

# MAKING the GRADE

FALL 2007



## UNDERSTANDING OUR GLOBAL COMMUNITY

Talking with your children about exotic places with funny sounding names can excite their imagination. Getting children and young adults to read news about these same locations can be challenging, though. If you want your child to learn about places where people's daily lives are different from your own, begin with what your child already knows and appreciates. For instance, can a pair of jeans really steer a young mind towards understanding the complex web of economic, political, historical and cultural factors that influence today's world?

This edition of *Making the Grade* is designed to help parents and students use current news stories to see the connections between their communities and people all around the world. Understanding these global connections helps everyone see how important it is to become lifelong learners and how critical it is to learn more than the traditional "three Rs" if they want to be prepared for today's global environment.

## WHAT WILL MY CHILDREN LEARN ABOUT WORLD GEOGRAPHY?

Geography is a key part of the K-12 social studies curriculum. In kindergarten and first grade, students begin by focusing on families and communities and the upper grades build from there.

In middle school social studies classes, students explore South America, Europe, Africa, Asia and Australia, as well as North Carolina history (eighth grade). At every level, students examine the historical, economic and cultural connections between our state and the world. By high school, students should understand the effects of global events on our state and nation. They should be able to compare both North Carolina and national economic and political systems with those of foreign countries, and they should know how foreign affairs impact our daily lives.

## BLUE JEANS REALLY CAN IMPROVE GRADES

Twenty percent of North Carolina's jobs are in the manufacturing sector which is evidence that our state's economic engine is quickly becoming more knowledge-powered rather than steam-driven. This shift dramatically changes the educational expectations many companies once held for their employees. Your children *are* these future employees.

Some resourceful businesses, though, are defying and re-thinking traditional practices while still employing the skills of local citizens to keep North Carolina's business growth and retention rates strong.

They are finding a niche in a very competitive economy that often results in outsourcing to off-shore sites. The following article (which originally appeared in its entirety in *The Charlotte Observer* on 8/24/07) is an excellent starting point to identify and discuss how our global economy will affect both your own and your child's present and future educational needs and goals.

### Bucking the trend, making fancy jeans

by Jen Aronoff

MICAVILLE — In this Blue Ridge mountain hamlet of little more than a post office and a white-steepled Presbyterian church, the Taylor Togs jeans plant isn't just the largest industry, it's the only industry. It's also a rarity: an American factory making the quintessential American garment.

Two years ago, Taylor Togs was on the brink of closing. Cheap imports had swept away orders for the basic jeans the plant had cut and sewn for nearly 50 years. Management laid off most workers, many of whom had decades of experience.

But with business referrals from major U.S. fabric maker Cone Denim, a few promising sample orders and a boost from an up-and-coming New York fashion design team originally from England, Taylor Togs decided to try to survive by making premium and vintage-style jeans.

The Micaville factory and a Taylorsville finishing plant are using old-fashioned hand-detailing techniques to turn out denim and twill pants, skirts, jackets and shirts that sell for hundreds of dollars in exclusive stores worldwide.

"We manufacture stuff that I'd have literally socked you if you'd asked me to make it before," said owner Grier Lackey, 65.

Levi's Vintage Clothing Collection, with its torn, weathered, limited-edition replicas that can sell for \$500 and up, comes from Taylor Togs. So did the Gap's (PRODUCT)<sup>®</sup> denim line. In the early 1970s, Lackey and his then-business partners began making jeans in an old school in Taylorsville. By Taylor Togs' mid-'90s peak, its plants in Bakersville, Micaville and Taylorsville, in the state's mountains and

foothills, employed more than 500 people and were making 60,000 pairs of jeans a week, Lackey said.

But by 2005, the Bakersville plant had closed, and employment was below 300. Mexico, China and other countries exported an increasing volume of jeans. Taylor Togs had only a few small customers remaining and began to shut down.

"I was scared to death," said Sylvia McMahan, 49, a 33-year Micaville employee. Looking for a new job, she said, "wasn't a bit fun. There was nothing to find."

Taylor Togs officials know what they're facing. The Taylorsville plant is within view of a Wal-Mart Supercenter that sells Mexican- and Asian-made jeans starting at \$9.97.

Taylor Togs has not made a profit since it restarted, Micaville plant manager Glenda Stewart said, but it's aiming to recruit enough business to do so.

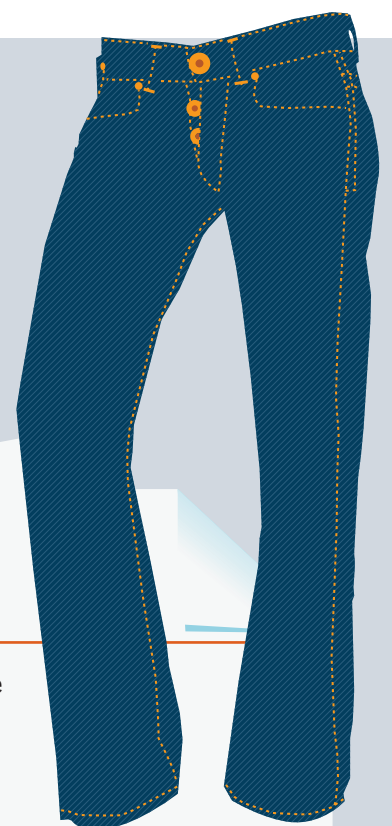
"There are very few places in the world that are doing these type products with the prestige and the clout that's behind these labels," Lackey said. "I guess that's what keeps you going is the fact that you have a little pride in what you do. I wish there was more profit in it. I like profit and pride — both P's are good."

*This edited version is reprinted with permission of The Charlotte Observer; copyright owned by The Charlotte Observer.*

### Top 10 Product Categories Exported by North Carolina Companies

1. Chemical Manufacturers
2. Computers & Electronic Products
3. Machinery Fabricators
4. Fabric Mill Products
5. Transportation Equipment
6. Plastic & Rubber Products
7. Electrical Equipment, Appliances & Parts
8. Crop Production
9. Apparel Manufacturers
10. Beverage & Tobacco Products

**SOURCE:** Office of Trade and Industry Information (OTII), Manufacturing and Services, International Trade Administration, U.S. Department of Commerce (2007)



## ACTIVITIES...TO ENCOURAGE AND STIMULATE YOUR CHILD'S INTEREST IN WORLD GEOGRAPHY



Some of the following activities are based on “Bucking the trend, making fancy jeans” (at left). This can help your child connect past events, distant lands and economic principles.

### ELEMENTARY GRADES

Using the clothes in your house, have your child read each label, note what the item is, where it was made, and what kind of fabric was used. Together, examine details such as stitching and designs, and compare foreign-made clothing to U.S.-made items. Using a map, locate and mark each item's country of origin. Then follow their possible path to your front door. Questions to discuss with your child include:

- Why do you think it was made there? Consider supply and demand, labor costs and easy access.
- How do you think it got from there to here? That makes your child consider modes of transportation (and maybe even how much more or less it costs to move products using different methods).

Talk with your child about some of the products and services made/offered in North Carolina (see <http://tse.export.gov/SEDHome.aspx> and click on “Every Product Profile”). Where do we export these (visit <http://tse.export.gov/SEDHome.aspx> and choose “Global Patterns of a State's Exports”)? Locate the top 20 countries on a world map. What countries might need which North Carolina exports? How does this help our economy? How does it impact your child's career choices? What kinds of skills will s/he need to work in an international company?

What geographical areas are mentioned in your newspaper? Find a world map and mark every country — each time it's mentioned in the news — for a week. What five countries are mentioned most and why?

### MIDDLE GRADES

Read the articles at [www.soc.duke.edu/NC\\_GlobalEconomy/](http://www.soc.duke.edu/NC_GlobalEconomy/) to see how other North Carolina businesses are responding to global competition and outsourcing. What differences, similarities, solutions and problems are our businesses facing? What does each article emphasize about our future workforce — your children?

Ask your children to research where their own jeans were made. Where were your television, sofa, toothpaste and car(s) made? If some were manufactured overseas, ask your children why your family did not buy U.S.-made items instead.

Most people have numerous wants and needs but limited resources to meet them. Ask your child which jeans s/he wants: the Levi's vintage jeans or the cheaper ones that may be made outside the U.S.? Which pair can you or your young adult afford? If your child earns enough money to buy the vintage Levi's, what else could s/he afford by purchasing the cheaper jeans instead?

Do your children have cell phones? If so, how has your family life changed? Read the article on the Democratic Republic of the Congo (found at

[www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/07/08/AR2006070801063.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/07/08/AR2006070801063.html)). Compare their cell phone use with ours. How do cell phones affect the ways people in both countries travel, conduct business and pay for goods and services?

### HIGH SCHOOL

Discuss with your child how the former Taylor Togs' employees might feel about the imported jeans that led to their layoffs. If those unemployed workers asked the U.S. Congress for tariffs or quotas to raise the price of offshore-manufactured jeans to match the cost of American ones, what might the results be? Ask your child what s/he thinks about the importance of job security for Taylor Togs' workers. For instance, is their welfare worth paying higher prices by all consumers of U.S.-made goods?

Choose an interesting article from the “World” section of Google News ([news.google.com/](http://news.google.com/)). You'll see a link that takes you to how newspapers around the world covered this same story. Identify similarities and differences in coverage. How does the foreign perspective differ from our own? Why are certain facts omitted or included in these different articles?

Look at newspaper ads with your teenager and list products and services not advertised in your community. Have your child narrow this list down to one business which s/he might want to open. What training would s/he need? What schools in North Carolina offer this training? Now make a business plan. List potential customers, possible suppliers (based on information found in your phone book or through Internet searches) and ways to get supplies to your community. To help you estimate:

- What skills will your employees need? Examine a newspaper's employment section, note the variety of jobs available and what skills and education each requires. What wages are offered for the jobs your child's business needs? Remember to add 32 percent to the quoted salary to cover government-mandated payments such as Social Security for which you as owner are responsible.
- What supplies must be imported and from where will they come?
- Look in the newspaper's real estate section to find possible business locations. How much would buying or renting cost?

The most important concept for your soon-to-graduate teenager to realize with this activity is that s/he must develop (and master) many skills to succeed in our global economy.



**GEOGRAPHY AWARENESS WEEK**  
November 11-17, 2007

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

### ELEMENTARY and MIDDLE GRADES:

#### American Library Association's "Great Web Sites for Kids:"

##### Cultures of the World:

[www.ala.org/gwstemplate.cfm?section=greatwebsites&template=/cfapps/gws/displaysection.cfm&sec=36](http://www.ala.org/gwstemplate.cfm?section=greatwebsites&template=/cfapps/gws/displaysection.cfm&sec=36)

##### Geography and Maps:

[www.ala.org/gwstemplate.cfm?section=greatwebsites&template=/cfapps/gws/displaysection.cfm&sec=34](http://www.ala.org/gwstemplate.cfm?section=greatwebsites&template=/cfapps/gws/displaysection.cfm&sec=34)

#### Grolier Online:

**America the Beautiful Almanac:** [go.grolier.com/gol](http://go.grolier.com/gol)

**Lands and People:** [go.grolier.com/](http://go.grolier.com/)

#### ThinkQuest Library: Cultures:

[www.thinkquest.org/library/cat\\_show.html?cat\\_id=86](http://www.thinkquest.org/library/cat_show.html?cat_id=86)

### MIDDLE GRADES:

#### The Internet Public Library:

**Culture Quest:** [www.ipl.org/div/cquest/](http://www.ipl.org/div/cquest/)

**Our World:** [www.ipl.org/kidspace/browse/owd0000](http://www.ipl.org/kidspace/browse/owd0000)

### HIGH SCHOOL:

To learn more about the influence of North Carolina's exports on our state's economy and the global market, visit the **U.S. Bureau of the Census' "North Carolina: Exports, Jobs and Foreign Investment" Web site at:**

[www.ita.doc.gov/td/industry/otea/state\\_reports/n-carolina.html](http://www.ita.doc.gov/td/industry/otea/state_reports/n-carolina.html).

#### Duke University's Department of Sociology Web site:

[www.soc.duke.edu/NC\\_GlobalEconomy/](http://www.soc.duke.edu/NC_GlobalEconomy/)

For a similar perspective on the same topic as *The Charlotte Observer* article — from another part of the United States — check-out this **Washington Post article at:**  
[www.soc.duke.edu/NC\\_GlobalEconomy/news/20070903\\_WashPost\\_In%20NC\\_a%20Second%20Industrial%20Revolution.pdf](http://www.soc.duke.edu/NC_GlobalEconomy/news/20070903_WashPost_In%20NC_a%20Second%20Industrial%20Revolution.pdf)

### FOR PARENTS and ALL GRADES:

To view newspaper front pages from 53 countries, visit [www.newseum.org](http://www.newseum.org). Choose "Today's Front Pages," then select the "Map" tab and you can view newspapers by each geographic region.

**NationMaster.com:** [www.nationmaster.com/index.php](http://www.nationmaster.com/index.php)

#### UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund):

**Info by Country:** [www.unicef.org/infobycountry/index.html](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/index.html)

**Voices of Youth:** [www.unicef.org/voy/](http://www.unicef.org/voy/)

## WORDS and CONCEPTS TO KNOW

**balance of trade:** value of a country's exports minus its imports

**exports:** commodities (goods or services) sold to a foreign country

**global warming:** gradual warming of the Earth's atmosphere reportedly caused by the burning of fossil fuels and industrial pollutants

**import duty:** fee paid at a country's border or port of entry that allows products from another country into that government's territory

**mode:** how something is done or how it happens

**quintessential:** the perfect example

**quota:** quantity of goods of a specific kind that a country allows to be imported without restrictions or import duties

**tariff:** duty (or tax) applied to goods transported from one country to another, or on imported products

**supply and demand:** amount of goods available at a given price at any time and how many consumers want the goods that are in supply

## MAKING the GRADE

UNDERSTANDING OUR GLOBAL COMMUNITY



**North Carolina  
Newspapers in Education**  
NC Press Foundation  
5171 Glenwood Ave., Ste. 364  
Raleigh, NC 27612  
[www.ncpress.com](http://www.ncpress.com)



**PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF NORTH CAROLINA**  
301 N. Wilmington Street, Raleigh, NC 27601-2825  
PHONE :: 919.807.3300, [www.ncpublicschools.org](http://www.ncpublicschools.org)

One in a series of publications produced by North Carolina Newspapers in Education with support from the North Carolina Press Association and the Public Schools of North Carolina (State Board of Education | Department of Public Instruction). Watch for other tips for helping your child during the coming months.

MTG092007

*newspaper/sponsor  
advertisements*