

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

## Child Labor

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Child labor is not anything new. When most of the people in Europe lived off the land, children worked on the farms right alongside other members of their families. They got up early and worked hard.

This type of child labor had many good effects. Children learned useful skills that they would use in their adult lives. They learned to be responsible and to help care for their families. They developed their strength and lived a healthy lifestyle out in the fresh air.

The work that these children did was supervised by their own families who had their best interests at heart. Along with the hard work, these children also found time for fun and games.

Then, in the late 1700s, the Industrial Revolution began to change the way people worked. Soon, a large percentage of workers had moved from agricultural work to industrial work. When a father or mother went to work in the factories, many times, so did their children.

This factory work was hard on everyone - men, women, and children - but no one felt the bad effects of the Industrial Revolution more than its youngest workers, the children who labored in the factories.

The workday for a child in a textile factory might begin at 5:00 A. M. with a quick breakfast of porridge and a mile-long walk to the factory.

In the factory, the youngest children, those around six years old, were given the job of scavenger. The scavenger's job was to pick up the loose cotton that accumulated under the machines. They did their work crouched down low under the operating machinery.

Children who had some experience working in the factory were given the job of piecer. A piecer's job was to catch broken threads and tie them back together. Piecers walked miles every day as they moved up and down the rows looking for broken threads and leaned over the machines to tie them.

Factory owners preferred to hire children at a young age. They did not have to pay these young workers very much money, and they could begin training them early to be good factory workers.

What qualifications did a good factory worker need? Good factory workers were the people who followed orders and kept working. They were the people who would tolerate dirty, noisy, crowded, and dangerous conditions. In other words - children.



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These factory children worked long days, as much as thirteen to fifteen hours per day. They worked six days per week. In some factories, the children got a half-hour break at dinner time. They ate their other meals standing at the machinery while they worked. Their meals, day in and day out, consisted mainly of porridge, oatcakes, and potatoes.

By mid-afternoon, the children had already had a long day, and they began to get sleepy. It was hard to stay awake and hard to stay on their feet. Overseers beat the children with a strap if they sat down or fell asleep on the job.

At the end of the day, it was time to walk home. The youngest children might be carried home by their parents or older brothers or sisters. Then it was a quick meal before they dropped off to sleep. Sometimes the children were too tired to eat.

Other children who worked in the factory did not have a family to go home to. These children, taken from orphanages or workhouses, were signed over to the factory until their twenty-first birthday.

At the end of their workday, they all went home to a dormitory where they were watched by another overseer. They slept in bunk beds lined up along the walls, two children to a bunk. They were locked in at night so that they couldn't run away.

It was a hard life. Many parents tried their best to keep their children out of the factories. Reformers worked for changes like shorter hours, safer working conditions, and schooling for the children. They didn't expect children to stop contributing to their families, but they did want children to have a chance to enjoy being children.

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## Questions

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- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. The work described in this article took place during the \_\_\_\_\_.
- A. 1700s-1800s
  - B. 1600s-1700s
  - C. 1960s-1970s
  - D. 1970s-1980s
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Factory children worked about \_\_\_\_\_ hours per day.
- A. 14
  - B. 7
  - C. 4
  - D. 8

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- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Factory children worked \_\_\_\_\_ days per week.
- A. seven
  - B. four
  - C. six
  - D. five
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. According to the information in this article, \_\_\_\_\_.
- A. all families preferred for their children to work in factories
  - B. no families allowed their children to work in factories
  - C. some families allowed their children to work in factories
  - D. families preferred factory work to school for their children
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Which of the following was NOT a qualification of a good factory worker mentioned in this article?
- A. could tolerate poor working conditions
  - B. kept working
  - C. had special skills
  - D. followed orders
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. The job of a scavenger was to \_\_\_\_\_.
- A. pick up stray pieces of cotton
  - B. weave cotton
  - C. tie threads together
  - D. operate machinery
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. The job of a piecer was to \_\_\_\_\_.
- A. tie threads together
  - B. pick up stray pieces of cotton
  - C. weave cotton
  - D. operate machinery
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Reformers of that time worked for improvements including all of the following EXCEPT \_\_\_\_\_.
- A. shorter hours
  - B. safer conditions
  - C. schooling
  - D. an end to child labor

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How many of these can you write about? Think! Write! Check all the ones you answered.

- What types of work do you think are appropriate for children? What types of work do you think children should not do? Make a chart showing jobs that you think children should and should not do.
- Write a paragraph comparing and contrasting the life of a factory child of the 1800s to the life of a child today.

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