



The story of your T-shirt

Lagos, Nigeria – Yaba market is busy, hot and dusty. People are **looking around** the second-hand shops, picking through piles of old clothes, and they're all hoping for bargains. The clothes for sale are from America and Europe and they usually **sell out** fairly quickly. They are called 'mitumba' or 'dead white men's clothes' – people in Africa can't believe that a living person has thrown these clothes away. 'These clothes make people's dreams come true,' says Abeke, a shop owner. 'Everyone wears them, from poor people to politicians. When they **put them on**, you can't tell the difference between rich and poor.' At the front of Abeke's store is a plain cotton T-shirt with the slogan 'Get Real'. It's **picked up** by a young man who examines it carefully. He **tries it on** and smiles – it fits him and it looks good. It's a simple T-shirt, but it has a complex story.

A few years ago, the T-shirt started life in a cotton field in Uzbekistan. The cotton was watered every day and harmful pesticides were used in the field. As the cotton grew, a young woman called Feruza picked it. She worked in the field for ten to twelve hours every day in temperatures of over 30°C, but she was paid very little. Sometimes the pesticides hurt her eyes.

Next, the cotton was flown to India. The T-shirt was made in a tiny sweatshop in Mumbai. There were twenty adults in the shop, five children and no air conditioning. The adults made the T-shirts and the children checked them. Ten-year-old Roshan checked our T-shirt that day. Although he worked long hours (from 6 a.m. to 4 p.m.), he was only paid a few rupees, but it helped to buy food for his family.



The finished T-shirt was sent to a huge discount shop in the UK. The people who shopped there didn't know where the clothes came from. They didn't want to spend a lot of money, but they wanted to be fashionable and to look good. The T-shirt was cheap and it was bought by fifteen-year-old Ryan who liked the slogan. It was washed, worn and ironed and, after a few months, Ryan threw it away. His mum took it to a charity shop with some other old clothes, which were sold to an export company. A few weeks later, the T-shirt made its way to Yaba market in Nigeria.

Back at the market, the young man **takes off** the T-shirt and looks at the \$3 price tag. He offers Abeke \$1.50 because that's all the money he's got. Abeke shakes her head. As she **hangs up** the T-shirt at the front of the shop, the charity shop's price tag is still on the back: 25p.

The journey of a T-shirt tells many stories. Stories about people, countries and cultures. Stories about farmers and factory workers. Stories about sweatshops and shopping centres. But most of all, it's a story about choices, and our choices can make a difference. Do you really need another T-shirt? Do you care where it's from? What's the cost to the environment? What's the human cost? Think about it, because our choices could start a new story.



Did you know?

- Ten thousand litres of water are used to make one T-shirt.
- A 200-gram T-shirt can use up to 5 tonnes of resources.
- 3.4 billion T-shirts are sold in the USA every year.
- Children as young as seven work in cotton fields and sweatshops.



3 Read the text again and choose the correct answers.

- 1 Why are the clothes called 'mitumba'?
 - ☐ a Because they make people's dreams come true.
 - ☐ b Because Africans think they come from dead people.
 - ☐ c Because they are cheap second-hand clothes.
- 2 Why do Africans like Western clothes?
 - ☐ a Because they are not expensive.
 - ☐ b Because only rich people wear them.
 - ☐ c Because everyone looks the same in them.
- 3 Why does Roshan work long hours?
 - ☐ a Because he's paid very well.
 - ☐ b Because he has to help his family.
 - ☐ c Because he only works one day a week.
- 4 Which sentence best describes people in the discount clothes shop?
 - ☐ a They buy a lot of expensive new clothes.
 - ☐ b They often know where clothes are made.
 - ☐ c They don't pay much for the clothes.
- 5 Why doesn't the young man buy the T-shirt from Yaba market?
 - ☐ a Because it's the wrong size.
 - ☐ b Because he hasn't got enough money.
 - ☐ c Because the charity shop is cheaper.
- 6 According to the writer, shoppers ...
 - ☐ a don't care how T-shirts are made.
 - ☐ b can't stop sweatshops.
 - ☐ c could change the T-shirt's story.