

# Assembly: Food & fashion

**Target audience:** Key Stage 4      **Timing:** 15 minutes

## Assembly plan

### 1 Unpack bag of shopping

Explain that you'd like to share your breakfast with the audience.

### 2 Where did my breakfast come from?

Read out Martin Luther King quote (mention that he was a civil rights activist for those who don't know), and explain that these breakfast products are produced by people in the poorer countries of the 'South' (in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, and Latin America). They are all here as a result of trade – although we may know that these products have come a long way, we don't often think about the people behind the products.

Many producers in the 'South' are poor, and getting poorer, as a result of **international trade** rules, which control how countries can exchange goods with each other. Ask volunteers to hold up cards showing problems faced by many producers. Fortunately the people behind these particular breakfast products are involved in an alternative form of trade – Fair Trade. This means they were paid a fair price for their products, and as a result of the extra money they and their communities have received, they've been able to plan for the future, and improve their lives.

As 'consumers' we can have a direct impact on people in the South by telling people about Fair Trade, and whenever possible buying Fair Trade products. How do we know if something is Fair Trade? Look for the Fairtrade Mark. You may have seen the Fairtrade mark on bananas, tea and coffee and chocolate, but there are actually over 4500 Fairtrade Marked products now available.

### 3 Are these farmers the only producers in the South facing difficulties?

No, Martin Luther King could have been referring to the clothes we put on, not just the breakfast we eat. Like making breakfast, putting our uniforms on is something we do every morning, but do we ever think about where our uniforms came from or how they were made? We all shop for clothes too – but how much do we know about what's behind the labels we buy?

Challenge audience's knowledge/perceptions. Read out/hold up fashion statements. Ask them to raise a hand if they think it is true.

## Resources

Bag of Fair Trade breakfast products (tea, coffee, muesli, sugar, bananas, fruit juice, hot chocolate)

Martin Luther King quote (see resources page 3)

Cards showing problems (see resources page 3)

Fairtrade Mark (hard copies available for free from <http://online.fairtrade.org.uk/> or see page 3)

Six fashion statements (see resources page 3)

#### 4 What do we think about when we buy clothes?

What they look like? What they cost? How well they fit? Usually we have no idea of where they have come from, or how they are produced.

**Where?** A pair of jeans is likely to have been produced in how many different countries? Guess? Maybe 10 or more – show pair of jeans.

**How?** Jeans are made from cotton, which is then later woven into jean fabric. Cotton is often picked by hand, and is often picked by children. Picking cotton is hard work and workers do not receive protective clothing. They often work with dangerous pesticides and have serious health consequences as a result. The factory workers also experience bad working conditions as well as the cotton pickers. Read extracts from workers' stories.

#### 5 What's this got to do with us?

In spite of all their difficulties, workers are finding ways to organise themselves, to try to improve their situation. There are many ways we can support them. This doesn't mean we should stop buying clothes, but it does mean we can encourage retailers to improve working conditions:

When you go shopping ask the store manager for information about where clothes are made, and in what conditions.

Write letters to retailers expressing your concern and requesting further information.

Find out more by contacting organisations like 'Labour Behind the Label', 'Clean Clothes Campaign' and 'EJ foundation' and tell other people what you know and what you find out.

Support Fairtrade – supporting Fairtrade guarantees a Fair deal for cotton pickers.

Over an average lifetime, a person from the UK will spend a MILLION pounds – that means that each and every one of us has have tremendous purchasing power.

**Explain to the students that as a new generation of shopper their choices count, they can make a difference.**

Resource: Journey of a pair of jeans (page 4)

Also take a pair of jeans as a prop if possible.

Extracts from workers' stories (see resources page 4)

# Assembly resources

(these could be reproduced on card or see accompanying powerpoint)

***In the morning we drink coffee provided for us by a South American, or tea by a Chinese, or cocoa by a West African. Before we leave for our jobs we're already indebted to more than half the world***

## Cards showing problems faced by many Southern producers

- Low pay, unpredictable prices.
- Unsafe working conditions
- No job security – or social security.
- Lack of education – children don't go to school
- No way of improving homes.
- Unable to afford medical care.
- No electricity, no piped water, no transport.



## Fashion statements

- 1) In the UK, we spend £3.8 billion per month on clothes. (True)<sup>1</sup>
- 2) 1000 deaths per year are linked to the use of pesticides on cotton, making it the most toxic crop on earth. (False, 20,000)<sup>2</sup>
- 3) 900,000 tonnes of clothes are sent to landfill in the UK every year. (True)<sup>3</sup>
- 4) In India, over 100,000 children have been documented working for 13 hour shifts for 1 dollar a day. (False, half a dollar a day)<sup>4</sup>
- 5) In Uzbekistan the government orders children as young as seven to harvest the annual cotton crop. (True)<sup>5</sup>
- 6) It takes 10,000 litres of water to produce one kg of cotton – and because cotton is grown in countries where water is scarce, this places an enormous strain on the local resources. (True)<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See page 16 for annual figures in 2008:

[http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme\\_economy/CT2009q3.pdf](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_economy/CT2009q3.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.ejfoundation.org/page327.html>;

[http://www.channel4learning.com/sites/lifestuff/content/citizens/money\\_matters\\_t.html](http://www.channel4learning.com/sites/lifestuff/content/citizens/money_matters_t.html)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.globalcool.org/news/167/swish-clothes-reduce-carbon-emissions>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.ejfoundation.org/page327.html>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.ejfoundation.org/page327.html>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.ejfoundation.org/page334.html>

### **Journey of a pair of jeans - an example**

- Cotton from Benin, West Africa, workers paid 60p/day
- Stonewashed using pumice from Turkey
- Brass rivets made from Namibian copper & Australian zinc
- Zip teeth made in Japan
- Thread produced in Northern Ireland
- Sewn together by worker in Tunisia, paid 58p/hour

## **Workers' Stories**

### **10 year old child from Uzbekistan**

I pick cotton all day. It's a very long day. I feel we are treated like slaves. I am tired, and would like to go home. Our teachers bring us here, they are ordered to by the state. All the schools are closed so that the children can pick cotton. If I complain I will get expelled. I work 14 hours a day and it is very heavy and hard work. No one can speak out.

### **Alick's story**

Alick picks cotton in Zambia. He worries that money he gets for picking cotton won't cover the costs of his family over the coming year. "The money I get from cotton farming does not even last my family and I three months". He sometimes ends up in dept to the companies who buy from him, because the cost of production outweighs the price they can sell their cotton for. Many farmers speculate the scales their cotton is weighed with are rigged. "We work day in day out, hoping to lift ourselves out of poverty and hunger but at the end of it all we get literally nothing because of poor prices of cotton offered to us by multinational companies. We work like slaves or prisoner of the companies who are getting richer everyday. We are just being used as cheap labour." The prices of pesticides are high, the pesticides are dangerous, and many people end up with health problems because of it.

### **Padmini's story**

Padmini works in a British-owned factory in Sri Lanka. She sews a range of different clothes. "Different types of clothes are sewn here, so I work in different sections. When a new design comes in they give us a demonstration for about 5 minutes, then we have to try it out ourselves on a piece of cloth – only then can we begin to meet our production targets. All the items we sew are sent to UK shops. We work from 8am-5pm, but when there are urgent orders we have to work through the night. This means we work a day shift, then through the night, then another day shift. We get a short break for dinner, then a short break between 2-3 in the morning. We try not to sleep during these breaks because it makes it more difficult to work."

### **Chakuben (Fairtrade Farmer)**

Chakuben works with her husband in India. They have two children. With the wages they earn working in the fields they can afford to them to the local primary school. They work for a Fairtrade Cooperative called Agrocel, where women are paid the same as men - a rarity - and given paid maternity leave. Farmers are paid a 30% premium above the price of conventional cotton, and they receive a pension, health insurance and good medical facilities. "Fairtrade farming has really changed our lives"

# Assembly follow up: Action!

- ❖ Investigate where your cotton/clothes come from?
- ❖ Campaign 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