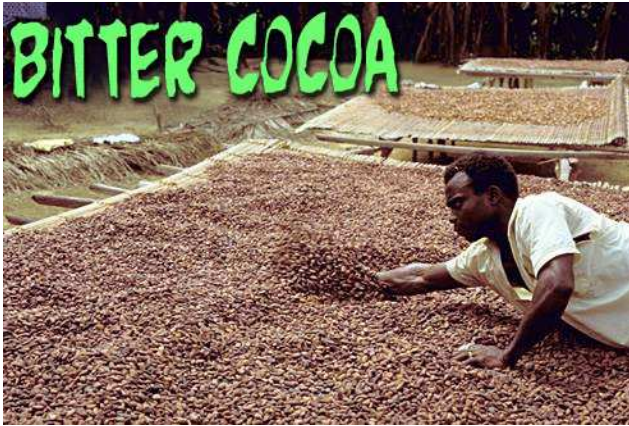


# STUDENT'S HANDOUT



## Background Information

One of the major causes in the difference of the distribution of wealth between rich and poor countries is due to the unfair conditions of the international trade market. Why is it that workers in cocoa plantations in Ghana, working 7 days a week, 365 days a year and often more than 15 hours a day are not able to feed their families? These workers live in conditions close to slavery. And why is the situation similar for workers in cocoa fields elsewhere in the world?



## Instructions

Write a short letter (200 words) to Brandon, the story's narrator, to express your feelings about his situation and to point out that things are changing with the fair trade system. Submit your letter to your teacher who will send it to the In-Terre-Actif Network so that it can be published on the Web site.



## Bitter Cocoa

Hello. My name is Brandon and I am 12 years old. I belong to the Baoulés ethnic group and I come from the north of the Ivory Coast. I have been living in Ghana since my parents entrusted me to a large cocoa farmer because they feared for my wellbeing. My country has been shaken by civil war for a few years. I was promised work and an education which my parents were not able to afford. What about work? Let's talk about it! At first I went to school, but soon after, the plantation owner came and got us.

Every day I work on the plantation without a break. In the morning I gather cocoa pods that have to be split and emptied of their beans using large machetes. The beans are put in large nylon bags so they can ferment for a few hours. Then these heavy bags are carried from the plantation to the drying racks. There, we spread the beans on mats where dry over a few days. They have to be constantly stirred so that they dry more quickly and when a storm is on its way we have to quickly move the beans into the warehouse! In the afternoon work is never finished. We have to prepare the plantation for the next crop and sometimes the owner sends us out to spread pesticides in the plantation. He says that children can do it much easier because we can move quickly between the low branches of the cacao-trees and in any case older workers, because of their health, can not handle chemicals. That is the part of work that I like the least. When I return in the evening I'm often sick and don't feel like eating. The owner sends us to bed early and makes us sleep through the plantation. We sleep on mats and have to stay almost half awake to watch the plantation and protect it from potential thieves.

I'm not complaining of the conditions. I eat when I am hungry and I get my pay once a month. Sometimes my days are very busy and I miss my parents and my brothers and sisters. I would like to send them a letter to tell them that everything is going well and that I am alive... but I don't write so well because at the school I only had time to learn how to read. Supposedly in the northern countries cocoa is used to make sweets which are well liked by kids my age and even by adults. I would like try to taste them once... because the cocoa beans that we process are rather bitter!

## Brandon's story – is it likely true?



Cocoa is the second largest export from Ghana. In 2004, Ghana produced nearly 22% of the world's production of cocoa all on its own. Although Ghana's cocoa is famous for its high quality, it obtains only low prices on the international markets. Large multinational companies, which buy cocoa, control its trade on the international level and insure that prices stay very low. So low, that the majority of small growers can't manage to survive with only an average income of less than 100\$ a year per person. The majority of cocoa produced by Ghana comes from small-scale family businesses but there are also much larger operations. In these large businesses, it has been known that children's are often abused, but the small-scale farms are not the example to be followed either... Often the head of a family has to make a serious decision when

they see their income diminishing year by year. They have to decide whether to send their children to school or to make them work on the family plantation. It is calculated that 284 000 children, between the ages of 9 and 12, work on cocoa plantations in West Africa in unfavorable conditions and where they often fall victim to exploitation. Out of all these children only 34% have access to basic education. Because of this a large majority of these children are deprived of any formal education which would help them later on in life as adults.

The International Institute of Tropical Agriculture estimates that poverty and political instability in the region push many parents to entrust their children to cocoa farming companies where they believe that their children will be sheltered and well cared for through honest and well paying work. These parents are literally taken in and are unaware that they had entrusted their children to networks trafficking in child slavery. These children are often sold later on to large plantation owners who make them work like slaves in order to reduce production costs.

### Towards a solution...

As you can see, Brandon's story is neither an exception, nor an isolated case. It is a daily reality of thousands of West African children. Learning about these abuses, chocolate consumers around the world reacted because cocoa left a bitter taste in their mouths...

Have you heard of fair trade commerce? Fair trade makes it possible to solve the problem of child slavery on cocoa plantations while tackling the source of the problem: poverty and producer's low income. Several cocoa farmers resort to child labour as a survival tactic. If they received a fair price for their cocoa, they could hire more qualified agricultural workers and send their own children to school! This is the basic philosophy of fair trade.

In order to pay a better price to the Ghanaian cocoa growers, intermediaries should be avoided as much as possible. The chocolate-makers who are for fair trade cocoa deal directly with the small cocoa producers working in cooperatives. This way the profit that went to exporters, brokers, importers, processing plants, and distributors goes to the cooperatives which redistribute the profit to their members through services (for example: construction of a school, communal drying-houses, building a tree nursery, etc).



Another way in which profits can go to the growers is by supporting the local production of cocoa products such as cocoa paste, cocoa powder, and cocoa butter. Instead of importing cocoa beans, fair trade chocolate retailers would buy cocoa products made in Ghana. This encourages the local businesses and if the price paid is fair for the processor, they will pay a higher price to the growers.

As well, there are information blitz' and public awareness programs on this subject. In Quebec the Équiterre organization (which receives financial aid from the CIDA) promotes fair trade business for things other than cocoa such as coffee, tea, and sugar. All of the fair trade products are certified by "TransFair" whose logo guarantees that the product supports the growers directly and that child labor is not used in its manufacturing. With fair trade cocoa, we can indulge ourselves without having the bitter taste of knowing that child laborers like Brandon were used!

## GHANA

The Republic of Ghana was formerly known as the "Gold Coast" and is situated on the Gulf of Guinea on the West coast of tropical Africa.

<b>Capital</b>	Accra
<b>Population</b>	18.5 million
<b>Area</b>	238 537 km <sup>2</sup>
<b>Languages</b>	English (official language) Gã, Éwé, Fanti, Haoussa, Twi, Akan Konkomba, Dagbani, Gonja
<b>Life expectancy</b>	Men 55 years, Women 59 years
<b>Mortality rate for children (per 1000 births)</b>	110
<b>Literacy Rate</b>	Men 76%, Women 54%
<b>Currency</b>	Cedis
<b>Population with access to drinking water</b>	65%
<b>Major Exports</b>	Cocoa, gold, lumber, tuna, bauxite, aluminium
<b>Means of communication</b>	20 televisions, 229 radios and 3 telephone lines per 1000 people

### Schematic from bean to buyer



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