Name:_____ Date:_____ Period:_____ S.S. 8

WORKING CONDITIONS and CHILD LABOR in the LATE 1800s and EARLY 1900s

WORKING CONDITIONS IN FACTORIES

Many workers in the late 1800s and early 1900s spent an entire day tending a machine in a large, crowded, noisy room. Others worked in coal mines, steel mills, railroads, slaughterhouses, and in other dangerous occupations. Most were not paid well, and the typical workday was 12 hours or more, six days per week. Owners spent little money to improve the safety and comfort of its workers. Since there were no laws protecting workers, owners took no responsibility for employees who got hurt or sick on the job. Many of these workers were new immigrants who had limited skills, spoke little English, and could easily be taken advantage of business owners.

CHILD LABOR IN THE UNITED STATES

During the industrial growth of the 1800s and early 1900s, business leaders often hired children to work in factories. From 1908 to 1912, photographer Lewis W. Hine took his camera across America to photograph children as young as three years old working for long hours, often under dangerous conditions, in factories, mines, and fields. In 1909, he published the first of many photo essays depicting working children at risk. In these photographs, the essence of wasted youth is apparent in the sorrowful and even angry faces of his subjects. Some of his images, such as the young girl in the mill glimpsing out the window, are among the most famous photographs ever taken.

Child Labor Photography (by Lewis W. Hine)



7 & 8 year old boys climbing up on machinery to replace bobbins



Sadie, a cotton mill spinner, S.C., 1908



Breaker boys at a Pennsylvania coal mine, 1908

1. Based on these photographs, what conclusions can be made about the lives of these children?

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2. Why do you think these issues do not exist in the U.S. today? Why do you think they DO exist today in other parts of the world? _____

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THE GROWTH OF LABOR UNIONS…

As industrialization grew, owners demanded more of their workers. To deal with the problems, workers formed organizations called ***labor unions***. Workers realized that they had strength if they acted together. Unions wanted the right to ***collective bargaining***. This is a process where representatives of workers negotiate employment conditions with representatives of management. If collective bargaining is successful, a ***contract*** (legal agreement) is formed. If it is unsuccessful, workers may go on ***strike***. This means that workers intentionally refuse to do their jobs until their demands are met.

What would YOU do?

It is 1890; you are either **a worker** in or **an owner** of a shoe factory. Both of you are determined to fight for what you believe is right. You may want to maintain a successful and profit producing business or you may want to fight for fair and equal wages so that you can continue to work and provide for your family. In pairs, you will negotiate new working conditions. Do not share your needs and demands with your partner.

The worker has negotiated the following with his/her employer:

HOURS/DAYS OF WORK: _____ hours per day, _____ days per week

HOURLY WAGE: _____ cents per hour **BREAK:** _____ minutes per day

Did the worker go on **strike**? _____

RESULT: Was the **collective bargaining** method successful for you? Explain why or why not.

_____

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Workers Unionize!

Many labor unions formed during the late 1800s, including the Knights of Labor and the American Federation of Labor. Overall, their goals were to fight for shorter workdays, higher wages, shorter hours, improved working conditions, and an end to child labor. Certain labor unions would support going on strike while others did not. Those labor unions who supported striking would collect money from members over time to be saved for when members were on strike. The money would be used as a source of income for members while they were on strike. Some unions only allowed skilled, white laborers who could not be replaced easily. Others, however, were open to people of different skill levels and backgrounds. By the early 1900s, labor unions became a powerful force in the American industry.

SUMMARY: What was the importance of labor unions during this time period?

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