

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

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



## EXAMINING ETHICS

### DID A CHILD MAKE THAT PRODUCT YOU JUST PURCHASED?

You are delighted with the athletic shoes you just received for your birthday. You are relaxing in your newly redecorated den and are admiring the oriental rug you recently purchased. Life can be wonderful, can't it? Although we may grumble when we lay out a lot of hard-earned money to make a special purchase, what is money for, if not to spend it on something we want or feel we need? But have you ever given serious thought to how the products you buy are manufactured? If some of those products could talk, they could tell horror stories about child labor in other countries.

Factories in the United States operate under a vast array of laws enacted to protect workers. These laws govern wages and working conditions and protect the environment. One of the most important of them is the Child Labor Law, which protects the health and welfare of American youngsters. In many foreign countries, laws and regulations governing child labor are quite different, and employing children is a standard operating procedure.

Most American companies with production facilities in foreign countries maintain that they abide by local minimum wage laws and environmental regulations. Critics, however, point out that "local" regulations in foreign countries are often quite lax when compared with similar regulations in the United States. Critics are also quick

to point out that the laws of many countries, allow children as young as five to work in factories and agricultural fields. For example, children between the ages of five and fourteen make up 20 percent of the work force in Pakistan. These same children handstitch, for six cents an hour, 80 percent of the soccer balls sold in the United States. In India, Nepal, and Pakistan, as many as a million children below the age of fifteen work up to twenty hours a day, seven days a week, chained to their looms producing oriental rugs for the world market. Mexico admits that nearly 400,000 children harvest vegetables in fields that have been sprayed with outlawed pesticides. And many children worldwide are employed in manufacturing sweatshops that produce a large quantity of the clothing and shoes we wear every day.

#### Issues to Consider

1. Many American firms with production facilities in foreign countries maintain that they abide by local regulations. Is local compliance enough, or should these firms be forced to comply with the higher standards and regulations used to protect workers in the United States?
2. The U.S. Congress has discussed bills that will prohibit the sale of merchandise from countries that use child labor. Should Congress pass laws that dictate how products are produced in other countries?
3. Assume that you want to purchase a pair of athletic shoes. If you knew that the shoes were produced in a country whose laws permit businesses to employ workers under the age of fifteen, would this knowledge affect your purchasing decision?