DO NOT WRITE ON

K. JIM MCMAHON (MAP)

A Deadly Accident

Many people didn't give much thought to how their clothing was made until April 24, 2013, when the Rana Plaza factory building in Bangladesh collapsed. The deadliest accident in the history of the garment industry, it killed more than 1,100 workers and injured 2,500 others. The factory, overloaded with too many floors, workers, and equipment, had been making clothing for global brands such as Benetton, Joe Fresh, and Mango.

Answer on your own paper in short phrases.

① What is the above cartoon trying to say?

Young women hunch over sewing machines in a windowless workroom in Bangladesh. Elbow to elbow in the stifling heat, they assemble jackets. Together, the women must sew hundreds of jackets an hour, more than 1,000 a day. Their daily wage is less than $3.

Just a week or two later, these same jackets will be labeled fall's hottest back-to-school item, selling to teens for $14.99 each at malls across the United States.

The jackets are just one example of what is known as fast fashion: trendy clothes designed, created, and sold to consumers as quickly as possible at extremely low prices. New looks arrive in stores weekly or even daily, and they cost so little that many people can afford to fill their closets with new outfits multiple times each year—then toss them the minute they go out of style.

Chains such as H&M and Zara first popularized fast fashion in the early 2000s. It has since spread throughout the entire clothing industry. As a result, global clothing production has more than tripled since 2000. The industry now churns out more than 150 billion garments annually.

Long Hours & Little Pay

Fast fashion items may not cost you much at the cash register, but they come with a serious price: Tens of millions of people in developing countries, some just children, work long hours in dangerous conditions to make them, in the kinds of factories often labeled sweatshops. Most garment workers are paid barely enough to survive.

Fast fashion also hurts the environment. Garments are manufactured using toxic chemicals and then transported around the globe, making the fashion industry the world's second-largest polluter, after the oil industry. And millions of tons of discarded clothing piles up in landfills each year.

"A lot of what we're throwing away hasn't even been worn that many times," says Elizabeth Cline, author of *Overdressed: The Shockingly High Cost of Cheap Fashion*. "Clothing has become a cheap form of entertainment."

Until the 1970s, most apparel worn by Americans was made in the United States. Then clothing production, like a lot of manufacturing, began moving overseas, where labor costs were lower. As recently as 1990, half the clothes sold in the U.S. were made in the U.S. Today, it's just 2 percent.

Most American clothing companies now manufacture their merchandise in developing countries in Asia *(see map, p. 10)*. Workers there earn a fraction of what U.S. workers make—and have fewer protections. The lower labor costs translate to lower prices for shoppers (who then buy more clothing) and higher profits for retailers. That's helped make fashion a $3 trillion global industry.

Today, many of the world's 75 million garment workers live in China and Bangladesh, the top-two clothing producers. Workers often earn just a few dollars a day. Many are women in their teens.

20 billion
NUMBER of garments Americans buy each year.
SOURCE: *OVERDRESSED*

76 pounds
AVERAGE WEIGHT of clothes and shoes an American throws away in a year.
SOURCE: ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

② After reading both sides of this handout, list 5 specific reasons why "fast fashion" is so cheap?

OPPOSITE: PHOTOGRAPHER: SHANNON GREER; STYLIST: JESSICA ZINDREN; GROOMER: NICOLE HERNANDEZ.
THIS PAGE: G.M.B. AKASH/PANOS (CHILD WORKER); ANDREW BIRAJ/LANDOV/REUTERS (COLLAPSED FACTORY)

Environmental Toll

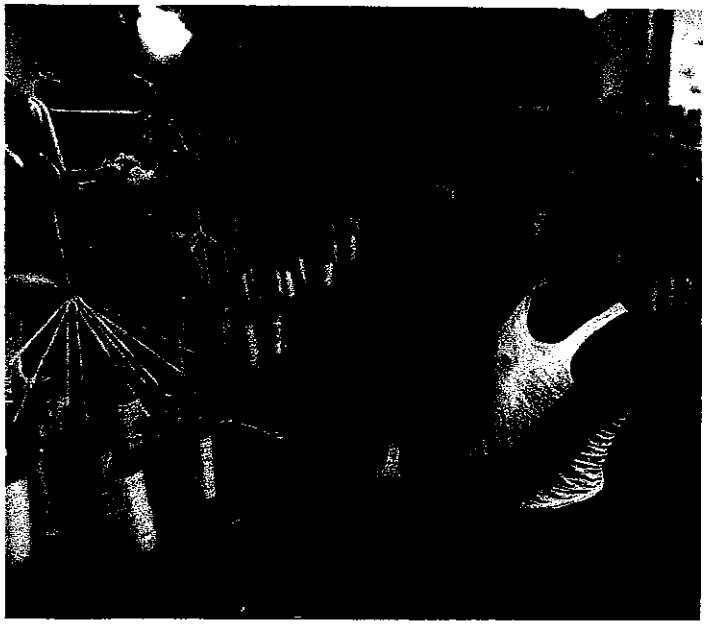
Fast fashion also takes a heavy toll on the environment. The industry consumes enormous amounts of water and other natural resources. Producing enough cotton for one pair of jeans takes about 1,800 gallons of water—the equivalent of about 105 showers.

Manufacturing polyester, which is made from petroleum, releases dangerous gases into the air. And farming cotton accounts for a quarter of all pesticides used in the United States. (The U.S. sends about 70 percent of the cotton it grows overseas, where it's turned into clothing.) Some of those pesticides can cause asthma and other health problems, and the chemicals pollute fresh water.

The damage doesn't end once clothing is made. Americans on average trash more than 70 pounds of clothes and shoes a year. Most are burned or piled in landfills, where synthetic fibers can take hundreds of years to break down.

"A lot of the problems in the fashion industry are things that are happening in other places: air and water pollution in China, poverty and low wages in Bangladesh," says Cline. "The waste is happening in our own backyard."

As more people have become aware of the ugly side of fast fashion, the push for ethically made clothing has grown. In the U.S., hundreds of start-ups are creating clothes out of recycled or organic fabrics. These companies use



PICTURE/MULTION ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES

A 13-year-old in a textile factory in Bangladesh;

(3) Is it a consumer's (buyer) responsibility to avoid buying clothing and products made in this way? Why or why not?