



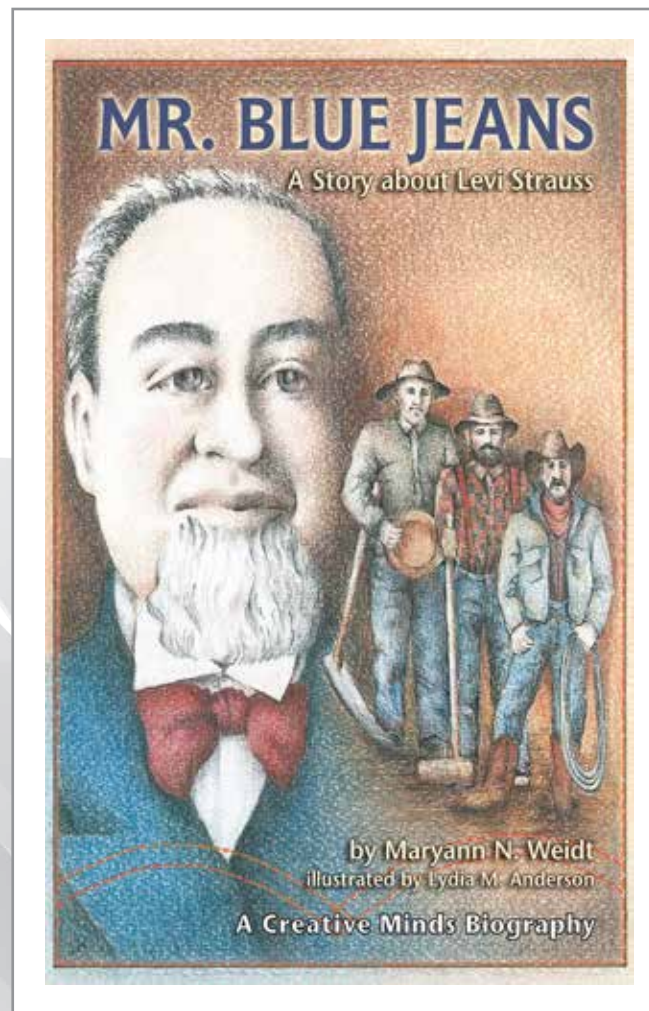
**TEACHER GUIDE**

**GRADES 3-5**

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

# **Mr. Blue Jeans: A Story About Levi Strauss**

Maryann N. Weidt



**READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT**

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Maryann N. Weidt

## TEACHER GUIDE

### NOTE:

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

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3901 Union Blvd., Suite 155

St. Louis, MO 63115

[sales@novelunits.com](mailto:sales@novelunits.com)

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## Summary

The patent for the 501 Levi jeans was approved in 1873. Does the following description sound familiar? "The 501 indicated the original lot number of the fabric. The pants were made from nine-ounce denim (later to become 10-ounce) and had tapered legs that could be easily tucked into the tops of boots. Each pair of jeans was slightly oversized. After washing, the pants would shrink to fit the wearer." From humble beginnings as a peddler in Germany, and later in the United States, Levi Strauss worked long and hard, seizing opportunities as they came along, while building solid, friendly business relationships that would eventually lead to his becoming *Mr. Blue Jeans*.

## About the Author

Maryann Weidt was a children's librarian for 20 years. She lives in Duluth, Minnesota, with her husband and three children. She is the author of three biographies. In addition to *Mr. Blue Jeans: A Story about Levi Strauss*, Maryann Weidt has written *Oh, the Places He Went: A Story about Dr. Seuss* and *Stateswoman to the World: A Story about Eleanor Roosevelt*.

*Note:* Please be selective and use discretion when choosing the activities that you will do with this unit. It is not intended that everything be done, but that the discretionary choices made are most appropriate for your use and group of students. A wide range has been provided, so that individuals as well as groups may benefit from these selections.

## Initiating Activities

1. Have one or two pairs of blue jeans hanging in the room. Make a copy of the following quotation from Louis L'Amour and place it in a conspicuous location, so that you may refer to it easily when ready to discuss it.

*"Sometimes I wonder if anything is ever ended. The words a man speaks today live on in his thoughts or the memories of others, and the shot fired, the blow struck, the thing done today is like a stone tossed into a pool and the ripples keep widening out until they touch lives far from ours."*

Find out how many students in the group are wearing jeans. Ask all if they like jeans, and what they think it is about jeans that makes them such a popular item of clothing. Point out the bulletin board and the jeans hanging in the room, and ask the students if anyone knows how long blue jeans have been in use, and how they came to be. Would they be surprised to know that the patent for the Levi 501 jeans was approved in 1873? Read, or have a volunteer read, the quotation. Do they think that Levi Strauss would be surprised at the popularity of blue jeans today, and the impact that this item of clothing has had throughout the years?

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## Chapter 1: "Buttenheim"—Pages 7-15

### Vocabulary

peddler 7	cascaded 7	hoe 8	trudged 8
meager 12	compartment 12	variation 13	swarm 13
immigrants 13	vendors 14		

### Vocabulary Activity

Match up the vocabulary words into sets of two words each. Since there are ten vocabulary words, there will be five sets of two words each. Use each set in a sentence. Illustrate one sentence.

### Discussion Questions

1. What is life like in Bavaria for the Strauss family? What is your opinion of the Bavarian government's treatment of the Jewish people? Choose a location near you for the Strauss family. What would life be like for them there? Why? (*Pages 8-9, Life in Bavaria is hard for the Strauss family. They cannot vote. The Bavarian government decrees how many Jewish couples may be married in a year. The government tells the Jews what they may do for a living, and where they must live. In addition, the Strausses pay special taxes on their home and business because they are Jewish.*) Do you think that you would like to live under these restrictions? Why? (*Answers will vary.*)
2. On page 12, Lob wonders on board ship which is worse, "to be seasick below deck in the meager, cramped quarters or to be on deck with the constant threat of being washed overboard." What is your opinion? Why?
3. Do you think that Levi will become accustomed to living in America? What do you think will happen next?

### Supplementary Activities

1. Do some research. Find out more about Bavaria.\*

\**Bavaria* is a state in southeastern Germany. It covers 27,238 square miles (70,546 square kilometers). Most of the state is a plateau surrounded and broken by mountains. The Bavarian Alps blend into the Tirolese Alps at the Austrian border. The Zugspitze, Germany's highest peak, lies in these mountains. It rises 9,721 feet (2,963 meters) above sea level. Bavaria is drained by the Danube and Main rivers. Bavaria is a tourist region. Farms in Bavaria produce such crops as barley, hay, hops, oats, potatoes, rye, and wheat. Hops are used in the production of beer, an important product of Bavaria. Munich and Nuremberg are Bavaria's two most important cities. Munich, the largest city in Bavaria and its capital, manufactures electronic products, optical instruments, and many other products. It is a center for printing and publishing. Nuremberg, the second largest city in Bavaria is famous for its toys and gingerbread. Bavaria has been a duchy, a kingdom, a republic, and a state at various times in its history. The region was first inhabited by the Celts. (Source: *The World Book Encyclopedia*, 1991.)

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2. Young Lob has taken over his father's trade of selling dry goods. What are "dry goods"? (*dry goods: textiles, clothing, and related articles of trade; also called soft goods*) What are some things that Lob might have to sell at the present time? Make a list. Categorize the articles on the list, using your own headings.

*Hirsch Strauss* was listed in the village registry as a dry goods salesman, which in that day probably meant that he was a peddler. He was following an occupation that can be traced from ancient times, when Jewish peddlers from Antioch in Greece sold their wares to Caesar's legions in France and Britain. Among the most famous peddlers were Jewish women, who sold perfumes to the wealthy ladies of Rome. These perfume peddlers were among the few Jewish people who interacted directly with the powerful Roman women and influenced their lives. The peddler enjoyed a similar position in the days of the feudal system of Europe. He moved from village to village while the townspeople seldom moved beyond their own boundaries. The peddler brought them news and gossip as he sold his wares and he had access to all, wealthy and poor, young and old. Throughout the years, the peddler's position was enviable, yet difficult. Although he saw many people and visited many places, he also experienced extreme hardships including poor food, lack of proper shelter, and disease. These hardships may have contributed to *Hirsch Strauss's* last illness, which was called consumption then. It was probably tuberculosis. When he died in 1845, his youngest son, Lob, was 16 years old. (Information Source: See Bibliography, Van Steenwyk.)

3. The Strauss family prepares to leave Germany. The things to be taken along are those that are important to the family members, such as: kosher food, bedding, brass candlesticks, and the samovar (page 10). Restricting your packing to a backpack or one small carry on luggage bag, what would you choose to take with you? Why? Make a list and explain the reason for taking each item on your list. (For background information see \* below and Teacher Information Section at the end of this guide.)

*\*Jews In America—1600s through the 1800s:* In most of the American Colonies, Jews had the same rights as Christians. As early as 1654, a group of Jews arrived in what is now New York City. They established a synagogue there and later established synagogues in Charleston, South Carolina; Newport, Rhode Island; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and Savannah, Georgia. Many Jews fought in the colonial army during the Revolutionary War in America (1775-1783). A Jewish financier named Hayman Salomon gave much of his fortune to help the newly established government of the United States. Since Jews had full legal equality in the new nation, American Jews became the largest and most secure Jewish population in the world. However, they continued to suffer discrimination elsewhere. During the late 1800s, anti-Semitism became a powerful force in European politics. Austria-Hungary and Germany even had political parties whose policies were based largely on anti-Semitism. Many anti-Semitic writers tried to prove that Jews were inferior to Germans and other peoples of northern Europe. At the same time, Russia had an official policy of discrimination against the Jews. As a result, hundreds of Jews were killed in a series of massacres. About 2 million Jews fled to the United States from Russia, and many others found refuge in Palestine. (Source: *The World Book Encyclopedia*, 1991.)

4. Start a story map that traces the journey and fortunes of Levi Strauss. (See page 10 of this guide.) How does Lob become Levi (page 14)?