***Lesson Plans: Grades 9-12***

**Garment Workers of South Jersey: Factory Life**

**Introduction**

The role of the factory worker has remained central in the success of individual industries. The treatment of these workers, and the rights guaranteed to them, has evolved over the past 100 years to include greater worker participation, safer conditions, and diversity of opportunity.

This lesson will use the text, Garment Workers of South Jersey as a lens to explore the treatment of workers over the past century. Students will engage in collaborative activities which focus on ELA reading and writing skills. This lesson engages students in civic questions of worker rights. This includes an analysis of change over time and what further actions can be taken to improve the lives of factory workers.

**Essential Questions**

How has factory life changed in the United States?

What rights should be guaranteed to all workers?

What challenges do factory workers experience?

**Learning Objectives**

*Students will be able to*

Compare and contrast primary sources addressing the topic of Factory Life

Evaluate how factory life changed over time

Work collaboratively to analyze diverse perspectives

**Lesson Activities**

**Activity 1**

Focus Activity: Students will develop a list of fair working conditions doing a “Think-Pair-Share.” Students will develop a list of what they believe are fair working conditions and share their responses with a partner. The teacher will facilitate a class discussion of these lists and work to create a singular list the class can agree on.

1. Collaboratively analyze working conditions. Students will be divided into groups of 2 or 3 depending on class size. Each group will be given a different oral testimony from *Garment Workers*, a selection describing factory life at turn of 20th century, and a selection describing contemporary factory life. Groups will develop an “Alike-Yet-Different Chart” to compare the different selections.
2. Class Discussion. The teacher will facilitate a class discussion surrounding the treatment of factory workers across history. Students are encouraged to comment on the similarities and differences they see, as well as ask themselves the question: “Has anything changed for factory workers?”
3. Workers Bill of Rights. Students, having discussed the issue of factory life with the class, will return to their groups to develop a “Workers Bill of Rights.” Considering how workers have been treated, students will develop a proposal that dictates what rights factor workers should be guaranteed.
4. Presentation. If time allows, have each group present what they included in their “Workers Bill of Rights.” The teacher can elect to have students write this on the board or develop an agreed upon class list. This can be extended to include a debate over what rights should be universal and what their implications are.

Closure: RAFT Activity. Students will be asked to select a role, audience, and format to write on the topic of Factory Life. These roles, audience, and formats can be changed by the teacher to best meet the needs of the students.

**Common Core Standards**

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.1

Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.9

Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.4

Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.8

Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.1

Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

**American Studies Habits of Mind**

* Seeking out diverse perspectives
* Studying change over time
* Practicing collaboration and public engagement

Notes:

**My life as a sweatshop worker: *Undercover reporter tells of crushing hours and terrible pay in Bangladeshi clothes factory where she worked for girl boss aged just NINE***

*Source: The Daily Mail, 12 October 2013.* [*http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2456412/My-life-sweatshop-worker-Undercover-reporter-tells-crushing-work-terrible-pay-girl-boss-aged-just-NINE.html*](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2456412/My-life-sweatshop-worker-Undercover-reporter-tells-crushing-work-terrible-pay-girl-boss-aged-just-NINE.html)

A Canadian journalist working undercover in a Bangladeshi sweatshop has revealed details of the back-breaking work and appalling conditions children as young as nine have to deal with.

Raveena Aulakh traveled to Dhaka to experience firsthand conditions in garment factories that mass produce products for the West…

After what became known as the worst garment factory disaster in the world, there was intense scrutiny of working conditions and child labor.

But the larger factories also brought in improved security and screening programs, making it harder for undercover investigators to gain access.

Ms Aulakh was able to find work only after a Bangladeshi driver told a small factory owner, named Hamid, that she was related to his wife and had moved to the city for work…

'The factory wasn’t big: about two dozen sewing machines lined the walls of the windowless room, about half the size of a basketball court. Two cutting machines sat in a corner. The sewing machines had little benches for the operators, and almost all had piles of colorful fabric by the side. Three ceiling fans, covered with layers of dirt, hummed quietly,' she wrote.

A quick tour of the building revealed no fire extinguishers, only one exit - the front door - and little more than a hole in the ground, down a rat-infested hall, for the toilet.

Staff worked from 9am to 9pm with only a lunch break. The girls tasked with snipping off threads from the men's shirts being made, had to sit cross legged in the middle of the floor.

Ms Aulakh joined the girls on the floor and, under Meem's direction, was taught how to snip away loose threads without marking the clothes.

'It was back-breaking, it was finger-numbing. It was particularly rage-inducing,' she said.

'Not because it was painfully hard work but because children like Meem hunched over hour after hour, squinted at the threads, cleaned one collar after another, one cuff after another, one arm piece after another until the piles were depleted.'

Like many young factory workers, Meem was taken out of school when the family ran into hardship. With her mother pregnant and unable to work, the family needed Meem to help boost the income.

Her father found her the job at Hamid's factory because the girl's aunt also worked there and would be able to look after her.

Overnight, Meem went from being a carefree schoolgirl to a factory worker, toiling for 12 hours a day.

'It works for everyone,' Smitha Zaheed, of the Dhaka-based Independent Garment Workers’ Union Federation, said. 'Factory owners get workers who are not demanding ... while the parents get to keep what the kids earn because the kids don’t know any better.'

Meem's wages are paid to her father and she is allowed to buy herself a glittery hair clip each month and an occasional ice-cream.

'It is not as if Meem’s parents don’t care for her, they simply had no choice,' Ms Aulakh wrote.

Despite the long hours and aches caused from sitting hunched over for hours at a time, Meem was always smiling and her only complaint was that she was yelled at if she chatted too much or hummed too loudly.

Workers like Meem are paid about $25 a month. They are allowed half a day off every Friday and do not get holidays or paid sick leave.

In a country with widespread poverty however, such jobs are valued and Meem had ambitions to move up the factory chain to become a better-paid sewing operator.

'When I become a sewing operator, I will make very good shirts,' she said. 'No one will yell at me.'

The lifestyle is so common in Bangladesh that Meem and another of the girls, 13-year-old Taaniya think nothing of ending their education early.

Even at their young ages they knew how the extra money could help and talked of how their families had been able to buy furniture and goats.

Taaniya also hoped she could earn enough to avoid being married off to a stranger.

'By all accounts, working women are changing their lives, their families’ lives,' Ms Aulakh said. 'There is more food in homes, and cleaner clothes. There is electricity, even if it’s one bulb, and there are toilets ... But it has come at a price.'

For children like Meem, the factory has become their life. Ms Aulakh may have been able to return to her comfortable home and office job, but the knowledge that thousands of girls remain trapped in such back-breaking work has stayed with her.

**A Day In The Life Of An iPhone Factory Worker**

*Source: Fast Company* [*https://www.fastcompany.com/3014988/a-day-in-the-life-of-an-iphone-factory-worker*](https://www.fastcompany.com/3014988/a-day-in-the-life-of-an-iphone-factory-worker)

At the second-largest Apple supplier factory in China, pregnant and underage workers put in 66-hour weeks (China's legal max is 49) while being forced to sign falsified time cards, according to a nonprofit group called China Labor Watch. One undercover investigator posing as a worker at the plant was scolded by a supervisor for asking for a restroom break.

China Labor Watch has just released the results of an extensive behind-the-scenes investigation of three factories that are subsidiaries of Pegatron Group, which supplies Microsoft, Dell, and HP as well as Apple. The report alleges 86 separate legal and ethical labor violations, although most of the tech press were more focused on the "scoop" that there is going to be a new, low-cost iPhone.

In a statement, Apple said the report included claims "that are new to us and we will investigate them immediately. Our audit teams will return to Pegatron, RiTeng and AVY for special inspections this week. If our audits find that workers have been underpaid or denied compensation for any time they’ve worked, we will require that Pegatron reimburse them in full."

Based on months of undercover investigation, the report gives an intimate look at the lives of workers making your iPhones and iPads. Here's what a day looks like according to the report:

6:30 a.m.: Get up in your dorm. Wait for the shuttle bus.

8:10 a.m.: Workers, some of whom are student "interns" who pay part of their salaries to their schools, under 18, or pregnant, start the day with an unpaid 20-minute meeting. They must shout out slogans like "quality, discipline, unity. I’m the best! Work hard!" and clap their hands, or stand at military attention and be berated for missing quotas. There are three of these meetings a day.

8:30 a.m.: Work begins. The workday typically lasts 12 hours on the assembly line. There are 90 minutes of breaks for meals and restroom. No talking. No standing up. No drinking water at your station. No cell phones. If you finish your work early, you must sit down and read employee manuals.

9:30 a.m.: The day's task is to assemble back covers for the iPad. The quota is 600 per day, or 1 per minute.

10:30 a.m.: Ask your team leader for a bathroom break. "No one else wants to go. Only you are such a pain!"

12 p.m.: Lunch. At the dining hall, meals are 2 RMB ($0.33) to 5 RMB ($0.81) for breakfast and 5 RMB to 10 RMB ($1.63) RMB for lunch and dinner. The food is "bad," with dinner mainly reheated lunch; on the plus side, there is a free piece of fruit every Wednesday.

1 p.m.: Back to work. Choice disciplinary quotes from managers: "If you don’t obey, I will expose you to the blazing sun until 12 o’clock"; "Which son of a bitch is talking?"; "Don’t talk; be quiet! Who’s still fucking talking over there?"; "If I ever catch someone who hasn’t cleaned up the area under his seat, the whole assembly line will work overtime for nothing. Don’t get others in trouble."

5 p.m.: Break. The factory campus includes a supermarket, post office, bank branch, hair salon, library with Internet access, basketball court, and gym. The most popular are the basketball court and the supermarket, even though the food prices are inflated.

7 p.m.: No guests. No gossiping. No revealing your pay. No smoking outside smoking areas. No passing out leaflets. No instigating a strike (grounds for dismissal).

8:30 p.m.: Once a week you must sign a falsified time sheet meant for Apple inspectors. The sheet records 10 to 16 hours of overtime, when the real number is 20+ hours. Workers depend on overtime to make a living wage.

9 p.m.: After the evening meeting, and a wait in a security line, take a company shuttle to grab a more edible meal at the outdoor night market.

10 p.m.: Back to the dorm, where hundreds share a dozen showers. Dorm rules: No pets. No alcohol. No sitting on balconies. No switching rooms or beds. No gambling. No outside guests (grounds for dismissal).

11 p.m.: Finally get a shower. The water is cold.

11:30 p.m.: Fall into your bunk exhausted in a room with 11 other workers. Surf the Internet on your cell phone for a few minutes before you fall asleep. Wake up. Repeat.

**Modern History Sourcebook:  
Harriet Robinson:  
Lowell Mill Girls**

http://chnm.gmu.edu/courses/jackson/images/doodle.gif

*In her autobiography, Harriet Hanson Robinson, the wife of a newspaper editor, provided an account of her earlier life as female factory worker (from the age of ten in 1834 to 1848) in the textile Mills of Lowell, Massachusetts. Her account explains some of the family dynamics involved, and lets us see the women as active participants in their own lives - for instance in their strike of 1836.*

In what follows, I shall confine myself to a description of factory life in Lowell, Massachusetts, from 1832 to 1848, since, with that phase of Early Factory Labor in New England, I am the most familiar--because I was a part of it.

In 1832, Lowell was little more than a factory village. Five "corporations" were started, and the cotton mills belonging to them were building. Help was in great demand and stories were told all over the country of the new factory place, and the high wages that were offered to all classes of work–people; stories that reached the ears of mechanics' and farmers' sons and glave new life to lonely and dependent women in distant towns and farm–houses .... Troops of young girls came from different parts of New England, and from Canada, and men were employed to collect them at so much a head, and deliver them at the factories.

. . .

At the time the Lowell cotton mills were started the caste of the factory girl was the lowest among the employments of women. In England and in France, particularly, great injustice had been done to her real character. She was represented as subjected to influences that must destroy her purity and self–respect. In the eyes of her overseer she was but a brute, a slave, to be beaten, pinched and pushed about. It was to overcome this prejudice that such high wages had been offered to women that they might be induced to become mill–girls, in spite of the opprobrium that still clung to this degrading occupation....

The early mill–girls were of different ages. Some were not over ten years old; a few were in middle life, but the majority were between the ages of sixteen and twenty–five. The very young girls were called "doffers." They "doffed," or took off, the full bobbins from the spinning–frames, and replaced them with empty ones. These mites worked about fifteen minutes every hour and the rest of the time was their own. When the overseer was kind they were allowed to read, knit, or go outside the mill–yard to play. They were paid two dollars a week. The working hours of all the girls extended from five o'clock in the morning until seven in the evening, with one half–hour each, for breakfast and dinner. Even the doffers were forced to be on duty nearly fourteen hours a day. This was the greatest hardship in the lives of these children. Several years later a ten–hour law was passed, but not until long after some of these little doffers were old enough to appear before the legislative committee on the subject, and plead, by their presence, for a reduction of the hours of labor.

Those of the mill–girls who had homes generally worked from eight to ten months in the year; the rest of the time was spent with parents or friends. A few taught school during the summer months. Their life in the factory was made pleasant to them. In those days there was no need of advocating the doctrine of the proper relation between employer and employed. *Help was too valuable to be ill–treated....*

. . .

The most prevailing incentive to labor was to secure the means of education for some *male*member of the family. To make a *gentleman*of a brother or a son, to give him a college education, was the dominant thought in the minds of a great many of the better class of mill–girls. I have known more than one to give every cent of her wages, month after month, to her brother, that he might get the education necessary to enter some profession. I have known a mother to work years in this way for her boy. I have known women to educate young men by their earnings, who were not sons or relatives. There are many men now living who were helped to an education by the wages of the early mill–girls.

It is well to digress here a little, and speak of the influence the possession of money had on the characters of some of these women. We can hardly realize what a change the cotton factory made in the status of the working women. Hitherto woman had always been a money *saving*rather than a money earning, member of the community. Her labor could command but small return. If she worked out as servant, or "help," her wages were from 50 cents to $1 .00 a week; or, if she went from house to house by the day to spin and weave, or do tailoress work, she could get but 75 cents a week and her meals. As teacher, her services were not in demand, and the arts, the professions, and even the trades and industries, were nearly all closed to her.

As late as 1840 there were only seven vocations outside the home into which the women of New England had entered. At this time woman had no property rights. A widow could be left without her share of her husband's (or the family) property, an " incumbrance" to his estate. A father could make his will without reference to his daughter's share of the inheritance. He usually left her a home on the farm as long as she remained single. A woman was not supposed to be capable of spending her own, or of using other people's money. In Massachusetts, before 1840, a woman could not, legally, be treasurer of her own sewing society, unless some man were responsible for her. The law took no cognizance of woman as a money–spender. She was a ward, an appendage, a relict. Thus it happened that if a woman did not choose to marry, or, when left a widow, to re–marry, she had no choice but to enter one of the few employments open to her, or to become a burden on the charity of some relative.

. . .

One of the first strikes that ever took place in this country was in Lowell in 1836. When it was announced that the wages were to be cut down, great indignation was felt, and it was decided to strike or "turn out" en masse. This was done. The mills were shut down, and the girls went from their several corporations in procession to the grove on Chapel Hill, and listened to incendiary speeches from some early labor reformers.

One of the girls stood on a pump and gave vent to the feelings of her companions in a neat speech, declaring that it was their duty to resist all attempts at cutting down the wages. This was the first time a woman had spoken in public in Lowell, and the event caused surprise and consternation among her audience

It is hardly necessary to say that, so far as practical results are concerned, this strike did no good. The corporation would not come to terms. The girls were soon tired of holding out, and they went back to their work at the reduced rate of wages. The ill–success of this early attempt at resistance on the part of the wage element seems to have made a precedent for the issue of many succeeding strikes.

Harriet H. Robinson, "Early Factory Labor in New England," in Massachusetts Bureau of Statistics of Labor, *Fourteenth Annual Report*(Boston: Wright & Potter, 1883), pp. 380–82, 387–88, 391–92.

**Workers Bill of Rights**

**Directions**: *Collaborating with your partners, develop a “Workers Bill of Rights.” Considering what you have read about factor conditions, develop a list of things all workers should be guaranteed or promised.*

**Closure: RAFT**

Directions: Choose a perspective from the list below and follow the prompts for format and audience.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Role** | **Audience** | **Format** | **Topic** |
| Garment Worker | Employer | Complaint Form | Factory Life |
| Child of Worker | Parent (worker) | Lunchbox note |
| Employer | Employees | Workplace Notice |
| Modern factory worker | Buyer of Goods | Letter |

**Teacher Preparation**

1. Read the article “Ready to Wear” for background on the garment industry: <https://bellatory.com/fashion-industry/Ready-to-Wear-A-Short-History-of-the-Garment-Industry>
2. Read over “Working Conditions During the Industrial Revolution”: <http://www.schoolshistory.org.uk/IndustrialRevolution/workingconditions.htm#.V_6V1vkrKM8>
3. Read over and familiarize yourself with the assigned readings. Edit them to best fit the needs of your class.