

# Child Labour—Then and Now



## LESSON 4—GRADE 9

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### PRESCRIBED LEARNING OUTCOMES

It is expected that the students will:

- identify and clarify a problem, an issue, or an inquiry.
- defend a position on a controversial issue after considering a variety of perspectives.
- co-operatively plan, implement, and assess a course of action that addresses the problem, issue, or inquiry initially identified.
- evaluate the effects of the Industrial Revolution on society and the changing nature of work.

### LESSON TITLE

Child Labour—Then and Now

### OBJECTIVES

- to investigate the working and living conditions of children working in the industrial revolutionary Britain.
- to evaluate and assess the sources of the exploitation of children during this period.
- to assess the legal and social responses to their conditions.
- to extend the analysis of (and apply the learning outcomes from) objectives above to child labour as it exists today.
- to compare and contrast the exploitation of child labour in the Industrial Revolution (Britain) to child labour as it currently exists.

### INTRODUCTION AND NOTES TO TEACHERS

Perhaps the most obvious negative aspect of the early Industrial Revolution was the widespread exploitation of children in the factories, mills, mines, and sweatshops of 19th century Britain. Child labour seems to have marched in step with industrialization as it has spread around the world. In its contemporary form, it is most associated with Third World situations.

### BACKGROUND

Child labour was widespread in Britain during the early Industrial Revolution. When the issue was officially investigated by the *Factory Commission of 1833*, it was revealed that in many situations, children as young as six were being forced to work in factories for 14-, even 16-hour shifts, six days a week. Their overseers often beat them to keep them awake at their machines. The terrible conditions under which young children worked in Britain's coal mines were even worse. An official 1842 report that described the situation eventually forced the British government to pass the first serious laws against child labour. The legislation only banned children under nine from mine work and children under ten from factory work, but it was a start (*New Internationalist*, July 1997).

Here in Canada, even though the Industrial Revolution lagged behind the changes occurring in Britain, child labour was a feature of early 19th century workplaces in both Britain and Canada. Adult workers' opposition to child labour was a significant factor in the 1836 York printers' strike in Toronto (*Challenging Child Labour, Canadian Labour Congress, 1997*).

In Britain, the first industrialized nation, widespread child labour was to continue for many more years despite legislation against it. Likewise, as the Industrial Revolution spread to the United States, child labour was still widespread even into the 20th century. Not until 1938 was the first truly effective U.S. federal law against it enacted.

It took the establishment of free, compulsory public education at the end of the 19th century and the changed attitudes that followed to reduce, if not fully eliminate child labour in Britain, Canada, the U.S.A., and other industrialized countries (*New Internationalist, July 1997*). Unions have been leaders in the on-going struggle against child labour.

While the use of child labour has been significantly addressed, if not completely eradicated, in most of the developed, industrialized countries of the world such as Canada, the U.S.A. and Britain, it remains a major problem in much of the Third World. Children in many countries around the globe are working when they should be in school, at home, or at play. Many of them are virtual slaves, working long hours for low wages in terrible working conditions. Canadian unions have been at the forefront of on-going, international efforts to address the problem.

### ACTIVITY 1

Divide the class into small groups of three or four, and ask them to consider the following questions. Post five wall charts around the room, each titled with one of the five questions.

1. List the reasons why the families of young children during the early Industrial Revolution would have allowed them, even forced them, to work long hours for low wages in poor, even hazardous working conditions.
2. List the reasons why some employers during the early Industrial Revolution would have encouraged the use of child labour in their operations.
3. List the reasons why during the early Industrial Revolution, trade unions and their members would have opposed the use of child labour.
4. List some of the possible negative effects of child labour on children and the larger society during the early Industrial Revolution.
5. Were there any possible beneficial effects of child labour on children and the larger society during the early Industrial Revolution? If so, list them.

Have a recorder from each group write down the group's responses and then write the responses on the wall charts. They could put a check mark next to any previous response that matches their own.

## ACTIVITY 2

Assign to your students the web quest “Child Labour 2001... Tackling the Problem”.

### Child Labour 2001... Tackling the Problem A WebQuest Dealing with Child Labour in the Modern World and Recalling Child Labour During the Early Industrial Revolution

#### INTRODUCTION

Some people think that the terrible abuses of child labour were part of the early Industrial Revolution. Some people believe that exploitation of young children in sweatshops, factories, and other dangerous work sites is a thing of the past. Unfortunately, they are mistaken. While child labour at the beginning of the 21st century may be different in some ways from that of 19th-century Britain, some terrible similarities remain. In this web quest, you have been appointed by the ILO (International Labour Organization) to a five-member team of young people tackling the problem of child labour in the modern world.

#### TASK

In this web quest, you will work as a member of a five-person team appointed by the ILO to design and create a public-awareness campaign aimed at the problem of child labour in the modern world.

Your campaign will be based on the following 10-point plan, adapted from the July 1997 issue of the *New Internationalist*.

#### **1. Ban the most hazardous forms of child work.**

- bonded labour
- work in heavy industry (steel production, foundries, etc.)
- work with toxic or dangerous substances
- work in the sex trade

National governments should support the proposed *International Labour Organization Convention on Hazardous Labour* and act against these extreme forms of child-labour exploitation immediately.

#### **2. Guarantee universal primary education.**

If they gave it sufficient priority, even the poorest national governments could deliver on this goal, to which (incidentally) they all have already committed themselves by signing the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*.

#### **3. Make education more flexible, relevant, and attractive to child workers.**

#### **4. Officially register all births.**

This record keeping is vital if there is to be any chance of regulating child labour.

**5. End the so-called “structural adjustments” required of poor countries by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank before international financial aid is offered.**

**6. Raise the status of child domestic workers.**

Existing laws need to be applied to this often-forgotten group of exploited young workers. Build a new world-wide consciousness-raising campaign to draw attention to their plight.

**7. Rein in the power of the transnational corporations.**

In the absence of an international body prepared to regulate the activities of the world's powerful transnational corporations, consumer pressure must do what it can to force corporations to adopt voluntary codes of ethical conduct. The codes must apply to their suppliers' employees as well as their own and must offer dismissed children an adequately funded educational alternative.

**8. Give child workers' jobs to their adult relatives.**

Giving child workers' jobs to their adult relatives would mean that the family as a whole would not suffer.

**9. Support child workers' organizations.**

With support, child workers' will win pay raises and improved conditions for child workers, thus removing the employers' main reason for employing children in the first place.

**10. Gather and distribute more information.**

Accurate information on child labour is notoriously sketchy and inadequate. More research is needed, and that information needs to be publicized.

Your team will produce one of the following formats:

- a Powerpoint or similar computerized presentation
- a web site
- a video
- a set of posters

Your presentation must address each of the 10 points in the action plan. Each of the 10 points must refer to situations as they used to be in the early Industrial Revolution and refer to similar conditions today.

In addition to the completed project, each one of you will hand in to the teacher a one-page reflective discussion on child labour.

## PROCESS

Once you have formed your five-member group, discuss the 10 points in the action plan and decide which format you will be using.

Since there are five of you, it may be a good idea for each of you to take responsibility for two of the ten points.

As a group, you should also decide on suitable introductory and concluding parts to your format and who will take responsibility for producing them.

Decide on a common theme, slogan, and look that will repeat all through your presentation.

Using the web resources shown below to find useful information you may decide to include in your project.

## RESOURCES

- Canadian Labour Congress: Social & Economic Policy: Child Labour & Sweatshops
- British Columbia Federation of Labour: Campaign Against Child Labour
- Spartacus Encyclopedia Schoolnet: Child Labour in the 19th Century
- Global March Against Child Labour
- ILO International Program Against Child Labour
- The History Place: Child Labour in the U.S. 1908-1912.
- New Internationalist On-Line: Mega Index - C - Child Labour

You may wish to use other resources as well, both via the Internet and from other sources. The following may be of particular use:

- *Challenging Child Labour, Canadian Labour Congress, 1997*
- *Child Labour: Costly at Any Price, coDev Canada, 1998*
- *New Internationalist, July 1997*

## EVALUATION

Your web quest will be evaluated using the following framework:

You will evaluate each of the other members of the group and give the teacher a confidential mark out of 20 for each person in the group. Your mark should reflect your evaluation of each person's participation in the web quest.

20%

The teacher will evaluate your web quest based on content, effectiveness of presentation, and style. Each member of the group will receive the same mark out of 60.

60%

Each final reflective discussion on the subject of child labour will be marked by the teacher. The mark will reflect the degree of care and thought evident in the writing.

20%