

FOLLOW YOUR STUFF

WHO MAKES IT, WHERE DOES IT COME FROM, HOW DOES IT GET TO YOU?

by Kevin Sylvester and Michael Hlinka

Genre: Non-fiction

Themes: economics; socio-economics; global trade; global markets; math; STEM; consumerism; production; choices; decision making; money; politics and government; real-world problems

Suitable for: Grades 6+

Guided Reading Level: W

Lexile Measure: 920L

Common Core standards: L.6.3,4,4a,4b,4d,5,5b,5c,6
SL.6.1,1a,1c,1d,2,3,4,5,6
WHST.6-8.2,4,6,7,8,9,10
RST.6-8.1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,10

Summary

Get ready to go global!

Our cellphones, our clothes, our food: all are everyday things we consider essential, but we seldom think of what and who is involved in making them and getting them into our hands. In *Follow Your Stuff*, award-winning children's author Kevin Sylvester and business professor Michael Hlinka tackle the dynamics of the global economy, examining the often-complex journey of ordinary goods from production right to our doorsteps.

Using familiar examples, easy-to-follow charts and graphs, and a big helping of humor, Hlinka and Sylvester introduce young readers to concepts such as relative value and fair wages and how to think critically about our purchasing decisions. This sequel to the critically-acclaimed *Follow Your Money: Who Gets It, Who Spends It, Where Does It Go?* is the perfect introduction to socio-economics and an eye-opening essential read for young people.

BEFORE STARTING THE BOOK

These activities build the context and introduce the topic of the book, and establish prior knowledge and interest, and develop predictions of what the text will be about.

1. What can you tell about this book just from looking at the cover? What do you think this book is about?
2. Before you start reading, look over the list of terms below and identify which words you know. Give an explanation for those you do know and look up the definitions for the other terms.

| | |
|----------------|----------------|
| Big Pharma | overhead |
| clinical trial | relative value |
| fair trade | royalties |
| infrastructure | shareholder |
| markup | transaction |
| net profit | |

3. Looking at the Table of Contents, which item (T-shirt, puffer, book, cell phone, eyeglasses) do you think is the most complicated to make? Which item do you think involves the most people in the manufacturing process? The fewest?
4. Share what you already know about how any of the five items (T-shirt, puffer, book, cell phone, eyeglasses) are made.

WHILE READING THE BOOK

These activities check on comprehension, stimulate interest, involve readers in reflection as they read, and encourage consideration of other readers' reactions.

TEXT TO SELF CONNECTIONS: RELATIVE VALUE

1. On page 6, the authors ask us, "Is it worth it?" Think of something you've recently purchased or that you would like to buy. Write a persuasive paragraph about why this item is worth buying. Include at least two reasons to support your argument that it's worth it.

TEXT TO SELF CONNECTIONS: GLOBAL TRADE

2. Write a list of five products from your home (clothing, toys, appliances, etc).

Next, write down the country where the product on your list has been made, if you know it. If you don't know each country of origin, can you find out? (Look for a tag, ask at the store, or research.) See how many countries of origin you can identify.

On a map, mark the countries of origin for your products. This step can be done by all the students in the class, with each student adding their data to one map. Discuss the following: How many countries are marked on your map? Do any countries manufacture more than one product? Are any products made in your own country?

CLAIMS AND EVIDENCE: GLOBAL ECONOMY

3. In the introduction (pages 4–5), the authors claim that 50 years ago, the things that we used, consumed, and bought were more likely to be made by someone close by, while today, products come from all around the world.

Working in a small group, create a list of the reasons for this change as described in the book. How many reasons were you able to find?

AFTER READING THE BOOK

These activities inspire continued reflection and response to the text, bring conclusion to the experience of reading this text, and stimulate further extensions.

PRODUCT LIFECYCLE

1. Watch the TED-Ed documentary *The Life Cycle of a T-Shirt*, which illustrates the full life cycle of a T-shirt and discusses the environmental impact and social costs involved.

<https://ed.ted.com/lessons/the-life-cycle-of-a-t-shirt-angel-chang>

Compare the information in this video to the chapter about making a T-shirt in *Follow Your Stuff*. What are the similarities and differences between the two formats (book and video)? Did you learn anything from the video that added to your understanding after reading the book?

As a class or individually, answer the questions under the “Think” link in the documentary. (Note: If you want to save your answers with Ted-Ed, you will need to register, but you’re free to answer them on your own without saving them.)

MATHEMATICS / DATA MANAGEMENT

2. Chose one of the products mentioned in *Follow Your Stuff* (T-shirt, puffer, book, cell phone, or eyeglasses). Look at the last page in the chapter where all of the costs are listed. Convert the total costs from numbers to percentages. Then convert these percentages into a pie chart.

Next, group the costs into different categories (for example, raw materials, labor, overhead, markup, etc.) What percentage of the total cost are the following: raw materials, labor, and markup?

TEXT TO WORLD CONNECTIONS: FAIR WAGES

3. Review the brief discussion of fair wages on page 8. To explore the idea of fair wages, or a “living wage,” more deeply, play *Spent*, an interactive online game: <http://playspent.org>

After playing, share with the class (or a small group) how it felt to have to make all those decisions. Do you think you “won” the game? If you played the game again, would you do anything differently?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

If students want to investigate further or explore the topic of how clothing is manufactured, the following links provide additional insights and information.

The True Cost of Fast Fashion

<https://youtu.be/tLfNUD0-8ts>

This is a short news story from *The Economist* that looks at the environmental cost of fast fashion and asks the question, how can the fashion industry continue to grow while addressing environmental needs?

Planet Money Makes a T-Shirt

<https://apps.npr.org/tshirt/#/title>

This five-part series of short documentaries by National Public Radio (NPR) looks at a number of the steps in the making of a T-shirt.

Chapters include:

- 1) Cotton. This chapter profiles one typical cotton farmer in the US.
- 2) Machines. This chapter shows how raw cotton is processed into sheets of fabric.
- 3) People. This chapter introduces viewers to two fabric workers, one from Bangladesh and one from Colombia, and compares their wages. (Warning: This video includes scenes from the Bangladeshi factory collapse in 2013.)
- 4) Boxes. This chapter looks at how resources, material, and products are shipped around the world by containers. (Warning: The narrator says “pain in the ass” about half way through this video.)
- 5) You. This chapter briefly introduces some of the people around the world who are part of the manufacturing process.