

THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

Wisconsin State Curriculum Alignment:

Social Studies E.8.8 – Give examples to show how the media may influence the behavior and decision-making of individuals and groups.

Social Studies B.8.1 – Interpret the past using a variety of sources, such as biographies, diaries, journals, artifacts, eyewitness interviews, and other primary source materials, and evaluate the credibility of sources used.

Social Studies B.8.8 – Identify major scientific discoveries and technological innovations and describe their social and economic effects on society.

English Language Arts B.8.1 – Create or produce writing to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.

- Write a persuasive piece (such as a letter to a specific person or a script promoting a particular product) that includes a clear position, a discernable tone, and a coherent argument with reliable evidence.

Houdini came to America during the height of the American Industrial Revolution. By the late 1700s Americans were already experimenting with machines to find how they could reduce human labor. In 1790, a British immigrant named Samuel Slater built America's first water-powered textile mill in Pawtucket, Rhode Island. This marked the beginning of America's Industrial Age. Only three years later, the American Eli Whitney invented the cotton gin, a machine that cleaned cotton and removed cotton seeds.

By the mid 1800s, American cities were growing as factories opened and people came from rural areas in the hopes of finding jobs. After the end of the Civil War in 1865, many freed slaves migrated North to escape white southerners' anger and to build a better life. This migration was greatly helped by trains powered with steam locomotives, invented in 1804. The steamship, telegraph, telephone, improved printing methods, and improved postal delivery were also products of the Industrial Revolution.

All of this productivity came at a price, however. New machines could do the work that skilled workers had spent years perfecting. This enabled factories to hire unskilled laborers for lower pay to run the machines. In order to increase productivity, factories also increased the length of the working day. Laborers often worked twelve hour shifts six to seven days a week. The pay was low and working conditions were poor.

However, for immigrants in the cities, factory work was one of the few options available. Many of the 25 million immigrants that entered America between 1866 and 1915 became factory workers. Several of the immigrants from this era came from Eastern and Southern Europe and also faced many prejudices.

Some photo journalists went into immigrant ghettos and factories and snapped pictures showing the difficult conditions in which immigrants worked and lived. Study the photo below and analyze it with the help of the questions provided.

Many people referred to investigative journalists of the day as muckrakers. In a 1906 speech, President Theodore Roosevelt compared investigative journalists of the early 1900s to a person whose job it was to literally rake up muck (animals' dung.) Following the speech, investigative journalists became known as muckrakers. (See www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/Jmuckraking.htm) The muckrakers investigated and wrote about injustices in society, hoping to encourage reform. They tackled subjects such as treatment of prisoners in jail, health concerns related to food processing, the abuse of child labor, the destruction of natural resources, and unacceptable working conditions in factories.



Girls at the weaving machines, Lincoln Cotton Mills, Evansville, Indiana. Library of Congress LOT 7479, v.1, no. 0220 [P&P]

- 1) What type of factory do you think this is? Cite evidence to support your answer.

- 2) This girl is working on a loom weaving cloth. What about her work might be dangerous or uncomfortable?

- 3) What kind of working conditions does the factory provide? Things to think about include: Is there adequate light? Is there fresh air provided? Are there precautions to keep the workers safe in case of an accident or fire?

- 4) Is this a factory in which you would like to work? Why or why not?

- 5) What kinds of technology are used in this factory? How do you think this technology might have changed the way this job was done? How do you think it affected the workers?

Go to the library and find books on the American Industrial Revolution and the lives of factory workers in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Read about the conditions in which many immigrants lived and worked at the time. Write your own piece of muckraking journalism and try to convince your audience that conditions need to change. What will you tell your audience to convince them that conditions are unacceptable? What improvements can you suggest? Do you think that you and other muckrakers can convince factory owners and tenement housing landlords to make those changes on their own or do you think that change needs to start with laws that protect the immigrants from unsafe conditions? Try to use your skills as a writer to convince people to take action! After writing your article about living and working conditions for immigrants of the late 1800s and early 1900s, try to think of a modern-day cause that a muckraker journalist might write about. Where is corruption occurring in today's society? Do you know of groups that suffer poor living and working conditions? Write down your ideas about subjects for a modern muckraking article.