Child Labor in the Industrial Revolution: Case Studies and Mini Research Assessment

Purpose for Learning:
These case studies will introduce you to first-hand accounts written by 19th century historical figures who supported or opposed child labor during the Industrial Revolution. After reading and analyzing these case studies, you will be tasked with generating your own historical questions about child labor, the Industrial Revolution, and socioeconomic circumstances in 19th century England and Western Europe. Your final task will be to conduct some primary source research to answer your historical question.

Assessment Objectives:
- SWBAT understand how factories and new manufacturing technologies led to the rise of child labor during the Industrial Revolution.
- SWBAT develop their own historical questions to further understand socioeconomic circumstances for British people during the Industrial Revolution.
- SWBAT independently locate and determine which primary sources appropriately and effectively answer their historical questions.
- SWBAT analyze primary sources that are relevant to their historical questions.

Guiding Questions:
- What significant social, economic, technological, and cultural changes occurred in Europe during the Industrial Revolution?
- How did the Industrial Revolution affect class struggles and gender roles?
- How did wealthy capitalists maintain power and influence over working class people?
- Did the Industrial Revolution improve economic opportunities for working class people?
- What benefits did the Industrial Revolution bring to society?

Steps #1-4: Child Labor Case Studies
1. You will spend today’s class reading the four case studies included in this packet.
2. While reading each case study, you and your home group need to respond to the sources by generating two questions in the margins. (Note: You do not need to annotate each source. Simply consider further questions you might ask about child labor, the Industrial Revolution, and/or British culture and society in the 1800s and write these questions down. You should have 8 questions by the end of the class period today.)
3. Use the chart on page 6 to summarize and catalog the information you learn from the case studies.
4. Answer the synthesis questions on page 7 to fully analyze the overall story about child labor during the Industrial Revolution.
George Courtauld, Factory Owner
Letter to Mr. Mann, December 11, 1813

I have 8 children coming from Islington on Tuesday next and 8 or 10 more on Thursday. I had my choice from upwards of 50 girls of different ages and accepted all but one that were within the age of 10 and 13. They are from a very well-conducted workhouse and I really expect and earnestly hope that by continued care and attention my establishment of apprentices will become a nursery of respectable young women fitted for any of the humble walks of life.

Employment at Mr. Courtauld's Bocking & Halstead Mills, 1838.

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Vicar [Priest] of Biddulph, England
Letter to Samuel Greg, a factory owner, February 1817

The thought has occurred to me that some of the younger branches of the poor of this parish [county] might be useful to you as apprentices in your factory at Quarry Bank. If you are in want of any of the above, we could readily furnish you with 10 or more from 9 to 12 years of age of both sexes.

Andrew Ure, *The Philosophy of Manufactures*, 1835

At Quarry Bank, near Wilmslow in Cheshire, is situated the great factory of Greg & Son. At a little distance from the factory, on a sunny bank, stands a handsome house, two stories high, built for the accommodation of the female apprentices. They are well fed, clothed, and educated. The apprentices have milk-porridge for breakfast, potatoes and bacon for dinner, and meat on Sundays.
Samuel Fielden, *Autobiography of Samuel Fielden, 1887*

The infants, when first introduced to these abodes [houses] of torture, are tasked with stripping the full spools from the spinning machines and replacing them with empty spools. They are put to work in a long room where there are about twenty machines. The spindles are apportioned to each child, and woe be to the child who shall be behind in doing his or her work. The machine will be started and the poor child’s fingers will be bruised and skinned with the revolving spools. While the children try to catch up to their friends by doing their work with the speed of the machine running, the brutal overseer will frequently beat them unmercifully, and I have frequently seen them strike the children, knocking them off their stools and sending them spinning several feet across the greasy floor.

Robert Owen, *Observations on the Effect of the Manufacturing System, 1815*

In the manufacturing districts it is common for parents to send their children of both sexes at seven or eight years of age, in winter as well as summer, at six o'clock in the morning, sometimes in the dark, and occasionally in frost and snow, to enter the manufactories, which are often heated to a high temperature, and contain an atmosphere far from being the most favorable to human life, and in which all those employed in them very frequently continue until twelve o'clock at noon, when an hour is allowed for dinner, after which they return to remain, in a majority of cases, till eight o'clock at night.

John Wood, a factory owner, interviewed by Alfred Kydd, author of *The History of the Factory Movement*

Little children in my mills work from six in the morning to seven o'clock in the evening. In some mills in the neighborhood little children are working 14, 15, 16, and even 18 hours a day without a single minute having been set apart for meals. Besides all this, in many mills they are cheated out of portions of their scanty wages by fines and other means of fraud.

Richard Oastler, describing a meeting with John Wood, a factory owner, 1830.

John Wood turned towards me, reaching out his hand. He pressed my hand and said: "I have had no sleep tonight. I have been reading the Bible and in every page I have read my own condemnation. I cannot allow you to leave me without a pledge that you will use all your influence in trying to remove from our factory system the cruelties which are practiced in our mills." I promised I would do what I could. I felt that we were each of us in the presence of the Highest and I knew that that vow was recorded in Heaven.
Frances Trollope, *Michael Armstrong, the Factory Boy*, 1840
A little girl about seven years old had a job as a scavenger. She had to collect incessantly from the factory floor the flying fragments of cotton that might interrupt the work. The hissing machinery would pass over her as she crouched on the floor. If she kept her head, body, and outstretched limbs carefully on the floor, the moving machine would pass and repass over her dizzy head and trembling body without touching it. But accidents frequently occur; many locks of hair would be torn from children’s heads by these machines.

Richard Oastler, letter published in the *Bradford Observer*, 1834
The mill-owners obtained their wealth by overworking and by defrauding the factory children. They were praying people, but took care that their work people should neither have time nor strength to pray. These hypocrites pretended it was necessary to keep these poor infant slaves at this excruciating labor just to preserve them from “bad company” and to prevent them learning “bad habits.”

Michael Sadler, speech in the House of Commons [the British government], 1832.
The parents rouse [wake] them in the morning and receive them tired and exhausted after the day has closed; they see them droop and sicken, and, in many cases, become cripples and die, before they reach adulthood; and they do all this, because they must otherwise starve. It is a mockery to believe that these parents have a choice. They choose the lesser evil, and reluctantly resign their offspring to the captivity and pollution of the mill.

Lord Ashley, speech in the House of Commons, 1840.
The future hopes of a country must, under God, be laid in the character and condition of its children; however right it may be to attempt, it is almost useless to expect that a country’s adults can be reformed. As the sapling [tree] has been bent, so it will grow. The first step towards a cure is factory legislation [laws]. My grand object is to bring these children within the reach of education.
**Case Study #4 Documents**

**Edward Baines, *History of the Cotton Manufacture in Great Britain, 1835***

It is alleged [suggested] that the children who labor in factories are often cruelly beaten by the spinners or overseers. Their feeble [weak] limbs become distorted by continual standing and stooping, and they grow up cripples. They are compelled to work thirteen, fourteen or fifteen hours per day. Views such as these have been repeatedly given of factory labor which have persuaded many to think they must be true. But this is the exception, not the rule.

**Andrew Ure, *The Philosophy of Manufactures, 1835***

I have visited many factories, both in Manchester and the surrounding districts, during a period of several months, and I never saw a single instance of corporal punishment inflicted on a child. The children seemed to be always cheerful and alert, taking pleasure in using their muscles. The work of these lively elves seemed to resemble a sport. Conscious of their skill, they were delighted to show it off to any stranger. At the end of the day's work they showed no sign of being exhausted.

**John Charles Spencer, speech, House of Commons, 1832***

My opponent, Michael Sadler [another member of the House of Commons], hopes to end child labor. He has suggested decreasing wages for child workers or making child labor illegal entirely. However, I must ask him: Wouldn’t laws that make child labor illegal actually be more harmful than helpful to working class families?

As long as we have a manufacturing population in England, it will be impossible to make their work as healthy or safe as farm work. This is an evil that cannot be helped. It is too late now to argue about the unwholesome nature of manufacturing employment. We have got a manufacturing population, and it must be employed. Any measure which will take away work opportunities for working class people in the cities will produce extensive misery.

**Edward Baines, *History of the Cotton Manufacture in Great Britain, 1835***

The noise and whirl of the machinery, which are unpleasant and confusing to someone unaccustomed to the scene, produce not the slightest effect on the workers who are used to it. The only thing that makes factory labor difficult is that they are confined for long hours, and deprived of fresh air: this makes them pale, and reduces their vigor [strength], but it rarely brings on disease. The minute [small] fibers of cotton which float in the rooms are admitted, even by medical men, not to be harmful to young persons.
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<th>Case Study #</th>
<th>Point of View (Oppose or Support Child Labor.)</th>
<th>Evidence 1 (Choose and explain a quote that shows this case study is for/against child labor.)</th>
<th>Evidence 2 (Choose and explain a quote that shows this case study is for/against child labor.)</th>
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**Synthesis Questions**

1. Which case study group had the most convincing arguments? Why did you choose this group?

2. What information are we missing in order to make an informed decision on who is right about child labor?

3. What are the key differences between the groups that support child labor and those that oppose child labor?

4. What kind of biases and experiences would have motivated someone to support child labor?

5. What kind of biases and experiences would have motivated someone to oppose child labor?