

Children and the Industrial Revolution: Changes in Policy

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, industrial societies created a number of special institutions, laws, and policies to protect laboring children. Since working children, like the poor, have always been with us, this lesson asks students to consider the context within which people in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries developed new policies toward children. In short, these lessons help students to investigate conditions of working children in industrializing societies, public attention to child labor, and social and political responses to these issues. In this investigation, students formally use a variety of historical "tools" including reading analytically, assessing chronological patterns, employing comparative methods, and creating and supporting a historical argument.

Objectives

1. To analyze trends and features of the nineteenth century, using shifting policies toward children as the focal point.
2. To construct a chronology and analyze it for continuities and discontinuities.
3. To analyze historical documents.
4. To construct and defend a historical argument regarding nineteenth-century policy toward children.
5. To develop a procedure for comparing cross-cultural cases, including, a) establishing a problem for comparison, b) creating points/questions for comparison, and c) using the comparative points/questions to investigate primary source and demographic data.

Lesson I: What is special about being under-age?

The purpose of this first lesson is to set the stage for study by encouraging students to think about the creation of status laws and institutions for children. Students begin by exploring their own understanding of the laws, policies, and institutions that specifically impact them as minors. Carefully considering their pre-instructional knowledge helps students understand the *constructed* nature of age-based status and thus helps to problematize the historical creation of these special policies toward children. It also reinforces the idea that historical study begins with historians identifying problems to investigate.

Time Frame

This activity takes one class period.

Procedure

1. Ask students to consider all the special laws, institutions, programs, and policies that currently affect them as minors. In your instructions, clearly articulate that you are referring only to those institutions and laws aimed specifically at children, that is, policies "activated" or "deactivated" by age. One way to approach this is by asking students "What *must* minors do that adults do not have to do? What can adults do that minors can't?"

2. List the answers that students generate. Possible answers include public schools, compulsory school laws, camps, nursery schools, pre-schools, orphanages, Little Leagues, curfew laws, juvenile courts, juvenile detention centers, adult books, and laws defining adulthood and restricting voting, driving, drinking, labor, and admissions to movies. A useful, though not essential activity, is to have students delineate the list using different types of categories (such as laws, institutions, and policies) or by whether the item is a limitation (curfew, censorship, compulsory schooling) or an entitlement (public schooling).

3. Next ask students to consider the value of these differentiations between adults and children. You might start by asking which of the policies seem sensible and which do not. Encourage discussion about the merits of the policies. Try to identify issues raised by these policies or status laws.

4. Have students think aloud about their assumptions concerning the nature of childhood and the responsibility of the non-familial society to care for children. Try to push students beyond specific opinions to consider larger questions of children, childhood, and social policy. For example, should children have the same freedoms as adults? Should children always be treated as adults? When? Why? Why not?

5. Bring this discussion to a close by focusing on why society might establish so many special situations for the young. Ask students to consider why adults might go through the effort and expense to maintain so many special policies, laws, and institutions. You might ask students if they would want such policies to apply to their own children. Encourage speculation, but try to keep discussion centered around the central question: "Why do we have so many special organizations and rules for children?"

Lesson II: Was there an "Era of the Child?"

The second lesson has students looking for continuities and

discontinuities within historical periods. In a sense, we want students to ask "Was there an era of the child?" The activity is relatively simple; it begins with creating a class timeline that lists the beginning dates of the special policies toward children discussed in Lesson I. The heart of the activity is the classroom conversation analyzing this chronology. Here the teacher encourages students to consider these events against the larger historical context, helping students identify the shifts in policy toward children.

Time Frame

This activity requires two class periods.

Procedure

1. To build a transition from Lesson I, ask students to consider *when* people first developed special policies, laws, and institutions for children. Turn the question into a mini-investigation, possibly assigning students to find out when different nations established compulsory schooling, juvenile courts, or child labor laws. Make certain to include a range of industrial countries, such as Great Britain, the United States, France, and Japan. Students would benefit from creating a visual timeline, differentiating events both by nation and category of policy (education, labor, justice). The class should post the timeline in the classroom.

Some possible dates to include are:

- Proposal of a national education system in France, 1792
- Massachusetts compulsory school law, 1832
- Factory Act in Great Britain 1833 (shortened children's work hours)
- French law (Guizot) for mass schooling, 1833
- French child labor law with school requirements, 1841
- Morrill Act in the United States, 1862
- Admittance of non-samurai to elite schools in Japan, 1869
- Creation of Japanese Ministry of Education, 1871
- Japanese Education Code, 1872 (established a universal, central system of education)
- Imperial rescript defining the purpose of Japanese education, 1879
- French compulsory school law for primary education, 1882
- Formation of the College Entrance Exam board in the United States, 1899
- Establishment of the French Baccalaureate exam, 1902
- Japanese Factory Acts limiting Child Labor Act, 1911
- First SAT, 1925

2. The key step in this activity is to encourage students to make temporal interpretations. Begin by asking students "What can we learn by the timeline? Judging by chronological patterns, does there seem to be consistent interest in children? Are there 'breaks' with the past? Does any time period seem to be unique regarding policies toward children?"

Grapple out loud with the problem of periodization. This is a wonderful chance to demonstrate how historians use facts to frame time, a framing that involves interpretations, evidence, decisions, and often controversy. Depending upon your interests, you might discuss historians who see this as a critical era in attitudes toward children, particularly in the West.

3. Use this activity to speculate about the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as periods of change in policy and attitude toward children in industrial societies. It certainly appears that most of the special programs for children did not exist 250 years ago and that people in the nineteenth century created a number of the distinctive laws aimed at children that continue to exist today. Ask students, therefore, if they think the events of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries constitute a major shift in policy toward children. In having them defend their answers, you might also contest the temporal hypothesis by "doubting" it, using counter examples. For instance, do long-standing religious rites of passage, such as Confirmation or Bar Mitzvah, show the same special categories for children that seemed to emerge in the nineteenth century?

4. Close the activity by asking students to consider what might explain such a large change in a relatively short time. What circumstances might explain the special organizations and rules for children during this time? Which is more important: new ideas about children or new problems and conditions? These questions relate well to the next activity.

Lesson III: Using sources to investigate the era

Equipped with good historical questions, students can now conduct inquiries into the nature of these changing policies by using primary and secondary sources. Included below are a few sources and activities to assist in this inquiry. As a general note, it is important to remind students regularly about the driving questions for their investigation.

Time Frame

Students can complete this activity in two to four class periods.

Procedure

In groups or as a class, have students investigate the timing of the policy changes using multiple sources. Try to link the sources to student questions. Before each class, ask students what they are trying to understand and at the end of the class ask how their understanding has changed. Their response can take the form of a journal entry explaining how the source contributed to their understanding of the question, the problem, and the time period.

Below, I have included a number of documents and activities that should be useful for students.

1. Reading the Textbook using a Double-Entry Reading Method. Students might begin with the textbook's treatment of the nineteenth century and the industrial revolution. However, their reading should focus on their own questions concerning children, education, or labor. One way to accomplish this is with a double-entry journal method. Have students take notes in one column or on the back of a page. In the facing column or page, they should briefly explain how each fact might help explain new policies toward children. Such interpretive reading encourages students to take given information and use it to "resolve" their historical problem.

2. Population Patterns. Could changes in population patterns have had an impact on new policies? Locate population charts to see if there were significant changes in population and numbers of



Children applying for working papers in New York City, 1908. Photograph by Lewis W. Hine. (Courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration, NWDNS-102-LH-17A.)

children in industrializing countries, such as England, France, the United States, and Japan. Use the charts below (Handout 1) to consider the number of children working in factories in this era.

3. Literature on Children in Factories. Did people develop new ideas about children? Since children had always worked, could the type of work they did have changed? How was that work represented? You might use various literature on children laboring in preindustrial periods, such as William Blake's poems "The Chimney Sweeper" from *Songs of Innocence and Experience* (Handout 2). Ask students to read and react to the pieces. What do they show about some people's concerns about children?

4. Commission Reports of Government Agencies and Factory Acts. Have students read and discuss the reports of the 1833 Sadler Commission (Great Britain), the 1906 Government Commission (Japan), and the short essay, "Child Labor in Japan in the Late Nineteenth Century," included below (Handouts 3 and 4). Also, have students read and discuss the British Factory Act (1833) and the Japanese Factory Act (1898/1911), included on Handout 5. Why would government convene such hearings? What were possible motives? How would the following people respond: Religious leaders? Industrialists? Children themselves?

A possible follow-up activity here might be to ask students to convene their own commission, playing various roles such as commissioner, child worker, parent of child worker, factory owner, etc. A useful web site on British child labor is located at: <<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/IRchild.htm>>.

Lesson IV: Making a historical argument

While engaged in their Lesson III activities, students focused on their driving question about the changes in social policy toward children. They learned to move back and forth from evidence to interpretation and back to the evidence again. Lesson IV plays off

that iterative process to help students formalize their historical understanding and build an argument using historical evidence.

Time Frame

Allot one to two class periods for this lesson.

Procedure

1. Again ask students to consider the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as periods when many nations created special-status laws and institutions for children. What might explain these changes? Make sure students understand that child labor itself was not new, indeed was widely expected. The question about change is more subtle, involving recognition of the new conditions of factory work—the impact of machines, the movement of work outside the home. As students speculate, make certain that their conversation is now warranted and grounded in evidence. Ask them regularly, "How do you know? What are the limitations of your knowledge? What other kinds of evidence do you need?" Point out to students that this discussion is quite different from the one at the end of Lesson II, where student guesses were not challenged by data. Now, the teacher should expect students to support their speculations with evidence from sources.

2. After discussion, have students write a brief explanation why in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries people shifted their laws, policies, and institutions towards children. Have them "star" the statements they are very confident about and "circle" those that are in doubt. Share these in small groups, encouraging students to help classmates make better cases.

3. Allow students to create a presentation of their explanations for the new policies. These presentations may take any number of formats (such as papers, posters, videos, etc.), but must make an argument using historical evidence. You might encourage students to use language appropriate with their confidence level, i.e., "I suspect," or "I have evidence that..."

Additional Comparative Study:

Are there differences between nations?

The question surrounding new status laws or institutions lends itself quite well to comparative history. Therefore, teachers might assign a comparative project to end the unit. The Factory and Education Acts of Japan and England provide interesting differences to explore.

Done well, comparative history stimulates students to use higher level thinking skills and helps students locate the common, the distinctive, and the hidden elements in a situation.

However, too often comparative activities in history are not carefully constructed. Teachers should not simply assume students can compare historical events, but rather introduce them to the distinctive steps of comparing cases.

1. Introducing comparison and comparative history.
2. Forming a problem and selecting historical cases.
3. Choosing the elements of comparison.

These first few steps will help students define a comparative problem, identify the cases for investigation and select specific elements to compare across cases. Without clear categories, the comparative task often overwhelms students. They may collect information in a random or an unbalanced way. Furthermore, when they try to compare cases, they often find that they do not have sufficient information on comparable items. Comparison then turns into parallel descriptions. So, determining the elements for comparison provides important direction for students.

In the case of Britain and Japan, comparison should highlight some obvious similarities. Both societies used child labor in the factories, both hesitated for several decades between the advent of factories and explicit regulation (and for similar reasons), but both ultimately turned to regulation despite the fact that child labor was highly traditional. But there are also crucial differences—clearly in timing but also in the nature of explicit exploitation. Students might explore the conditions of early industrialization in the two societies to explain why, for example, certain aspects of the treatment of young women workers seemed harsher in Japan.

4. Collecting information and analyzing each case.
5. Making an initial comparison.

Teachers might want to set up charts to help students keep their thinking straight. Comparative history lends itself well to concept mapping, charts, and visuals. One suggestion is to place the comparative cases in the columns of a chart, and put the items of comparison in the rows. Have students fill in data on each case separately, focusing on one column before moving onto the second one.

Students might want to skip the individual data collection stage and move immediately to comparing the cases. Teachers should prevent this, especially with younger students. Initially, these steps should remain separated as mixing cases too quickly has risks. Comparing before understanding the specifics of the cases often leads students to ignore key elements in one case or apply standards from one case to the other.

6. Summarizing the results.
7. Reconsidering each case.
8. Final comparison and conclusions.

After students analyze each case, have them consider the similarities and differences between the cases. What do these cases have in common? What is different? What is present in one case that is not present in the other? What is missing? If a person from one case traveled to the other, what would be most surprising? Least surprising? What if a traveler went in the other direction? It is important for students to record what they learned from their comparisons. What did they discover? What is similar or different in the cases? This is a wonderful opportunity for students to write in a journal, "publish" a draft of a paper, write a letter explaining the difference from one case to other, or participate in a discussion with other students.

Too often, comparison stops at the initial steps. In history, we must return to each case informed by the ideas and information from the initial comparison. Ask students to reconsider each case now that they have seen the other case. What did they miss the first time? Did

the initial questions or categories too narrowly define the study? What elements might we compare that we had not considered initially?

Students now compare the cases again, reconsidering each category and the new categories or questions. They work to answer their initial question, to resolve their initial problem. As a final step they analyze the method itself.

This comparative process is initially laborious. The steps are a bit exaggerated, though they do become less rigid with practice. Students can use the method to develop comparative essays, or to criticize the comparisons and analogies of others. Most importantly, the comparative method allows students to make sophisticated connections, to test and retest ideas across time and/or cultures, to deepen and extend their understanding of world history. □

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Handout 1

Age of Factory Workers in England

Age of Workers in Cotton Mills in Lancashire, England, in 1833

Age	Males	Females
Under 11	246	155
11-16	1,169	1,123
17-21	736	1,240
22-26	612	780
27-31	355	295
32-36	215	100
37-41	168	81
42-46	98	38
47-51	88	23
52-56	41	4
57-61	28	3

Source: *Spartacus Internet Encyclopedia*: <<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/1Rages.htm>>.

Composition of the French Industrial Labor Force, 1845

Type of Industry	Children	Percentage of Women & Children
Textiles		
Cotton	55.3	18.3
Wool	49.6	18.6
Linen and hemp	41.1	12.9
Silk	33.6	5.6
Mixed Fibers	44.2	18.7
Mines, Quarries	14.8	7.7
Basic metallurgy	13.2	8.7
Metalworking	20.5	12
Leather	46.2	3.4
Wood	1.8	4.5
Ceramics	24.8	12.2
Chemicals	16.9	6.7
Construction	16.7	9.1
Lighting	21.2	4.5
Furnishings	—	—
Clothing	36.2	6.3
Food	15.4	5
Transport	4.7	4.4
Paper publishing	45.3	11.5
Luxuries	11.3	7
Miscellaneous	—	—
Totals	35.5	12.1

Source: Colin Heywood, *Childhood in Nineteenth-Century France: Work, Health and Education Among the classes populaires* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 104.

Handout 2

Poetry by William Blake

The Chimney Sweeper (1789)

When my mother died I was very young,
And my father sold me while yet my tongue,
Could scarcely cry "weep! weep! weep! weep!"
So your Chimneys I sweep & in soot I sleep.

There's little Tom Dacre, who cried when his head
That curled like a lambs back, was shaved, so I said
"Hush, Tom! never mind it, for, when your head's bare
You know that the soot cannot spoil your white hair."

And so he was quiet, and that very night,
As Tom was a-sleeping, he had such a sight!-
That thousands of sweepers, Dick, Joe, Ned, and Jack
Were all of them locked up in coffins of black.

And by came an angel, who had a bright key,
And he opened the coffins, and set them all free;
Then down a green plain, leaping, laughing, they run,
And wash in a river, and shine in the sun.

Then naked and white, all their bags left behind,
They rise upon clouds, and sport in the wind;
And the angel told Tom, if he'd be a good boy,
He'd have God for his father and never want joy.

And so Tom awoke, and we rose in the dark,
And got with our bags and our brushes to work.
Though the morning was cold, Tom was happy and
warm,
So, if all do their duty, they need not fear harm.

Source: William Blake, *Songs of Innocence* (Boston: The Medici Society, 1927), 14-15.

The Chimney Sweeper (1794)

A little black thing among the snow:
Crying weep, weep, in notes of woe!
Where are thy father & mother? say?
They are both gone up to the church to pray.

Because I was happy upon the heath,
And smil'd among the winters snow:
They clothed me in the clothes of death,
And taught me to sing the notes of woe.

And because I am happy, & dance & sing,
They think they have done me no injury:
And are gone to praise God & his Priest & King
Who make up a heaven of our misery.

Source: William Blake, *Songs of Experience* (c.1826; reprint, Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1984), 32.



"The Chimney Sweeper," by Jacynth Parsons. (William Blake, *Songs of Innocence* [Boston: The Medici Society, 1927], plate between 14 and 15.)

Handout 3

The Sadler Commission from Great Britain

Michael Thomas Sadler, a Tory member of Parliament, chaired an 1832 committee to investigate the conditions of labor in England. He was a key supporter of the Factory Act of 1833, a law that limited child labor to ten hours per day.

WILLIAM COOPER, called in; and examined.

Q: What is your business?

A: I follow the cloth-pressing at present.

Q: What is your age?

A: I was eight and twenty last Feb.

Q: When did you first begin to work in mills or factories?

A: When I was about 10 years of age.

Q: What were your usual hours of working?

A: We began at five and gave over at nine; at five o'clock in the morning.

Q: At what time had you to get up in the morning to attend to your labor?

A: I had to be upon soon after four o'clock.

Q: What intermissions had you for meals?

A: When we began at five in the morning, we went on until noon, and then we had 40 minutes for dinner.

Q: Had you no time for breakfast?

A: No, we got it as we could, while we were working.

Q: Had you anytime for an afternoon refreshment...?

A: No; when we began at noon, we went on till night; there was only one stoppage, the 40 minutes for dinner....

Q: To keep you at your work for such a length of time, and especially towards the termination of such a day's labor as that, what means were taken to keep you awake and attentive?

A: They strapped us at times, when we were not quite ready to be doffing the frame when it was full.

Q: Were you frequently strapped?

A: At times we were frequently strapped....

Q: Were any of the female children strapped?

A: Yes; they were strapped in the same way as the lesser boys.

Q: When your hours were so long, you had not any time to attend a day-school?

A: We had no time to go to a day-school, only to a Sunday-school; and then with working such long hours we wanted to have a bit of rest, so that I slept till the afternoon, sometimes till dinner and sometimes after.

Q: Did you attend a place of worship?

A: I should have gone to a place of worship many times, but I was in the habit of falling asleep, and that kept me away; I did not like to go for fear of being asleep.

Q: Do you mean that you could not prevent yourself from falling asleep in consequence of the fatigue of the preceding week?

A: Yes....

Source: Peter N. Stearns, ed., *The Impact of the Industrial Revolution: Protest and Alienation* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1972), 129-30.

Handout 3 (cont'd)

Japanese Commission on Factories, 1906

In 1906 the Japanese government issued a report created by investigators who had looked into the conditions in the factories. The following is a dialogue between the investigators and a woman worker.

Q: Do you get scolded?

A: We are taken to a room next to the office and are reprimanded there. We are also beaten. And, until we show a change of heart, we are kept there in the dark for several days.

Q: Are you fed?

A: No.

Q: Are there other forms of punishment?

A: If anyone steals something she is stripped naked and marched around the factory with a flag attached to her shoulders. They then take her to the dining hall and report her misdeed to everybody....

Q: Do youngsters of seven and eight work only during the day or do they work at night, too?

A: They work at night, too. Since the supervisors are strict during the day, the children clean up the plant. But at night things are less closely supervised, so they don't do much cleaning. Even in the winter we wear only one unlined kimono.

Q: Do young workers work through the night?

A: They do but sometimes they say they will not go to work unless they are given some candy. So the officials give them some. But if they ask for candy often, they are not given any. They go to work crying.

Q: Do they fall asleep in the factory?

A: If they fall asleep they are scolded and beaten.

Q: Do they get paid?

A: They are paid 8 sen. Then 7 sen is deducted for food, so they get only 1 sen.

Q: Are there many young children?

A: There are about ten workers who are seven or eight. There are many who are ten years old.

Source: Mikiso Hane, *Peasants, Rebels and Outcasts: The Underside of Modern Japan*, 1st ed. (New York: Pantheon, 1982), 186-87.

Handout 4

Child Labor in Japan in the Late Nineteenth Century

In his description of an earlier Japanese Commission, historian Mikiso Hane reports that, "The more serious abuses in the small plants operated by grasping entrepreneurs who treated their employees like slaves. [A] 1901 government report...included an account of a man who operated a small textile plant in a village in a secluded area of Saitama prefecture. He employed twenty-four female workers ranging in age from fourteen to twenty-five. The workers were locked inside the plant and were forced to work until they finished producing a fixed quota, often from 5 A.M. well into the night. Those who failed to meet their quotas were deprived of their meals. One worker, who was finally blinded by the abuses inflicted on her, reported that she tried to run away twice but was caught each time and, as punishment, was stripped naked, tied up, and beaten with an iron rod. After she was released and sent back to work, she was punished over and over for failing to meet her quota. Each time she was stripped naked, tied up, and beaten. She was even stripped naked and shoved into the excrement pot. When she tried to hide from her employer, she was dragged through the snow by her hair and then made to stand in the snow for an hour. She was also burned with moksa weed, deprived of food, and her frostbitten feet were jabbed with an iron rod. In the course of these abuses her eyes got infected, but she was locked, untreated, in a small shack until she lost her eyesight completely."

Handout 5

British 1833 Factory Act

R. W. Cooke-Taylor, an inspector of factories and the author of *The Factory System*, described the British 1833 Factory Act as follows:

“The Factory Act, 1833 was an attempt to establish a normal working day in a single department of industry, textile manufacture. The way in which it proposed to do this was the following: The working day was to start at 5.30 a.m. and cease at 8.30 p.m. A young person (aged thirteen to eighteen) might not be employed beyond any period of twelve hours, less one and a half for meals; and a child (aged nine to thirteen) beyond any period of nine hours. From 8.30 p.m. to 5.30 a.m.; that is during the night; the employment of such persons was altogether prohibited.”

Source: “1833 Factory Act,” *Spartacus Internet Encyclopedia*, <<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/IR1833.htm>>.

Japanese Factory Act

This act was voted down in the Japanese legislature in 1898, but was later passed in 1911.

ARTICLE ONE This law applies to factories employing fifty or more workers and apprentices.

ARTICLE NINE Employment of children under ten years of age is prohibited. However, this limitation will be modified with the approval of authorities where there exist special circumstances.

ARTICLE TEN The working hours of children under fourteen years of age are limited to ten hours per day. However, this limitation will be modified with the approval of authorities where there exist special circumstances.

ARTICLE ELEVEN Work shall be suspended on at least two days in each month and on three national holidays, and an hour of meal time is to be given to workers every working day. These requirements will be modified with the approval of authorities where there exist special circumstance.

ARTICLE TWELVE The employer shall provide educational facilities at his own expense for workers in his employ under the age of fourteen years who have not completed elementary school. Workers are to obey the academic rule of the employer.

Source: Stephen E. Marsland, *The Birth of the Japanese Labor Movement: Takano Fustaro and the Rodo Kumiai Kiseikai* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1989), 204-6.