

## Blue Jeans

Do you own a pair of blue jeans? The chances are that you do. In the UK three pairs of jeans are sold every second! Why are they so popular? Jeans are strong and durable. At the same time, they can also be soft and comfortable.



### The Origin of Blue Jeans

Blue jeans go back more than 140 years. The city of San Francisco in California, USA, was thriving due to a gold rush. Mine workers, gold diggers and pioneers had all moved to the city after James W Marshall had found a nugget of gold. After hearing about how well things were going in San Francisco, a man called Levi Strauss moved there from New York in 1853. He opened a successful dry-goods business. Strauss's business did well because the things he sold, including cloth, pillows, blankets and toiletries, were in high demand. Soon he was selling his goods to shops all over California.

In 1872, a tailor called Jacob Davis wrote Strauss a letter. Davis had begun putting metal fasteners, called rivets, in the places in trousers where they tended to rip, such as the corners of pockets. The rivets made the trousers stronger. Davis wanted to apply for a patent – a special licence that meant no one else could steal his idea. The patent cost US \$68. Davis did not have that much money. He asked Strauss to be his partner, and Strauss agreed. On 20th May 1873, they received the patent.

Levi Strauss & Co. opened factories in San Francisco to make 'waist overall' work trousers that used the rivets. The trousers were made from a strong blue fabric called serge. The serge was originally from a town in France called Nîmes. *De Nîme* means 'from Nîmes', so the trousers became known as denims. These overalls were the first blue jeans.



## Blue Jeans: Walking into a New Era

Over the years, other companies began making jeans. Miners were not the only workers who wore them. In the 1930s, films showed rugged cowboys wearing jeans. In 1953, Marlon Brando wore jeans in the film *The Wild One*. His character in the film was the leader of a gang of bikers. Brando's image from this film became extremely famous and many people wanted to copy his cool style. Jeans became a statement of independence and rebellion. But the biggest change came in 1963. An American magazine, *Newsweek*, did a feature on young people. The cover of the magazine showed a teenage girl wearing blue jeans. This was the start of a new era of fashion for young people. Before this, teenagers had worn clothes that were smarter, and just like the clothes their parents wore. Soon every young person wanted to own a pair of jeans.

### Getting Creative!

By the 1970s, some people wanted their jeans to stand out, to be different. They used beads, coloured thread and paint. In the 1980s, designers started making their own styles of jeans. Jeans became a fashion statement.

A recent fashion in jeans has been 'distressed' jeans. These are jeans that are visibly aged and worn, but still intact and functional. The denim is 'distressed' in the factory and people spend a lot of money buying jeans that look well-worn!



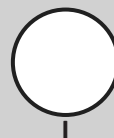
In 2000, a museum opened in Buttenheim, Germany. This is the city where Levi Strauss was born. The museum tells the story of blue jeans. Does this mean jeans are history? Look around. What do you think?

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Class: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

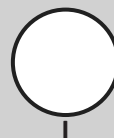
1 Why do you think the author starts with a question?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



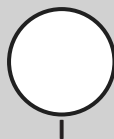
2 *Jeans are strong and durable.*  
What does the word 'durable' mean in this sentence?

\_\_\_\_\_



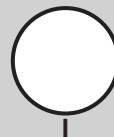
3 Why was there a big movement of population to San Francisco in the 1850s?

\_\_\_\_\_



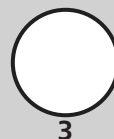
4 What was Jacob Davis's unique idea?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



5 Describe **three** things that happened after Levi Strauss moved to San Francisco, in the order that they happened.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_



6

How did denim trousers get their name?

Tick **one** box.

The work trousers had rivets.

The trousers were made from a fabric called serge.

The fabric came from Nîmes.

Levi Strauss opened a factory in France.

7

Number these events in the order in which they happened.

The first one has been done for you.

Davis couldn't afford the patent to protect his idea.

Davis had begun putting rivets on trousers to strengthen them.

Levi Strauss & Co. opened factories in San Francisco.

Davis asked Strauss to be his partner.

On 20th May 1873 they received the patent.

8

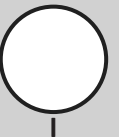
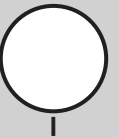
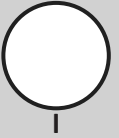
Look at the sub-heading ***Blue Jeans: Walking Into a New Era.***

Why has the author used the word 'walking'?

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9

Which of the following statements are facts, and which are opinions? Tick **one** box for each statement.

|  | Fact                     | Opinion                  |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Levi Strauss made the best jeans.  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Cowboys wearing jeans looked cool.                                       | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| The picture on the front of <i>Newsweek</i> showed a girl wearing jeans. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Everyone liked the blue colour of Levi Strauss's jeans.                  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Marlon Brando wore jeans in the film <i>The Wild One</i> .               | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

10

Look at the paragraph beginning: *Over the years ...*  
Give **one** reason why the author might have chosen to use the adjective 'rugged'.

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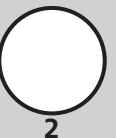
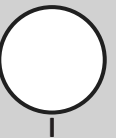
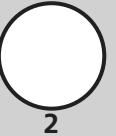
11

Look at the paragraph underneath the sub-heading: ***Blue Jeans: Walking into a New Era.***

Explain fully what the following sentence means: *Jeans became a statement of independence and rebellion.*

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12

Look at the section: **Getting Creative!** How did jeans become a fashion statement?

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13

Why is the word 'distressed' a good choice to describe new jeans that look old and worn?

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14

What is surprising about 'distressed jeans'?

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15

Look at the paragraph beginning: *In 2000 ...*  
Why might the author tell the reader to 'look around'?

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**For teacher use**

|                |                 |
|----------------|-----------------|
| Your mark      | _____ out of 20 |
| What went well |                 |
| How to improve |                 |

