

Factory System Lesson Plan

Central Historical Question:
Were textile factories bad for the health of English workers?

Materials:

- Copies of Documents A-D
- Copies of Factory System: Guiding Questions
- Factory System PowerPoint slides

(Note: This lesson is easily adapted from 4 to 2 documents. Various combinations of the documents support the skills of sourcing and corroboration.)

Plan of Instruction:

1. Use PowerPoint to establish background knowledge on factory reform in England during the 19th century.
 - a. Throughout the first half of the 19th century, England debated and passed a number of laws regulating working hours and conditions in factories.
 - b. Many of these laws focused on protecting children working in factories and set limits on the amount of hours that children could work in factories. The Factory Act of 1850, for example, limited the weekly hours that children could work to 60 and daily hours to 10.5.
 - c. Throughout this period, several commissions were established to gather information on working conditions in factories. Further, many politicians, academics, doctors, and other public figures wrote books, pamphlets, speeches, and newspaper articles supporting or opposing regulation of the country's growing factory system.
 - d. Today, our job is to explore some of these historical documents to address the question: *Were textile factories bad for the health of English workers?*
2. Introduce/Review skills of sourcing and corroboration.
 - a. Use Historical Thinking posters to review the skills of sourcing and corroboration (posters can be found in the intro materials folder on the SHEG website).
 - b. Point out that historians make claims based upon evidence often found in historical documents. In order to gather credible evidence, historians evaluate the reliability, or trustworthiness, of different historical sources. They often do this by considering the point of view and purpose of different historical actors and by comparing how different sources portray historical events.

- c. Today, we are going to work on sourcing and corroborating different accounts of what life was like for factory workers in 19th century England.
3. Pass out Document A and guiding questions.
 - a. Model sourcing with Document A. Explain to students that you are going to show them how you source a document. Example:

*The first thing I want to do is read the source information at the bottom of the document. That means I want to think about who wrote it, when it was written, who was the audience, and what the author's purpose might have been. (Read sourcing info). So I see that this is from an interview of a doctor that was conducted in 1819 by the House of Lords Committee. I am not exactly sure what this Committee did, but I think it was a government body looking into factory conditions. I know that by 1819, there had been some reforms passed to try to improve factory conditions, but that this date was still early in the reform movement. I bet that this interview will include questions about factories. I also see that the interview is with a doctor. I don't know much about this particular doctor, but I assume he is being interviewed because of his expertise on health issues. I am not sure whether or not he is under oath, but it seems that if he is being interviewed by a government committee he is more likely to be truthful. Although, we know that people do certainly lie to the government. This is called **sourcing** a document.*

- b. In pairs, students read the document and answer the guiding questions.
 - c. Share out responses.
 - d. Ask students: *Do you think this is a reliable document? Why or why not?*
4. Pass out Document B
 - a. In pairs, students read Document B and answer guiding questions.
 - b. Share out responses.
 - c. Ask students: *How is it possible for such similar sources to offer such different accounts of factory life? Which, if either, of these sources do you find more trustworthy? Why?*
5. Pass out Documents C and D.
 - a. Students read Documents C and D and answer guiding questions.
 - b. Share out responses to question 3.
 - c. Students read Document D and answer guiding questions.
 - d. Share out responses to questions 5 and 6.

6. Final Claim

- a. Students construct final claim:
 - Based upon these documents, do you think that English textile factories were bad for the health of working class families?

7. Final Discussion:

- a. Which document do you find most convincing regarding the central historical question? Why? Which is the least convincing? Why?
- b. Based upon these documents, do you think that English textile factories were bad for the health of working class families? What other types of sources might you look at to answer this question?

Citations:

- House of Lords Committee (Interviewer) & Michael, W. (Interviewee). (1819). Minutes of Evidence taken before the Lords Committees appointed to enquire into the State and Condition of the Children employed in the Cotton Manufactories of the United Kingdom. House of Lords Sessional Papers (1806-1859).
- House of Lords Committee (Interviewer) & Holmes, E. (Interviewee). (1818). Minutes of Evidence taken before the Lords Committees to who was referred The Bill entituled 'Act to amend and extend an Act made in the Forty-second Year of His present Majesty, for the Preservation of the Health and Morals of Apprentices, and others, employed in Cotton and other Mills, and Cotton and other Factories.' House of Lords Sessional Papers (1806-1859).
- Birley, J. (19 May 1849). *The Ashton Chronicle*.
- Baines, E. (1835). *History of the Cotton Manufacture in Great Britain*. Retrieved from http://books.google.com/books/about/History_of_the_cotton_manufacture_in_Gre.html?id=XXkBAAAAQAAJ