leaders**

WORLD AFFAIRS COUNCIL OF DALLAS/FORT WORTH

JWAC Lesson Plan Sweatshops

By: Emma Sheean, October 2017

Warm up: *What is a sweatshop? Why have sweatshops developed? Why might working in a sweatshop be detrimental to a worker?*

Discussion: Sweatshops have sprung up around the world as a byproduct of globalization. As developing countries obtained the necessary infrastructure to produce goods, they created jobs that needed to be filled. In order to become competitive, many countries never adopted strict labor and workplace regulations that Western countries have in place. As a result, factories in less-developed countries (LDCs) are often dangerous and involve long work hours with little to no pay, but are able to produce goods for low prices. *What are some of the ethical dilemmas behind sweatshops?* In 2009, nearly 1,000,000 Chinese laborers were injured at work in sweatshops, in part due to the ban on trade unions in place in China.¹ Trade unions allow workers to strike and demand better wages or working conditions. Without this ability, workers often have absolutely no say in what they are paid, and can easily be fired for refusing to work, putting them out of a salary altogether. These conditions are not unique to China. One famous account of dangerous work conditions came out of Bangladesh in 2013, where a building containing factories collapsed and caused the death of nearly 1,130 people.² Accidents like these are common in sweatshops, although not many occur on such a large scale and thus can be overlooked. *Why might developing countries be reluctant to enact labor and workplace laws?* Many people see sweatshops as an egregious violation of human rights, yet little is done to eliminate them.

Activity: *Following the premise of this lesson plan, (<http://toolboxfored.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Sweatshops-in-our-lives-activity.pdf>) have students partner up and look at the tags on each other's t-shirts to see where they were made.*

Where were the items made? Did you notice any trends or patterns? Were they formerly colonized nations? Why do you think the factories were in these locations? What kind of conditions do you think the people who produced the items work in?

Split into two groups and have one team read the following article:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/15/opinion/15kristof.html?mcubz=0>

¹ War on Want. "Sweatshops in China." *War on Want*, War on Want, 21 Sept. 2016, www.waronwant.org/sweatshops-china.

² White, Gillian B. "What's Changed Since More Than 1,110 People Died in Bangladesh's Factory Collapse?" *The Atlantic*, Atlantic Media Company, 3 May 2017, www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2017/05/rana-plaza-four-years-later/525252/.



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Have the other group read this article:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/05/business/worldbusiness/05sweatshop.html?mcubz=0>

Have each group discuss amongst other members of their group about what they read, and what they think about the content of each article. Then, have the members select what they think are the main points of the articles and present them to each other. After the presentations, discuss: Are there any benefits to sweatshops? Might they offer hope of a long-term goal of building a developing economy? Or are the conditions within sweatshops too dangerous and abhorrent to be allowed to continue?

Recap: Sweatshops are dangerous factories where many people, including children, can work for 12-15 hours a day for very little pay. Workers risk their lives daily, often being forced to work with dangerous machinery or chemicals. The absence of transparency in many developing countries makes knowing just how well workers are treated very difficult. In addition, with such low prices at places like Wal-Mart (which uses sweatshop labor, it is easy for Western consumers to overlook the condition under which their goods were made. Yet the alternatives to sweatshops are sometimes worse, and some economists argue that sweatshops will eventually disappear on their own as countries' economies grow and turn from manufacturing-based to service-based. There is no telling how long this could take, however, and as one country slowly eliminates sweatshops, there is no stopping another country from opening them. *What do you think is the best way to support the workers of third-world countries?*

Call to Action: Buying Fair Trade products will not solve the issue of sweatshops, but it will ensure your money is not going toward worker exploitation. See if your favorite clothing brand is a member of the Fair Trade Federation here:

<http://www.fairtradefederation.org/findmembers/>

Encourage students to read this article:

<http://highline.huffingtonpost.com/articles/en/the-myth-of-the-ethical-shopper/>

It explains the status of sweatshops today and offers a solution that offers promise of ending unsafe labor conditions.

Strategize as a group how you can make changes in your life to be a more ethical shopper. How can you bring awareness to ethical consumerism to your community?