

Danger: Children At Work!
Child Labor Past and Present
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Abstract:

How do young people view work and their role in it? Do they understand the history that lies behind the issue of children at work? Are they aware of the modern conflicts that exist regarding the issue of children at work? Ever since the industrial revolution, work has been a central ingredient in any society, yet there have not always been guidelines pertaining to the work of children. What caused guidelines to be put in place in the United States, and who were some of the individuals involved in that struggle? How did people of the time view the issue of child labor? How does the world view the same issue today?

This unit focuses on the issue of child labor, past and present. Many young people today see work as an avenue to “purchasing power” and a degree of independence. Yet in the past children at work had a very different role in society. In other parts of the world today, children at work still have quite a different role. Working is on the minds of our young people growing up, but it is important for them to have some perspective on the place work should have in their lives.

Essential Questions/Enduring Understandings:

- What is labor?
- Who should work and who should not?
- What work should young people be able to do or not do?
- Should the government control what work young people do?
- How has society seen child labor?
- How am I connected to other people in the world?
- Why should I be concerned about other people in the world?

Assessment:

Students will be assessed during group discussions, individual or small group work on graphic organizers and analytical forms, and on a final project.

Setting the Purpose:

Students will increase their understanding of the history of child labor in the United States by using primary and secondary sources. They will also extend that knowledge to the issue of child labor in the world today.

Duration:

The lessons together can be done in a one to two week time period.

Procedure:

The unit has 5 lesson components:

Introductory Lesson: Children at Work: A Brief Look

Lesson 2: Children at Work: A Look into the Past

Lesson 3: Children at Work: Child Labor and the Law

Lesson 4: Children at Work: Lost Childhood

Lesson 5: Children at Work: A Long Hard Look

Analysis of primary sources:

Several graphic organizers and document analysis forms are used in these lessons.

Additional Resources

- IL Department of Labor information on the Child Labor Law
- Poster about teen labor laws
- Glossary of Terms from “In Our Own Backyard” by the AFT
- “Stolen Childhoods” Teacher Resource Guide