

Industrial Revolution – Lesson 2

How did working conditions change during the Industrial Revolution?

Subject Knowledge Notes

One of the main features of the Industrial Revolution was the horrendous working conditions that people faced. At the time, industrial cities and towns grew dramatically due to the migration of farmers and their families who were looking for work in the newly developed factories and mines. These factories and mines were dangerous and unforgiving places to work in. The working conditions that working-class people faced were known to include: long hours of work (12-16 hour shifts), low wages that barely covered the cost of living, dangerous and dirty conditions and workplaces with little or no worker rights.

As industry became more important, there was a greater demand for coal, which was used as a fuel in steam engines and also for furnaces. The result of this was that coal mines grew deeper and became increasingly dangerous. Some coal shafts would extend hundreds of feet down into the ground. Conditions were cramped. Some of the underground roadways were as little as 60 – 120 cm in height. Mine owners did not want to increase their costs by making them bigger. So small children were often used to pull or push tubs or large baskets of coal on sleds along the low and narrow roadways.

Some mines were very hot and wet, or hot and dusty. Dust was formed as stone and coal were worked by pick. Poor ventilation meant that the dust stayed in the air underground. In some mines, it was so hot that workers wore little or no clothing whilst they worked. It would feel even hotter if the ventilation was poor. Water is always present in coal mines, as it seeps through the rocks above and gathers in underground reservoirs or old workings. Flooding was always a possibility and an ever present fear.

Factories of the Industrial Revolution were notorious for being dangerous, especially textile mills. Spinning machines in textile mills were often left unguarded and posed a serious risk. For instance, a report from the British House of Commons in 1832 commented that “There are factories, no means few in number, nor confined to the smaller mills, in which serious accidents are continually occurring, and in which, notwithstanding, dangerous parts of the machinery are allowed to remain unfenced.” This situation caused industrial workers to become injured, as they were working dangerously close to spinning belts and shafts that powered the machines. Any loose fitting clothing could easily become clogged and pull the worker violently into the workings of the machine.

Industrial workers were generally paid very small amounts and struggled to survive. For example, adult men were paid around 10 shillings per week, while women were paid 5 shillings for the same work, and children were paid just 1 shilling. In comparison, families were usually charged 5 shillings per month for rent. This did not usually leave much left over for food, clothes and luxury items. As a result, they often struggled to cover their cost of living and had to also endure difficult living conditions. As well, workers often had their pay deducted for being late or for taking a break during their shift.

In 1833 the Government passed a Factory Act to improve conditions for children working in factories. Young children were working very long hours in workplaces where conditions were often terrible. The basic act was as follows:

- no child workers under nine years of age
- employers must have an age certificate for their child workers
- children of 9-13 years to work no more than nine hours a day
- children of 13-18 years to work no more than 12 hours a day
- children are not to work at night
- two hours schooling each day for children
- four factory inspectors appointed to enforce the law

Sources:

History Crunch - Working conditions during the Industrial Revolution (<https://www.historycrunch.com/working-conditions-in-the-industrial-revolution.html#/>)

National Coal Mining Museum of England – Working Conditions in 19th Century Mines (https://www.ncm.org.uk/downloads/23/C19_working_conditions.pdf)

National Archives – 1833 Factory Act (<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/1833-factory-act/>)

Further Reading:









<https://www.historyonthenet.com/industrial-revolution-working-conditions>

<https://www.bbc.com/bitesize/guides/zwdqk7h/revision/4>

Industrial Revolution – Lesson 2

How did working conditions change during the Industrial Revolution?

Lesson Two: How did working conditions change during the Industrial Revolution

 5 mins	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Display the key question for the lesson (Slide 2)• Display the retrieval quiz and give pupils five minutes to complete it independently (Slide 3).• Circulate to gather information about common misconceptions or mistakes.• Display the correct answers and allow pupils to self-mark (Slide 4).
  15 mins	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Call on different pupils to read aloud the opening paragraphs about mining.• Pause to give pupils a chance to complete the two questions when you reach this point.• Get feedback and give pupils the chance to correct their answers. (% increase is 900%). (Slide 5)
 10 mins	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Model looking at the table with information on mining deaths.• Ask pupils to complete the three questions underneath.• Ask them to reflect on how the table deepens their understanding of working conditions in the mines.• Model exploring what can be learnt from data of this type: slight increase in explosions means more use of explosives, increases in roofs collapsing showing that perhaps less attention paid to safety, or going deeper into mines. Likely that deaths from wagons will be women and children.
 10 mins	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Call on different pupils to read the section on Factories (Slide 6).• Explain the concept of an 'overseer' (like a foreman) – the person responsible for managing the factory (or part of the factory).• Answer the question when pupils come to it.
 5 mins	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ask pupils to reflect on this question in silence.• Explain that the Factory Act was unpopular with many people (the factory owners, for example). It also created challenges – having to make sure there were schools for children to go to.• Ask pupils to reflect on why the government pursued this Act.• Discuss their ideas about government motivations. Explain that in large part this was motivated by concern about the impact that working long hours were having on children and that this physical impact was so marked that the government had to act.
 5 mins	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ask pupils to reflect on this question and work out in pairs which one they think would have been better to work in.• Ask them to come up with reasons for their choice.• Take feedback from pupils and then ask them to record their choice and add a reason.•
 5 mins	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ask pupils to return to page 3, and answer the question 'How did working conditions change during the Industrial Revolution'.