

**Modern World History
Industrialization Unit**

Name: _____

Reading Questions to go with article by Sean Price

Directions: After you have read the article on child labor during the Industrial Revolution, answer the following questions. You may write your answers on this sheet. Be sure to answer all parts of the questions and provide examples from the reading.

1. Describe the work that children did during the Industrial Revolution.
2. What reasons did people give in favor of child labor? (Name 2 reasons)
3. How would you compare the working conditions in the cloth mills to those in the coal mines? Provide at least 2 specific examples from the reading to support your answer.
4. Why do you think poor families let their children work in factories and mines during the Industrial Revolution? Would any parents in the U.S. today let their children work under such conditions? Explain.

by Sean Price

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Ever wonder what teenagers' lives were like in the past? If you had grown up in a poor family during Britain's Industrial Revolution (1750-1850), you would not have spent your days in a classroom reading a magazine. In fact, you probably would not be able to read.

Instead, you would have worked all day in a factory or coal mine to help support your family. You might have begun working as early as your fourth or fifth birthday. But more than likely, work would have begun when you were nine or ten.

Your life would be a lot like that of Susan Pitchforth, who was 11 in 1842. She worked in a coal mine six days a week, for pennies a day. Her job was to pull coal carts hundreds of yards uphill. As she described it, a typical work-day went like this: *I*

get porridge for breakfast before I come [to work], and

bring my [lunch] with me—a muffin. When I have done about 12 loads I eat it while at work; I run 24 [coal carts] a day; I cannot [go home] till I have done them all.¹

The coal that Susan hauled was the fuel of the Industrial Revolution. It ran the machines that helped make Britain the world's first industrialized country. Britain became the first country to rely mostly on factories, rather than farming, to employ its people and make products.

Industrialization does many great things. It boosts the flow of inexpensive goods and improves most people's standard of living. Other countries in Europe, as well as the U.S., quickly followed Britain's example.

But the transition from agriculture to industry is usually harsh. In Britain, the people who suffered most were children like Susan Pitchforth. They did the backbreaking work that made the Industrial Revolution possible.

Leading the World

Britain became industrialized first because it was in better shape than other countries to use new technology. Its political system granted people freedom to explore new ideas. When the steam engine came along around 1700, inventors adapted it to power machines such as looms, which make cloth. Later, the steam engine powered ships and trains.

Other countries still relied mostly on horsepower or waterpower to make and transport goods. So the British could get more products to their customers faster. Britain also had the natural resources, such as iron and coal, to build and fuel machines.

Cheap Labor

Britain had one other vital resource: cheap labor. Women and children—especially children—were considered less valuable than men as workers, so they could be paid far less. Also, they were less able to protest bad working conditions.

In the 1700s and early 1800s, education was usually a luxury for the

rich. Many people thought that it was natural for children to do hard physical labor. One person wrote: *In all ages, children have been employed in labor often unsuitable to their strength. For example, in the agricultural districts, gangs of them may be seen weeding in the fields during the bitter days of winter, for nine hours a day.¹*

Many well-meaning people thought that heavy labor was the best way to help poor children. Children who worked did not have to rely on public handouts, and they never had time to get into trouble. As one supporter of child labor wrote: *A person [working] constantly under the eye of his master for 12 hours together, and not [allowed] to go out at night, cannot commit a crime.¹*

Making Children Slaves

But other people believed that factory work had changed child labor into child slavery. Poor children had always worked long hours. But before the Industrial Revolution, they usually had done so in a family business or on a farm, rather than in factories and mines.

People who could not support themselves were sent to workhouses, places where the poor, sick, and aged lived under horrible conditions. Many workhouses in London took poor children away from their parents and shipped them off to factories in other parts of Britain. Said one observer: *The children, who are sent off by wagon loads at a time, are as much lost forever to their parents as if they were shipped off for the West Indies.²*

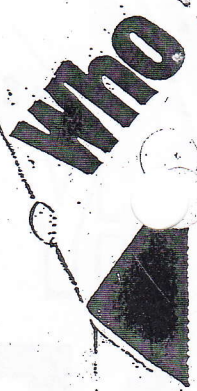
Robert Blincoe, who was seven in 1799, was on one of those wagons. Many years later, he wrote that he and 80 other poor children had been tricked into working at a faraway cotton mill: *[The mill owners promised us that we would be] fed on roast beef and plum-pudding—be allowed to ride [our] masters' horses, and have silver watches, and plenty of cash in [our] pockets.¹*

But Blincoe soon realized that the mill was a terrible place. As the wagon he was in approached the mill, he



age of workers.

Matt Collins



ard one villager say, "The Lord have mercy on them." Another replied, "They'll find little mercy here."

rippling Work

The type of work that awaited Blin- ne and other children was brutal. In oth mills, their work was mind- amblingly dull, and the air was filled ith harmful cotton or wool dust. hey had to stand on their feet for most of their 12- to 18-hour shifts.

In 1831, Joseph Hebergam, 17, said at his work at a cloth factory had left him crippled: *When I had worked bout half a year, a weakness fell in y knees and ankles; it continued and has got worse and worse. In the morning I could scarcely walk, and y brother and sister used out of kind-*

died. In 1831, one former child work- er recalled a sleepy girl who narrowly escaped death: *She one day got entan- gled in the machinery till all her clothes were torn off her back, and the overlooker was not at hand. But we got the mill stopped [in time], and when she was taken out she was very much abused [by the overlooker] for her neglect in letting herself [get caught in the machine].*¹

Conditions in the factories were ter- rible. But work in the coal mines was worse. Children there faced cave-ins and poisonous gases. One labor in- spector wrote in 1833: *The hardest labor in the worst room in the worst-con- ducted factory is less hard, less cruel, and less demoralizing than the labor in the best of coal mines.*¹

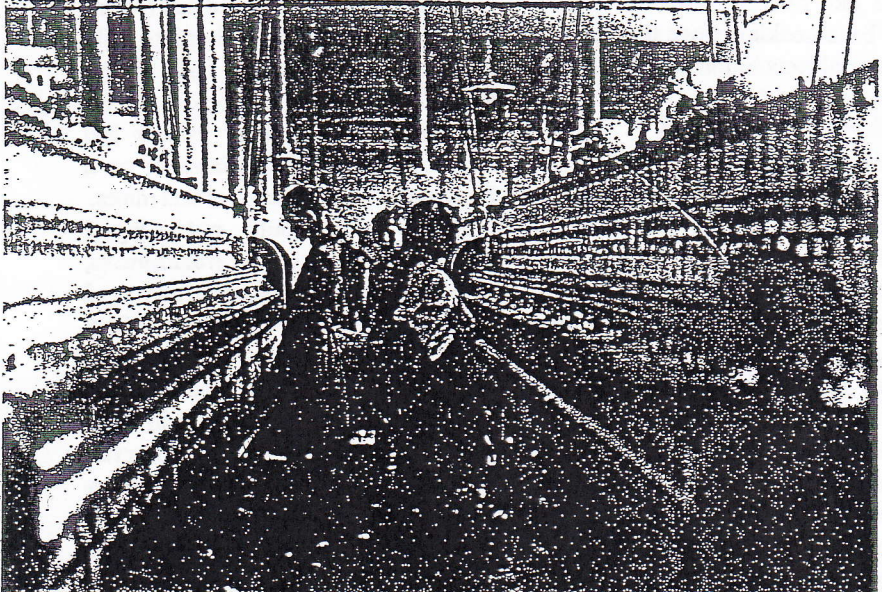
factories.

Unfortunately, the demand for cheap labor made child workers a common sight in those countries as well. One teen, who worked at a Massachusetts cloth mill in the early 1800s, wrote home about some of the hazards there: *Last Thursday . . . a man was killed by the [railroad] cars. Another had nearly all his ribs broken. Another was nearly killed by falling down and having a bale of cot- ton fall on him.*³

Slowly, people began to understand the horrible conditions under which children worked. Adults were hesitant, at first, to let the government set rules for private businesses. They said that such control would limit the freedom of both factory owners and workers.

Horror stories about children—and adults—who were overworked or maimed or killed while working, fi- nally changed people's minds. But it took until the 1930s for most forms of child labor to be stamped out in the U.S. and Western Europe.

The Industrial Revolution brought Britain, the U.S., and other countries many benefits. But, in other parts of the world, industrialization is just taking place. Countries in Asia, Africa, and South America are still struggling to modernize their econ- omies. As they do, they are turning to an old resource—child labor. ☆



Industrial Revolution caught on quickly elsewhere. By 1870, there were 750,000 men 10 to 15 years old who were hard at work, like these cloth-mill laborers.

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ness to take me under each arm, and run with me, a good mile, to the mill, and my legs dragged on the ground in consequence of the pain. . . . If we were five minutes late, the overlooker would take a strap, and beat us till we were black and blue.¹

Child laborers were almost always exhausted—and tired children ran the risk of falling into machinery. Smashed fingers and mangled limbs were common. Many injured children

Reforms Slow to Come

Few people in Britain knew that children were enduring such hardships. Travel was still slow and uncomfortable, so news about child labor was slow to spread.

But people did notice the wide array of products—cloth, dishes, matches, pins, shoes, paper, and books—that was suddenly available. The U.S. and other countries quickly copied—and often improved upon—Britain's

¹"Hard Times": *Human Documents of the Industrial Revolution* by E. Royston Pike (Frederick A. Praeger, © Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1966).

²*English Society in the Eighteenth Century* by Roy Porter (Penguin Books; © Roy Porter, 1982, 1990).

³*A History of US: Liberty for All?* by Joy Hakim (Oxford University Press; © 1994 by Joy Hakim).

YOUR TURN

Why do you think poor fam- lies let their children work in fac- tories and mines during the Industrial Revolution? Would any parents in the U.S. today let their children work under such conditions? Explain.

Do you think that you or your friends could have worked under such conditions? Why or why not?