

Why do we wear blue jeans?

Why do we wear blue jeans? Probably because we choose to. They are durable, comfortable and easy to wear. They also last longer than conventional trousers. Jeans mean different things to different people. Does this explain their wide appeal? The classic symbol of the American West is now a staple in wardrobes for men and women around the world. Today half the world appear to wear them. Okay, there are exceptions - like parts of China, South Asia and the Middle East. But who invented jeans and when? In the 19th century a Nevada tailor called Jacob Davis was asked to make a pair of sturdy trousers for a local woodcutter. Davis struck upon the idea of reinforcing them with rivets. They proved to be extremely durable and were soon in high demand. They were worn as workwear by labourers on the farms and mines of America's Western states. The reason for their success has as much to do with their cultural meaning as well as their physical construction.

Davis realised the potential of his product but couldn't afford to patent it. He wrote to his fabric supplier, the San Francisco merchant, Levi Strauss, for help. In 1873, Levi's, as the patented trousers became known, were made in two fabrics, cotton duck (similar to canvas) and denim. The latter soon outsold the former. Denim was more comfortable, softening with age, and its indigo dye gave it a unique character. It sold because the denim changed as it aged and the way it wore reflected people's lives. By the beginning of the 20th century workers began to realise they could shrink the trousers to a more comfortable fit. Their durability enabled each pair to tell the story of the worker and his work. Before World War Two jeans were only worn in America's Western States. In places like New York they were synonymous with romantic notions of the cowboy – rugged, independent and American, but at the same time rural and working class. Affluent easterners would go on "Dude holidays" playing cowboys – wearing jeans was part of the experience. Once back home the jeans stayed in the closet.

It was only when Marlon Brando in his 1953 film *The Wild One* and by James Dean two years later in *Rebel Without a Cause* that jean sales took off. With Hollywood putting all the bad boys in denim teenage boys suddenly wanted to be rebels. Schools banned them thus spreading their appeal further. In the 60s jeans appeal had spread to the American middle class, which Europeans wanted to buy into..

Category: USA / Clothes / Jeans

Level: Intermediate / Upper Intermediate

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EXERCISES

1. Blue jeans: Think of three things you know about blue jeans. Go round the room swapping details with others.

2. Dictation: The teacher will read four to six lines of the article slowly and clearly. Students will write down what they hear. The teacher will repeat the passage slowly again. Self-correct your work from page one - filling in spaces and correcting mistakes. Be honest with yourself on the number of errors. Advise the teacher of your total number of errors. Less than five is very good. Ten is acceptable. Any more is room for improvement! More than twenty - you need to do some work!

3. Reading: The students should now read the article aloud, swapping readers every paragraph.

4. Vocabulary: Students should now look through the article and underline any vocabulary they do not know. Look in dictionaries. Discuss and help each other out. The teacher will go through and explain any unknown words or phrases.

5. The article: Students should look through the article with the teacher.

- a) What is the article about?
- b) What do you think about the article?

6. Jeans: In pairs think of five things from the article about blue jeans. Then add five thoughts of your own. Write them below. Discuss together.

From the article	Your own information
1	1
2	2
3	3
4	4
5	5

The teacher will choose some pairs to discuss their findings in front of the class.

7. Let's roleplay 1: KMKT Dallas: In pairs/groups. One of you is the interviewer. The others are one of the following people. You are in the *KMKT FM* radio studio in Dallas, USA. Today's interview is about: *Why do we wear blue jeans?*

1	A cowboy
2	A tourist who has visited a Dude ranch
3	Levi Strauss spokesperson
4	Great, Great Grandson of Jacob Davis

The teacher will choose some pairs to roleplay their interview in front of the class.

8. Let's think! In pairs. On the board write as many words as you can to do with **Blue jeans**. *One-two minutes*. Compare with other teams. Using your words compile a short dialogue together.

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9. Let's roleplay 2: In pairs. You are in cowboy bar in a small town in Texas, USA. One of you is a cowboy. The other is a tourist who has visited a Dude ranch. Start a conversation about 'Dude holidays'. 5-minutes.

10. Let's do 'The Article Quiz': Have the students quiz each other in pairs. They score a point for each correct answer and half a point each time they have to look at the article for help. See who can get the highest score!

Student A

- 1) Name the cities.
- 2) Name the merchant.
- 3) Name the tailor.
- 4) What are Dude holidays?
- 5) Name the movies.

Student B

- 1) Name the film stars.
- 2) Who wanted the sturdy trousers?
- 3) What does sturdy mean?
- 4) What did New Yorkers once think of jeans?
- 5) What did Davis reinforce his jeans with?

11. Blue jeans: Discuss with your partner the different decades of jeans. Who wore them? What does this signify? What changes happened?

1) 1880s	5) 1970s
2) 1940s	6) 1980s
3) 1950s	7) 2000
4) 1960s	8) Today

The teacher will choose some pairs to discuss their findings in front of the class.

12. Presentation: In pairs, groups or individually: Prepare in class or at home a two minute presentation on: '**Blue jeans**' or '**What my class mate and I are wearing!**'. Stand at the front of the class to give your presentation to the class. The class can vote on the best presentation.

13. Jeans: In pairs think of three brand names of blue jeans. Which is best and why? Explain some challenges competing brands might face today. Then add what makes a good pair of jeans. Write them below. Discuss together.

Different jean brand names	What makes a good pair of jeans?
1	1
2	2
3	3

The teacher will choose some pairs to discuss their findings in front of the class.

14. Let's write an e-mail: Write and send a 200 word e-mail to your teacher about: **Blue jeans**. Your e-mail can be read out in class.

15. Sentence starters: Finish these sentence starters. Correct your mistakes. Compare what other people have written.

- a) Jeans _____
- b) I wear blue jeans _____

DISCUSSION

Student A questions

- 1) Did the headline make you want to read the article?
- 2) Do you wear jeans? Explain!
- 3) Why are jeans so popular?
- 4) How many students are wearing jeans today in the class?
- 5) Would you like to go to Texas?
- 6) Do cowboys still wear jeans?
- 7) When were jeans introduced in your country?
- 8) Can jeans be worn on any occasion?
- 9) Why do you think jeans were popular during the 1950s in America?
- 10) What made jeans fashionable for women to wear?

Student B questions

- 1) What do you think about what you read?
- 2) Have you learnt anything in today's English lesson?
- 3) What colour jeans do you wear?
- 4) Would you like to go on a Dude holiday?
- 5) When do you wear jeans?
- 6) How do you think World War Two influenced people wearing jeans?
- 7) What type of jeans might rockabillies, hippies, and punks worn?
- 8) Why were Brando and Dean so important for jeans?
- 9) How might blue jean sales have been affected by the American Vietnam war draft or the racial discrimination in America during the 1960s?
- 10) Did you like this discussion?

SPEAKING

Let's discuss! Blue jeans

Allow 10-15 minutes – As a class / small groups / pairs / 1 to 1

20 things about blue jeans

The teacher can moderate the session.

GAP FILL: READING:

Put the words into the gaps in the text.

Why do we wear blue jeans?

Why do we wear blue jeans? Probably because we choose to. They are (1)____, comfortable and easy to wear. They also last longer than conventional trousers. (2)_____ mean different things to different people. Does this explain their wide appeal? The classic (3)_____ of the American West is now a staple in wardrobes for men and women around the world. Today half the world appear to wear them. Okay, there are (4)_____ - like parts of China, South Asia and the Middle East. But who invented jeans and when? In the 19th century a Nevada (5)_____ called Jacob Davis was asked to make a pair of (6)_____ trousers for a local (7)_____. Davis struck upon the idea of reinforcing them with rivets. They proved to be extremely durable and were soon in high demand. They were worn as workwear by labourers on the farms and mines of America's Western states. The reason for their (8)_____ has as much to do with their cultural meaning as well as their physical construction.

Davis realised the potential of his product but couldn't afford to patent it. He wrote to his fabric (1)_____, the San Francisco merchant, Levi Strauss, for help. In 1873, Levi's, as the patented (2)_____ became known, were made in two fabrics, cotton duck (similar to canvas) and denim. The latter soon outsold the former. Denim was more comfortable, softening with age, and its indigo dye gave it a unique character. It sold because the (3)_____ changed as it aged and the way it wore reflected people's lives. By the beginning of the 20th century workers began to realise they could (4)_____ the trousers to a more comfortable (5)_____. Their (6)_____ enabled each pair to tell the story of the worker and his work. Before World War Two jeans were only worn in America's Western States. In places like New York they were synonymous with romantic notions of the (7)_____ – rugged, independent and American, but at the same time rural and working class. Affluent easterners would go on "Dude holidays" playing cowboys – wearing jeans was part of the experience. Once back home the jeans stayed in the (8)_____.

tailor

symbol

durable

success

jeans

woodcutter

sturdy

exceptions

closet

durability

denim

supplier

trousers

cowboy

fit

shrink

GAP FILL: LISTENING

Listen and fill in the spaces.

Why do we wear blue jeans?

Why _____? Probably because we choose to. They are durable, comfortable _____. They also last longer than conventional trousers. Jeans mean different things to different people. Does this explain their wide appeal? The _____ American West is now a staple in wardrobes for men and women around the world. Today half the world appear to wear them. Okay, _____ - like parts of China, South Asia and the Middle East. But who invented jeans and when? In the 19th century a Nevada tailor called Jacob Davis was asked to make a pair of sturdy trousers _____. Davis struck upon the idea of reinforcing them with rivets. They proved to be extremely durable and were soon in high demand. They were worn as workwear by labourers on the farms and mines of America's Western states. The reason for their success has as much to do with their cultural meaning as well as their _____.

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GRAMMAR:

Put the words into the gaps in the text.

Why do we wear blue jeans?

Why do we wear blue jeans? Probably because we choose to. They are durable, comfortable and easy to wear. They (1)___ last longer (2)___ conventional trousers. Jeans mean different things to different people. Does (3)___ explain their wide appeal? The classic symbol of the American West is now a staple in wardrobes for men and women around the world. Today half the world appear to wear them. Okay, (4)___ are exceptions - like parts of China, South Asia and the Middle East. But who invented jeans and when? In the 19th century a Nevada tailor called Jacob Davis was asked to make a pair of sturdy trousers for a local woodcutter. Davis struck upon the idea of reinforcing (5)___ with rivets. (6)___ proved to be extremely durable and were soon in high demand. They were worn as workwear by labourers on the farms and mines of America's Western states. The reason for their success has as much to do (7)___ their cultural meaning as well as (8)___ physical construction.

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SPELLING TEST

The teacher will ask the class individually to spell the following words that are in the article. Afterwards, check your answers with your teacher, using the following ratings:
Pass = 12, Good = 15, Very good = 18, Excellent = 20

1	extremely	11	canvas
2	comfortable	12	labourers
3	conventional	13	potential
4	trousers	14	cowboy
5	jeans	15	woodcutter
6	wardrobes	16	probably
7	symbol	17	latter
8	unique	18	sturdy
9	durability	19	tailor
10	shrink	20	rivets

LINKS

<http://www.931kmkt.com/>
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-17101768>
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jeans>
<http://www.jeans.com/>

Note: sturdy = hardy, muscular, brawny, stout, strong, powerful.

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