



EXPLORING 19TH-CENTURY CHILD LABOR IN THE UNITED STATES

TEACHER VERSION

Subject Level:

High School History

Grade Level:

9-11

Approx. Time Required:

30-45 minutes

Learning Objectives:

- Students will be able to analyze multiple primary sources to better understand the causes and consequences of child labor in the 19th century.
- Students 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).

Activity Description

Students will examine historical photographs and a data table related to 19th-century industrialization and child labor. They will observe and analyze the primary sources and ask questions. This activity could be used near the beginning of a unit on industrialization or the Progressives.

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Topics:

- Child labor
- Late 19th-century industrialization
- Progressive movement

Skills Taught:

- Analyzing historical photographs
 - Examining primary sources
-

Materials Required:

The student version of this activity, 7 pages; it contains images that should be printed in color.

Activity Items

The following items are part of this activity. Items, their sources, and any relevant instructions for viewing them online appear at the end of this teacher 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

For more information to help you introduce your students to the Census Bureau, read "[Census Bureau 101 for Students](#)." This information sheet can be printed and passed out to your students as well.

Standards Addressed

See charts below. For more information about the standards, read "[Overview of Education Standards and Guidelines Addressed in Statistics in Schools Activities](#)."

Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects

Standard	Strand	Cluster
<p>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.1</p> <p>Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.</p>	<p>RH 9-10 - History/ Social Studies</p>	<p>Key Ideas and Details</p>
<p>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.7</p> <p>Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.</p>	<p>RH 11-12 - History/ Social Studies</p>	<p>Integration of Knowledge and Ideas</p>

UCLA National Standards for History: U.S. History Content Standards

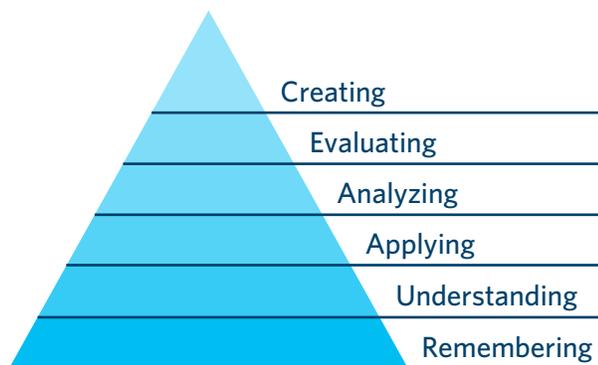
Era	Standard
6 - The Development of the Industrial United States (1870-1900)	Standard 3: The rise of the American labor movement and how political issues reflected social and economic changes.
7 - The Emergence of Modern America (1890-1930)	Standard 1: How Progressives and others addressed problems of industrial capitalism, urbanization, and political corruption.

UCLA National Standards for History: Historical Thinking Standards

Standard	Description
2 - Historical Comprehension	Utilize visual and mathematical data. Students will use historical photographs and a data table related to 19th-century industrialization and child labor to identify trends in child labor.
3 - Historical Analysis and Interpretation	Consider multiple perspectives. Students will consider different perspectives in relation to child labor.

Bloom’s Taxonomy:

Students will *understand* and *analyze* data from multiple sources.



Teacher Notes

Before the Activity

Students must understand the following key terms:

- **Labor force** – a group of people who perform work for wages, which can include manual labor
- **Labor union** – an organized association of workers — often in trade industries — that forms to protect and further workers’ rights and interests in that industry
- **Progressives** – a group of reformers in the late 19th century who introduced a variety of responses to the economic and social problems that rapid industrialization brought to America; Progressivism began as a social movement and grew into a political movement.

Students should have a basic understanding of the following concept:

- The status of the U.S. economy between the late 1800s and early 1900s

After the Activity

As a class, revisit the warm-up question and question 7 from the student activity to discuss how child labor in the United States has changed. Teachers should encourage students to support their inferences with historical evidence and data.

During the Activity

Teachers should monitor students as they work.

Extension Ideas

Teachers could instruct students to research, online or at the library, child labor laws from the past 10 to 20 years. Then teachers could set up a debate during which students would use their research to support their stance on joining the labor force — either for or against.

Student Activity

Click [here](#) to download a printable version for students..

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).

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?	Male	Male and female
In what approximate age range are the child workers?	Ages 10-14	Ages 6-10
What types of work do they appear to be doing?	Mining	Picking fruit
What do the working conditions look like?	Varied student answers — dirty, dark, dangerous working conditions; hard physical labor; possible long hours	Varied student answers — working outside in hot weather; bending over to pick berries; possible long hours
Write some questions that you have about the photos.	Varied student answers	Varied student answers

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

Student answers will vary but may include: In both photos, the workers had been performing manual labor and likely had been working long hours, which is apparent from their disheveled appearance.

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

Student answers will vary but should be supported with specific details from the photographs.

4. Review **Item 1: Gainful Workers, Aged 10-14, in the United States, 1870-1930**. What trends do you see? Which data points do you find interesting or surprising?

Student answers will vary but may include the following:

- **The number of 10- to 14-year-old workers practically doubled between 1870 and 1890 and peaked in 1900.**
- **After 1880, the majority of employed children aged 10 to 14 did not work on farms.**

5. Use your background knowledge to answer these questions: What was the state of the U.S. economy in the late 1800s and early 1900s, and how might that have explained the increase in the use of child labor?

Student answers will vary. Students should be able to link the increase in the use of child labor to industrialization.

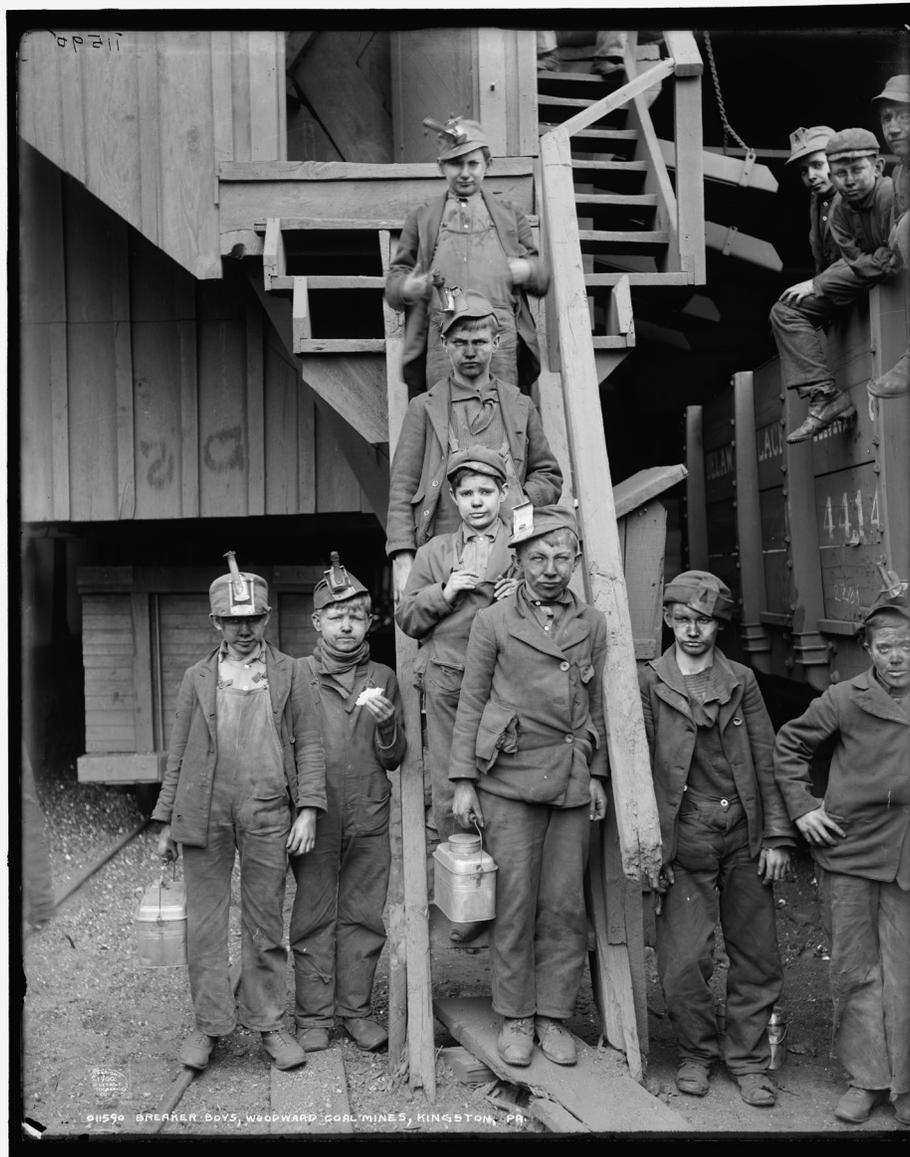
6. Why did the use of child labor decline so dramatically between 1920 and 1930? (There are multiple correct answers.)

Student answers will vary. Students might note the impact of the Progressive movement on a reduction in the use of child labor. They might also note that children had more opportunities to advance their education.

7. Based on what you've learned in this activity and your prior knowledge, identify and explain several ways that child labor today is different from child labor in the 19th century.

Student answers will vary. Students should note laws regulating child labor; these include a minimum working age, maximum hours a child is allowed to work, and laws that require students to go to school (schooling has not always been compulsory; Massachusetts was the first state to require, in 1852, that children attend school until age 16).

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



Library of Congress. Circa 1900. Retrieved from:

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

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.