

Geography

Journey of your blue jeans

RecyCOOL Lessons

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Journey of your blue jeans

Description of the lesson

You will read about the stages of the supply chain in the process of producing a pair of jeans. Due to the lack of transparency on this subject you will be given a hypothetical journey of a pair of jeans.

After reading, you will be given a task – you will be asked to pick some of your clothes and find their labels, write them down on a piece of paper and find those places on a map. Draw the world map and mark off the places shown on the clothing labels. Using google maps you will have to calculate the journey of your clothes to your closet.

Objective

Objective of this lesson is to explore the complex journey of materials needed for producing a simple pair of jeans and to raise awareness of how far every piece of clothing has travelled, before coming to the store – therefore raising a question about how one item of clothing can have a huge impact on nature.

After this lesson you will be able to

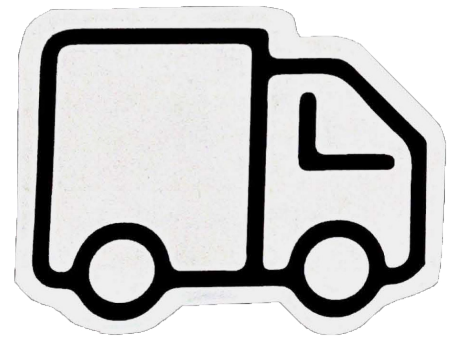
Understand the importance of transportation of clothes as a critical link in the supply chain of fashion industry and that often times, clothes travel farther than labels suggest.

Tools and materials

clothes, world map, google maps, paper and pencil, world atlas

TRANSPORTATION OF CLOTHES:

Journey of clothes from raw material, to fabrics, warehouses, wholesalers, retailers and ultimately to customers.



Have you ever asked yourself where your clothes come from? 'Made in China' or 'Made in Bangladesh'?

Does this really mean that it was sent only from there? Were your buttons, zippers, etc. also made in the same place?

Have our clothes travelled more than most of us? In this lesson, we will travel the world with a single piece from our wardrobe.

The supply chain involved to produce a pair of jeans involves a lot of stages, but it is common that supply chains are complicated and multi-layered. **The supply chain consists of growing and supplying the raw materials, processing them into fabrics, making the final product, shipping it to its final place of sale (like a fashion retail store) and ultimately, to the customers who take them home to their wardrobes.**

Even then, the journey of our clothes is not over if we take into account the post-consumer travel to the landfill, collection centre or elsewhere. This is a long trip that requires a huge amount of transport and logistics, as it usually involves different places around the world and is rarely done in one country.

Let's take your pair of jeans as an example. Before your jeans reach you, it's very likely it travelled thousands of kilometres; more than some people travel in years.

Due to a lack of transparency across many major fashion brands and retailers, it is difficult to trace back your clothes and find out where exactly it came from. However, we can give a hypothetical example to help you understand the complexity of this journey.

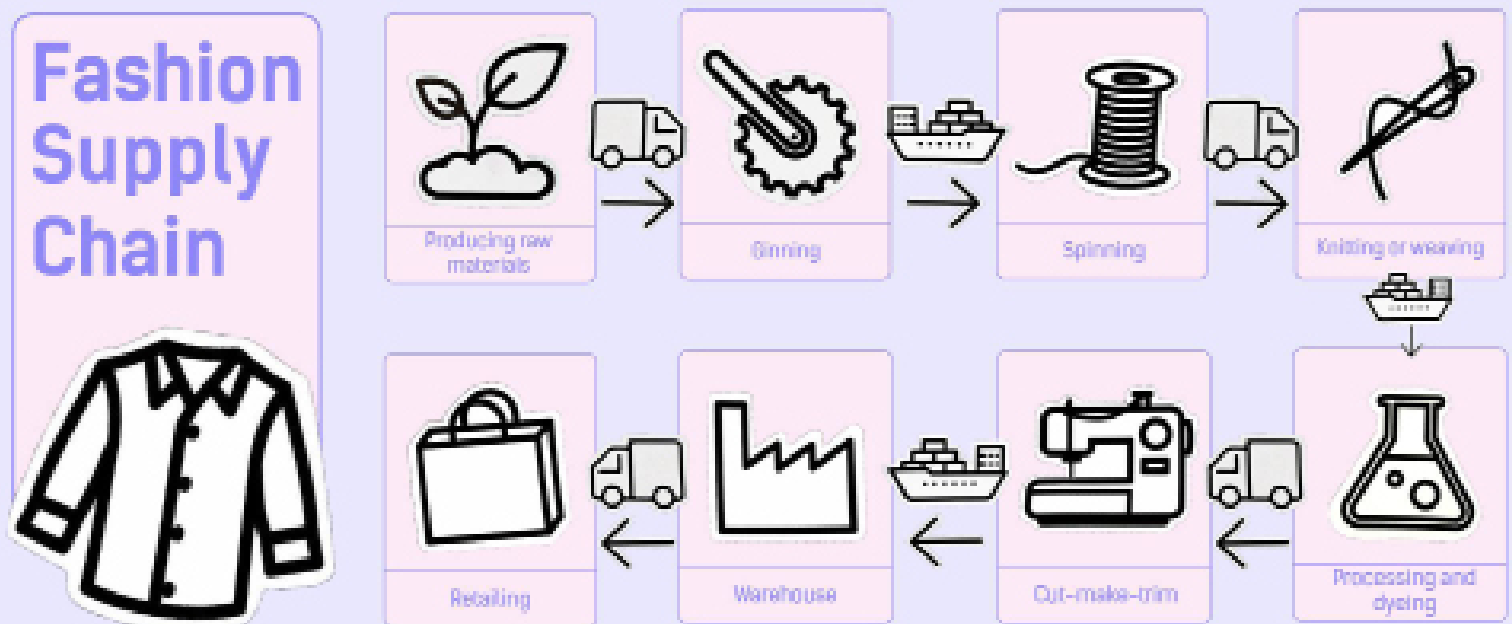


Photo credit: [Fashion Revolution](#)

Let's say that the label on your hypothetical pair of jeans says "Made in China", as **China is still the no. 1 garment producer in the world**. Jeans are (mostly) made of cotton – and while China is one of the world's biggest cotton producers, they also import a lot of it from the USA and India, since their production doesn't meet their huge demand. Let's assume that our hypothetical jeans used Indian cotton, as **India is the world's biggest cotton producer**.

Since the cost of labour in China and India has risen, many factories have moved to countries with cheaper labour like Bangladesh, so this country could be the next stop on the journey of our jeans where the cotton gets spun into yarn and dyed.

Photo credit: [Fashion Revolution](#)



What about the zipper and the button? The country that makes the most zippers is Japan whereas most buttons are made in China. Zippers and buttons from jeans are made of brass, which is made from zinc and copper. The zinc might have come from Australia and the copper was probably imported from Chile.

If we want to go even deeper, we can trace the parts of jeans even from Russia or Saudi Arabia if there is any polyester used, since polyester is made from oil. For further reading on this topic, we suggest [Changing Markets Foundation's reports](#) on fashion made from synthetic materials, also known as 'fossil fashion'.

When all the parts are done, the final step would be to stitch everything together. All the materials were sent to China where the final product was made. Then it had to be sent from the manufacturer to the fashion store where you purchased it. From the manufacturer, it could have been sent to wholesalers or directly to retailers. When it reached your closet, it already travelled far more than its label might suggest.

This journey shows us how globalised the modern world is and raises an important question about the environmental impact of transportation for all the materials needed to make a pair of jeans. It also shows the huge lack of transparency about the origins of those trousers. Without transparency in fashion, it is hard to challenge unethical practices in the industry.



Now it is time to calculate the distances between all the mentioned places in this hypothetical supply chain of your jeans. Keep in mind that this is all just one of many possibilities of your jeans' journey and that it's almost impossible to come up with an accurate calculation.

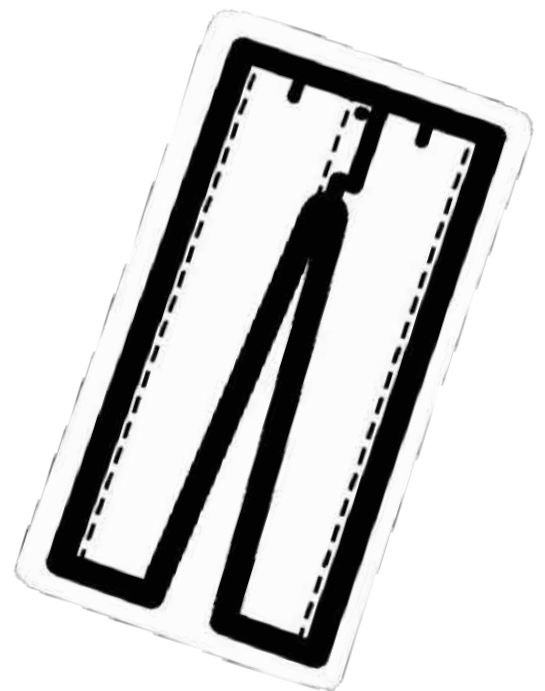
We will only calculate some of the biggest distances your hypothetical jeans have travelled and since it's only a guess it is up to us to decide which city we should pick for each country we are measuring from. For most of the countries we will use the biggest port or the one that is specified for transportation of garments.

But, in big countries like India and China, we should also take into account the distances in between - for example, from the place where the raw material was produced or grown, to the port where it was loaded on a shipping container and sent to another country for further processing.



Here is the list of the countries mentioned earlier, where parts of your jeans may have come from:

- India (raw cotton) – Bharuch (city known for cotton growing) and then Mumbai (where it is put on a ship)
- Russia (oil) – Omsk
- China (buttons) – Qiaotou
- Bangladesh (dye and yarn)
- Chile (copper) – San Antonio
- Australia (zinc) – Risdon (zinc production) and then Melbourne (shipping)
- Japan (zipper) – Nagoya
- China (final product) – Dongguan
- city where you bought your jeans
- your home



Task

Your task is to measure all the distances using Google maps (for offline work – use your own world map and a ruler) and write the final number in kilometres.

It is important that you calculate it the right way.

[Interactive map](#)

[Printable map](#)

COTTON

Bharuch > Mumbai > Chittagong > Dongguan = ?

POLYESTER

Omsk > Qiaotou > Dongguan = ?

COPPER

San Antonio > Nagoya = ?

ZINC

Risdon > Melbourne > Nagoya = ?

ZIPPER

Nagoya > Dongguan = ?

FINAL PRODUCT (jeans):

Dongguan > your fashion store > your home = ?

TOTAL =?

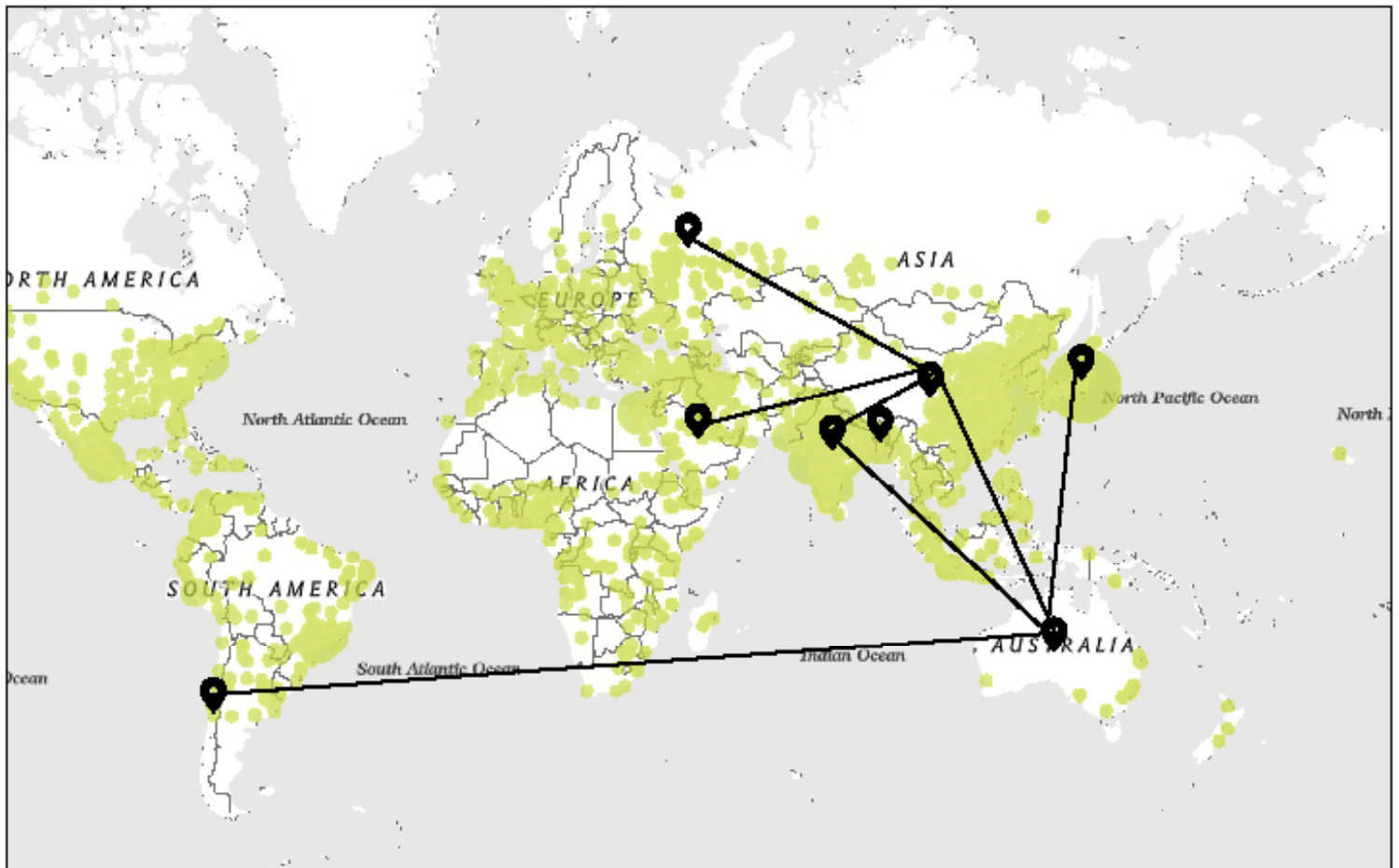


How much have your jeans travelled? How many different countries and continents have they visited before getting into your home? Write down your answers.

Keep in mind that the journey didn't end when you bought your denim pants. If you decide to throw them away they will be transported to a certain landfill (Africa) or some collection centre, if you donate them instead. It is up to you to decide how much more those jeans are going to travel once you are done with wearing them.

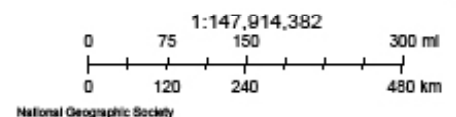
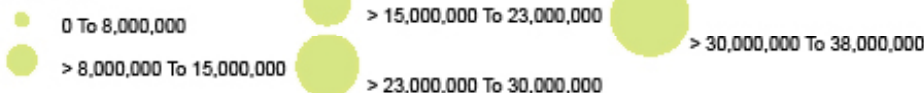
Photo credit: [Map Maker](#)

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5/16/2022

Global Cities



Serjja Tudor

Reflection

What do you think of the journey your jeans made before reaching you? Is it more than you expected?

Have you travelled as much as your jeans did?

Think of the reasons why the production of jeans includes so many different countries. Can you think of any way you could help reduce the transportation of clothes?

Think of yourself as a Fashion Revolution activist. How would you raise awareness on this matter? If everybody was aware of the long journey every piece of our clothing is making to reach us would we still behave the same?

Could improving transparency in the production and transportation of clothes lead to more conscious consumer behaviour and a greener, more ethical world?



Resources

Measuring fashion: Insights from the Environmental Impact of the Global Apparel and Footwear Industries Cotton sector at a glance. USDA ERS – Cotton Sector at a Glance. (n.d.). Retrieved February 11, 2023, from <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/crops/cotton-and-wool/cotton-sector-at-a-glance/>

Garside, M. (2023, February 7). Copper production by country 2022. Statista. Retrieved February 11, 2023, from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/264626/copper-production-by-country/>

Forbes Magazine. (2013, June 6). Zipping up the world. Forbes. Retrieved February 11, 2023, from <https://www.forbes.com/global/2003/1124/089.html?sh=ff660f34101d>

Attachments

[Outline map](#)

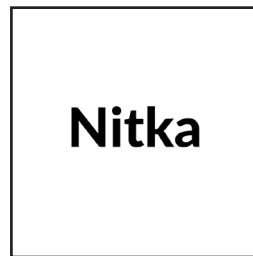
Further reading and watching

[Solidarity in the Secondhand Supply Chain
Denim to Denim Project](#)

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Partners



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