Is it Fair to Eat Chocolate?
Deborah Dunn, Skipping Stones, 2008

Have you had chocolate recently? Most Americans eat about twelve pounds of it each year! But many people don't know that children in West Africa pick most of the world's cocoa beans, which is the main ingredient in chocolate. Cocoa beans from the Ivory Coast make about half of the chocolate eaten in America in one year. Child labor is becoming of increasing concern to people who buy chocolate.

Imagine this: 12-year old Sametta lives in Cote d'Ivoire, West Africa. She wakes up at 4:00 a.m., eats millet porridge, then walks two miles to her family's cocoa bean field. For the next 12 hours she picks cocoa pods and breaks them open so she can scoop out the 30-50 seeds, or "beans," inside. About 400 beans are needed to make one pound of chocolate. Sametta does not go to school. Her family needs her to work in order for them to survive. Her health is at risk because she uses a sharp machete to harvest the cocoa pods, which are sprayed with poisonous pesticides.

A True Story

This is not a story from 200 years ago. It's happening right now! Every day in the Ivory Coast, as well as in Ghana, Nigeria and Cameroon, about 300,000 children are forced to pick cocoa beans that will be sold to big chocolate companies like Nestle and Cargill. About 6,000 of these children are treated like slaves--they sleep in dirty rooms, work 12-hour days without pay, are fed very little, and are sometimes whipped. Most of the other children work on their family farms where they need to sell every bean to make money for their families to survive. Going to school is out of the question.
Why Is this Happening?

The reason is money. Extremely poor countries send children to work in other countries where cocoa beans grow. In exchange their government is paid. Also, families who own the cocoa bean farms are very poor. For generations they have depended on growing and selling cocoa beans as their main means of survival. Without help from their children the farmers would not be able to buy food. Big chocolate companies like Mars/M&M want to buy cocoa beans for as little cash as possible so that they can make big profits selling their chocolate products. Chocolate companies pay farmers a very low price for their cocoa beans. Most farmers only earn between $30 and $100 a year. Cheap or free labor means more profits for the chocolate companies.

How Can We Solve this Problem?

In 2001 the U.S. government created a document, the Harkin-Engel Protocol, that called the chocolate companies to help eliminate child slavery and child labor by July 2005. However, chocolate companies have not abided by this protocol and the deadline has been extended to July 2008. Even if the companies do convince countries to stop selling their children, and they teach farmers that their children need to go to school, the cocoa farmers would still make barely enough money to survive.

A New Solution: Fair Trade

There is hope. An emerging group of farms in Africa and South America are called Fair Trade Certified. Companies that buy cocoa beans from these farmers sign a document promising to pay the farmers a Fair Trade price which is enough for them to buy food and clothing for their families and send their children to school. There are about 45,000 farmers in this program. Chocolate made from these farmers’ beans is labeled Fair Trade. Also, all organic chocolate made with cocoa grown on farms without child laborers is labeled Fair Trade.

Farmers must have control over their cocoa bean prices. Before 1999, the government in the Ivory Coast set a minimum price for cocoa, but then the cocoa industry was privatized and the minimum price disappeared. Groups like Save the Children say that minimum price laws need to return.

How can you help and take pride in what you eat?

There are several ways. The first is when you get a craving for delicious chocolate, buy it from companies that have the Fair Trade label, or buy organic chocolate. Second, tell all your friends to do the same! Third, write letters to the biggest chocolate companies (Nestle, M&M/Mars and Hershey) telling them that they need to buy at least some of their cocoa from Fair Trade Certified farms so that kids can go to school. Lastly, when your school has a fundraiser, choose to sell Fair Trade products. Now chocolate can be eaten fair and square!
From Farm to Factory

On the Farm: Cocoa trees grow for five years. Ready to harvest pods are picked by cutting them off with a machete and collected in a basket. Pods are split open with a machete and seeds are scooped out. A skilled farmer can open 500 pods per hour!

Next, the beans are buried under banana leaves to ferment. The fermented seeds are dumped onto a reed mat and dried on a rooftop, table or mat. This prevents mold from growing. When dried, seeds are scooped into sacks. A full sack weighs 120-200 pounds.

In the Factory: The beans are cleaned and roasted in a giant rotating oven. Seed shells are removed by putting it through a winnower. The remaining part is called a nib, which is made up of cocoa butter and cocoa solids. Next, the nibs are ground into a thick paste (which may be then blended with condensed milk, sugar and extra cocoa butter) and refined, or smoothed out using steel rollers. It is kneaded once more in a machine. Finally, the chocolate is heated to 105[degrees]F and cooled to 85[degrees]F to make it smooth and shiny, and then poured into a mold and packaged. It is now ready to be marketed.

Demonstrate Understanding
1. Using information from the article, explain why children like Sametta are treated like slaves.
**Demonstrate Understanding**
2. According to the article, what are two suggestions the author makes of how you can help resolve the problem of using child labor to produce chocolate?

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**Develop an Interpretation**
3. In paragraph five, the author discusses the Harkin-Engel Protocol. Why would companies choose not to follow these guidelines? Use information from the article to support your answer.
Develop an Interpretation
4. If fair trade practices were followed in the Ivory Coast (Cote d'Ivoire), how might life improve for Sametta? Be as specific as possible.

Analyze Text
5. What is the author's purpose in writing this article?
Analyze Text
6. The author uses subheadings in the article. How does this technique help the reader?