

CHILD LABOR IN THE 19TH CENTURY AND TODAY

Wisconsin State Curriculum Alignment:

Social Studies B.4.1 – Identify and examine various sources of information that are used for constructing an understanding of the past, such as artifacts, documents, letters, diaries, maps, textbooks, photos, paintings, architecture, oral presentations, graphs, and charts.

Family and Consumer Education A.1 – Identify several contributions the family makes in meeting family members’ needs for food, clothing, shelter, and economic resources; encouraging development of all family members throughout life; and taking action to improve conditions in the home, workplace, neighborhood, community, and world.

Social Studies E.4.6 – Give examples of group and institutional influences such as laws, rules, and peer pressure on people, events, and culture.

English Language Arts F.4.1 – Conduct research and inquiry on self-selected or assigned topics, issues, or problems and use an appropriate form to communicate their findings

- Propose research by formulating initial questions, narrowing the focus of a topic, identifying prior knowledge, and developing a basic plan for gathering information.
- Conduct research by identifying, locating, exploring, and effectively using multiple sources of information appropriate to the inquiry, including print, non print, and electronic sources.

Because Houdini’s family struggled to make ends meet, Houdini helped out by doing odd jobs, such as selling newspapers, shining shoes, and working in factories. Houdini worked long hours, even as a young child, which meant that he did not spend much time in school. Houdini was not alone as a child laborer. Through the 1800s and into the early 1900s, child labor was not at all uncommon, especially for immigrant children whose families were new to life in the United States and were often among the poorest city-dwellers. What kinds of jobs did child laborers have? What were the factories or “sweat shops” where they worked like? Study the picture below to get a sense of the life of a child laborer.



Teenage sweat shop workers cutting neck ties. Houdini also worked in the sweat shops as a neck tie cutter.

- 1) Study the photograph for a couple of minutes to form an overall impression of it.

- 2) Use the chart below to list people, objects, and activities in the photograph.

<u>People</u>	<u>Objects</u>	<u>Activities</u>

- 3) Do you think that this picture was taken in a large factory or in a small “sweat shop?” Cite evidence to support your answer.

- 4) What kind of working conditions do you note in this photo? List three things about the conditions pictured here.

- 5) What about the work might be difficult?

- 6) Do you think that these teenagers attend school? Explain.

- 7) In 1916, after this photo was taken, the Keating-Owen Child Labor Act placed restrictions on the employment of children. This act stated that children must be sixteen years old in order to work in a mine or quarry and fourteen years old in order to work in a mill, cannery, workshop, factory, or manufacturing establishment. It also said that children between the ages of 14 and 16 working in mills, canneries, workshops, factories, or manufacturing establishments could not work more than eight hours a day or more than six days a week. They also could not work between 7 p.m. and 6 a.m. How do you think that the Keating-Owen Child Labor Act might have changed the lives of these teenagers?

Read the WGBA-TV news story about child labor at Taco Bell reprinted below:

WGBA-TV

Updated: 10:39 p.m. ET Dec. 17, 2003

Dec. 17 – A company that operates 24 Taco Bell restaurants in 13 Wisconsin communities is accused of violating federal labor laws.

The U.S. Department of Labor accuses the Madison company, Border Patrol Wisconsin, of allowing nearly 160 14- and 15-year-old children to work as late as four a.m. Regulators say some children worked nearly eight hours on a school day, as many as ten hours on non-school day[s] and as many as 35 hours in a school week.

The labor department assessed a civil penalty of nearly 76-thousand dollars.

The 24 Taco Bell restaurants investigated are in Appleton, Ashwaubenon, Brookfield, Eau Claire, Glendale, Green Bay, LaCrosse, Manitowoc, Menasha, Milwaukee, Osseo, Richland Center and Wauwatosa.

Under the law, children that young may work three hours on a school day, 18 hours in a school week, eight hours on a non-school day and 40 hours in a non-school week.

Border Patrol president Rich Lepping says the company's appealed the fine to the Department of Labor and was cooperating with the investigation.

Associated Press

- 1) What is the date of this article?

- 2) What are the accusations against Border Patrol Wisconsin?

- 3) What is Border Patrol Wisconsin's relationship to Taco Bell?

- 4) What are the provisions of the law apparently violated?

- 5) What questions does this article raise for you? Where could you look for the answers?

- 6) Are you aware of any other instances of child labor law violations? If so, describe the case.

- 7) What might happen if there was no child labor legislation? How might child labor affect a boy or girl's life – their education, family relationships, relationships with friends, etc.?

There are nations, such as India, that rely heavily on child labor. Using the internet, books, and documents such as photographs, investigate the problem of child labor in India or another country (including the United States). Describe the problem and propose possible solutions. Look into the ways that children are empowering themselves to make a change, as in the Indian children's union, Bhima Sangha, a union of, by, and for working children. (See <http://www.changemakers.net/journal/00april/bhima.cfm> and <http://www.workingchild.org>.)