

# Understanding Fair Trade

**SUBMITTED BY:** Knowledge@Wharton Summer Educator

**SUBJECT(S):** Management

**GRADE LEVEL(S):** 9, 10, 11, 12

## ≡ OVERVIEW:

Within the movement toward socially responsible business practices, new vocabulary and symbols have become important in identifying business and industry's participation in such practices. In this lesson, students will learn about what the tag of "fair trade" stands for. Additionally, students will learn about the certification organizations who verify that socially responsible means were employed in the production of goods. Students will also be encouraged to critically examine the notion of fair trade, given the power dynamics that often exist in a relationship between vulnerable and powerful entities.

## ≡ NBEA STANDARD(S):

- Management, V. Ethics And Social Responsibility

## ≡ RELATED ARTICLES:

- ["The Business of Bling: News from the Diamond Trade"](#)
- ["Tackling the Problem of Hunger in America"](#)
- ["Seth Goldman of Honest Tea: The 'Perfect Ingredient' for Social Impact"](#)
- ["Inside the Economic Warfare Involving Tariffs and Trade"](#)
- ["How the Trade War with China Is Hurting U.S. Farmers"](#)
- ["Former Olympian Benjamin Lewis Is Revolutionizing Animal Testing"](#)
- ["Exploring Ties Between Countries at the Indian Embassy in Peru"](#)

- “Educator Toolkit: Tariffs and Trade”
- “Economic Partnership: Coffee Beans, Moroccan Rugs and the Future of Fair Trade”
- “Dark Milk Chocolate Bars Help to Unlock Wealth in West Africa”
- “Career Insight: Thinking about Business Ethics in a Practical Way”

### Common Core Standard(s):

- CCR Standard for Reading: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from text.
- CCR Standard for Reading: Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

### Objectives/Purposes:

- For students to understand what the commonly used term “fair trade” means.
- To have students explore examples of how companies actually engage in being socially responsible in the production of fair trade goods.
- To have students know who the organizations are that certify fair trade practices (e.g., Fair Trade Federation, TransFair USA, the British Fairtrade Foundation), what types of products they certify, and their process of certifying products and organizations.
- To have students interrogate the overly positive projection of fair trade — asking deeper questions about what actually constitutes “fair” in the midst of power relationships.

### Other Resources/Materials:

- Computer and projector
- Definitions for fair trade: <http://www.firstfairtradetownusa.org/fair-trade>
- Video of Media, PA, as a fair trade town: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6FZrlpN9mUo>

### Activities:

- 1) Engage students in a conversation about fair trade. Have they ever seen or heard of the term “fair trade”? What does the term mean? When and where is this term applied and for what

reason? (5 mins)

- 2) Direct students to read the Wharton Global Youth Program article “Seth Goldman of Honest Tea: The ‘Perfect Ingredient’ for Social Impact” to demonstrate the concept. (5 mins)
- 3) Reconvene students to refine their earlier description of what “fair trade” signifies. \*There might be some confusion between FT and certified organic products.\* (5 mins)
- 4) Project the official description of what fair trade means (use the website provided).
- 5) Show an example of how the notion of fair trade can expand beyond a mere product to reflect the philosophy of a shopping district (refer to video on Media, PA, as the first U.S. city deemed to be a fair trade town). (6 mins)
- 6) Invite students’ responses to what they have learned so far; provide clarification, if needed. (3 mins)
- 7) Explore the websites of fair trade certifying organizations as a whole group (with the projector), or if students have access to computers they can explore these sites on their own, making note of the different insignias used in fair trade labeling. Have students write notes on what they have learnt about the organizations’ roles in fair trade certification. For example: What kinds of items are covered/not covered under fair trade? The process of certification? Who or what exactly gets certified? (10-15 mins)
- 8) Have students identify two products that are fair trade certified, which they recognize and have experience with. Have students share their thoughts about these products. If they have not had contact with these items, why might this be? (e.g., higher cost, fair trade is an upper class trend) Optional: The teacher can also do a show-and-tell of fair trade items. (5-10 mins)
- 9) Engage students in thinking about who gets to decide what “fair” is when there are power inequities in the relationship. What might be some downsides to this seemingly positive movement? Record students’ responses to return to later.
- 10) Have students engage in a quick Internet search to locate articles and reports about the pluses and minuses of fair trade (20 mins). Have students record the information they find to share with the group.
- 11) Reconvene students to share what they have learned with the class.

12) Have students do a short note on what they have learned. Suggested writing prompts are:

- Describe some of the pluses and minuses of fair trade programs and products.
- In your own words, how would you describe what fair trade means to a friend?

### **Tying It All Together: (extension activities)**

1) Engage students in thinking/talking about the tensions that emerge between acting on our values and our willingness to pay more to uphold them. As Seth Goldman points out, consumers can expect to pay more for fair trade products. How do students feel about this? How would it affect their buying choices?

2) Consider bringing in items for students to look at and taste. Do they notice a difference in packaging, quantity, price or taste quality?

3) For homework, have students be on the lookout for fair trade items in their own communities. Suggest that they inquire with shopkeepers why they do or don't stock these items. Students can jot down their findings and discuss their significance.

**Practice Outside of the Classroom:** Have students be on the lookout for fair trade items in their own communities. Suggest that they inquire with shopkeepers why they do or don't stock these items?

Have students read the Knowledge@Wharton HS article "[Economic Partnership: Coffee Beans, Moroccan Rugs and the Future of Fair Trade](#)," which was published after this lesson plan was developed.

**What Worked and What I Would Do Differently:** I really enjoyed teaching the lessons about business ethics and companies' social responsibility practices. In most cases, it was a completely new area for students to explore. Additionally, students offered interesting perspectives about their own generation and their willingness (or not) to support socially conscious movements that will cost them something. The article on Seth Goldman is an easy read for students, and they walk away with a good understanding of what fair trade means. Some students had heard of the term, but few had an understanding of what it meant. Using the video of Media as a fair trade town was helpful in differentiating the delivery of this content. The students enjoyed the video and responded with good critical responses about what they learned about fair trade.

Lastly, the fair trade insignia was difficult for students to see online — even when projected. It would help to bring in items or literature with the symbol on it for students to see it in more detail.

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