

Kyi, Tanya Lloyd. *The Lowdown on Denim*. Illus. Clayton Hanmer. Toronto: Annick Press, 2011. Print.

It's springtime: time to pick up a pair of the latest blue jeans for the new season. This year, however, thanks to *The Lowdown on Denim*, young fashionistas can also read about their pants, and consider the cultural, economic, political, and environmental issues surrounding them. *The Lowdown on Denim* provides an entertaining introduction to how jeans have evolved, who makes them, and what they've meant throughout the world.

Author [Tanya Lloyd Kyi](#), based in British Columbia, has created a wide variety of curiosity-sparking non-fiction titles; including *50 Underwear Questions* ([reviewed by T. Chatterley in this issue](#)) and *50 Poisonous Questions* ([reviewed by K. Frail in Vol. 1, No. 1, 2011](#)). Here, she applies an unobtrusive narrative frame; protagonists JD and Shred are sent to detention, having been caught blue-handed running their teacher's jeans up the school flagpole. In detention, JD and Shred are tasked with writing a report on the history of jeans, which, as Shred points out, "have been around way longer than Google".

Kyi takes her protagonists on a tour of jeans beginning in the mid-19th century, and illustrator [Clayton Hanmer](#) carries the reader along by placing JD and Shred in each time and place along the way. They begin by panning for gold in California in garments woefully lacking in ruggedness. They go on to explore wartime periods, the cold war, rock'n'roll, disco, punk, hip hop, and more. Throughout, Kyi and Hanmer also touch upon issues including trade globalization, factory working conditions, marketing strategies, gender norms, and pesticide-intensive cotton.

Hanmer's award-winning illustrations are well-known thanks to publications such as *OWL Magazine*, *National Geographic Kids*, and *The Globe & Mail*, as well as several books. Here he effectively captures JD and Shred's bewilderment at their whirlwind tour, while highlighting key moments of insight.

The Lowdown on Denim is unfortunately mistitled. Kyi and Hanmer have actually given us *The Lowdown on Jeans Beginning with Levi Strauss*. Readers may unfortunately be left with the impression that jeans were a solely American invention; denim fabric's European origins, for example, go unmentioned.

Despite this, *The Lowdown on Denim* is a detailed, readable, engaging commodity history. It will draw in pre-teen and early teen readers, and could serve as a great launching point for a variety of classroom discussions and projects.

Recommended: 3 out of 4 stars

Reviewer: Sarah Polkinghorne