

Factory Work in the 21st Century: Thinking Critically About How Our Favorite Devices Are Made

Today, we see a ‘ground-breaking’ newspaper article on factory conditions in China where Apple’s iPads are manufactured. “In China, Human Costs Are Built Into an iPad” (pp. 83-99 in the Course Pack), by Charles Duhigg and David Barboza, calls attention to the realities of working conditions in a faraway plant that makes devices that most of us truly admire. This article lets us ‘think critically’ about the impact of technology (and globalization) on work in the 21st century. It will also help combine photos and printed texts as sources, just like you will be doing for *Essay #2 – Writing on Queens Historical Photos*.

● In groups of 3:

- 1) **Why do you think the authors open up this article with a description of an explosion in a Foxconn plant?** Why did the explosion occur? What does it suggest about safety conditions at these factories? **What are some problems with living and working conditions for workers at these factories?** Do you think the journalists are being fair in their tone and their use of evidence here?

- 2) Journalists often use interviews and personal stories for evidence and use these personal experience to comment on larger questions and themes. (This is just like our personal essays from our *Across Culture* anthology!) **Briefly tell us the story of Lai Xaidong on pp. 93-95. Why do you think the journalists include this ‘case study’ or personal story?** Is it effective?

- 3) **For a few minutes, look over any of the photos that accompany this article.** (We will also look at more multimedia content online at www.nytimes.com for this story.) Choose one photo and read it carefully for us. Use the caption and some ‘close reading’ to describe what is in the photo. **What does this photo add to the print story? What new or important information does it contain?**

- 4) **Challenge Question:** Journalists are supposed to be objective and fair in their reporting. **Do you think the journalists in this article are balanced in their approach to telling this story?** Do they seem to argue for ways in which the conditions in the plants in China could be improved? Is Apple Corporation fair to its employees? *Does it*

show respect toward manual or factory laborers in the 21st century? How can you tell?

Finally, does reading this piece make you think differently about iPhones or iPads?

Do you think most Americans are concerned with the way their products are manufactured overseas? (Look at the last page of the print article here for some evidence.)

(~20 min.)

- Choose one reporter from your team who will give your responses to the class. We will collect some answers to the above questions.