



# EXPLORING 19TH-CENTURY CHILD LABOR IN THE UNITED STATES

## Activity Items

The following items are part of this activity and appear at the end of this student version.

- Photo A: Breaker boys, Woodward Coal Mines, Kingston, Pa.
- Photo B: A group of berry pickers on Newton's Farm, Cannon, Del.
- Item 1: Gainful Workers, Aged 10-14, in the United States, 1870-1930

## Student Learning Objectives

- I will be able to analyze multiple primary sources to better understand the causes and consequences of child labor in the 19th century.
- I will be able to make inferences from information in a data table and historical photographs to explain child labor in the context of industrialization in the United States (1870-1900).

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

Warmup: Do you have an after-school, weekend, or summer job? Why or why not? What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of working at your age?

Essential question: Why — and to what extent — are children used as a labor force (now and in the 19th century)?

The 1870 Census was the first census to gather data on child labor. A report of the findings from that census concludes that more than 750,000 workers younger than 15 were counted; this does not include children who worked for their families in businesses or on farms. By 1900, more than 1.75 million American children younger than 15 were employed. Often, they worked in dangerous conditions that were hazardous to their health — and did so for extremely low wages.

1. Examine **Photo A: Breaker boys, Woodward Coal Mines, Kingston, Pa.**, and **Photo B: A group of berry pickers on Newton’s Farm, Cannon, Del.** Then fill out the following chart.

	Photo A	Photo B
What gender are the workers?		
In what approximate age range are the child workers?		
What types of work do they appear to be doing?		
What do the working conditions look like?		
Write some questions that you have about the photos.		

2. Review your table. What trends or patterns do you notice?

3. Does one of the jobs depicted in the photos look harder? Which one? Why?



Photo A: Breaker boys, Woodward Coal Mines, Kingston, Pa.



Library of Congress. Circa 1900. Retrieved from:

[www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/det.4a07285](http://www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/det.4a07285)

This photograph, taken around 1900 in Kingston, Pennsylvania, shows a group of young coal mine workers. "Breaker boys" were children who were too young (and sometimes men who were too old) to work down in the mines and were responsible for removing impurities from coal extracted from the mines.

This child labor practice started in the 1860s and continued into the 1920s.

Photo B: A group of berry pickers on Newton's Farm, Cannon, Del.



*Library of Congress. June 1910. Retrieved from:*

*[www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/nclc.00104](http://www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/nclc.00104)*

*This photograph, taken during June 1910 in Cannon, Delaware, shows a group of child and adult berry pickers.*

## Item 1: Gainful Workers, Aged 10–14, in the United States, 1870–1930

Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970 (U.S. Census Bureau, 1997),  
Series A119-134 and D75-84.

### **Gainful Workers, Aged 10–14, in the United States: 1870–1930** (in thousands)

Year	Workers 10–14	% Nonfarm	Population 10–14	Total workers	Children as % of workforce	Activity rates of children (%)
1870	765	47.00	4,786	12,925	5.92	15.98
1880	1,118	50.64	5,715	17,392	6.43	19.56
1890	1,504	57.38	7,034	23,318	6.50	21.38
1900	1,750	62.47	8,080	29,073	6.02	21.66
1910	1,622	68.98	9,107	37,371	4.34	17.81
1920	1,417	73.02	10,641	42,434	3.34	13.32
1930	667	78.55	12,005	48,830	1.37	5.56

*Source: Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970 (U.S. Census Bureau, 1997), Series A119–134 and D75–84.*