Today, we consider working in a canning factory, making glass, spinning in a textile factory or working in a coal mine jobs for adults. During the American Industrial Revolution, these were just a few of the dangerous jobs performed by children. Throughout history children have worked. The work was usually agricultural and often on the family farm. Children would work alongside their family and were rarely asked to perform a task that could cause them harm. But over time, families many who were immigrants, moved to urban areas searching for work. Their dreams of a better life soon vanished. Working long hours for little pay required every member of a family, including children, to work merely for a family to survive.

Child labor was attractive to business owners for several reasons. Children could fit into tight spaces in factories and mines where adults couldn’t go. Children were also easier to control with threats and verbal and physical abuse that scared children into doing what a supervisor required. Most importantly, children were paid less than adults doing the same job. Working 10 to 14 hours a day, six days a week left little time for play or school. Since children either did not attend school or attended infrequently, many were illiterate and lacked the knowledge needed to escape this way of life.

In the final quarter of the nineteenth century the number of children working increased. The official number was 1.75 million but this figure is drastically underestimated. Factories were not the only industry increasing child labor, cotton mills in the south were experiencing a surge. Employees under the age of fifteen rose to 25 percent and half of these children below the age of twelve. The increasing number of children working plus the shocking conditions these children worked in, finally brought child labor to the attention of the public. The National Child Labor Committee began conducting investigations into child labor by using photography to publicize the conditions these children worked in everyday. Through lobbying efforts, laws restricting child labor were passed through many state legislatures but many had loopholes or were simply ignored. This led to a fight for a federal child labor law. In 1916 and 1918, Congress passed the laws but the Supreme Court declared them unconstitutional. Congress passed a constitutional amendment authorizing federal child labor legislation but fear of increased federal power relating to children prevented many states from ratifying it.

It would take the Great Depression to cause a decrease in child labor. High unemployment lead to jobs being filled by adults that were previously held by children. New machinery also played a part in cutting child labor. Simple tasks became mechanized and machinery more complicated requiring a higher level of education. The United States has not eliminated child labor. It still exists in certain areas of the economy but it has reduced significantly allowing a childhood of play, education and discovery.
The Industrial Revolution brought an increased need for coal to keep steam machinery running. Illinois helped to meet this need with coal mines, mostly in northern Illinois. Young boys were employed by coal companies because of their small size and low wages. Boys as young as eight could be found working the mines. Poverty drove parents to lie about their children’s age so they could work in the mines. Mining companies were oblivious to the children who were legally too young to work in the dangerous mines. Companies profited from child labor since wages for children were so low. Children had a variety of jobs in the mines. Trapper boys opened and closed the huge doors allowing mining cars to travel from one area of the mine to another. The doors needed to open and shut quickly to control ventilation in the mines. These children worked in almost complete darkness.

Breaker boys separated coal from rocks or other debris. This work was done above ground but still posed hazards to young workers. They sat in a room dark from the thick coal dust for hours. Just like the children working underground, breaker boys inhaled great amounts of coal dust damaging their lungs and causing illness. Breaker boys handled thousands of pieces of coal each day and the sulfur on the coal would cause their fingers to swell and bleed. The sounds of the machines used were deafening and able to crush small hands quickly.

The ability of young boys to run and be agile should be used in games and fun, it was this ability that kept boys employed in the glass factories during the Industrial Revolution. The job boys performed at the glass factory in Alton, Illinois was hot and dangerous. It took two or three boys to assist each glass blower. One boy sat close to the mold while hot molten glass was poured inside. After the mold was poured, another boy took the glass out, placed it on a long stick and put it in front of a small furnace called “the glory hole.” The glass was placed on a tray where boys picked them up and ran to the annealing furnaces where the glass gradually cooled. The glass factories can not get adults to run as fast as the children could between the molds and furnaces. These boys would work days one week and nights the next, which left no time for school.

By 1900, roughly 1.7 million children under the age of 16 worked in factories. Young boys and girls worked long hours for little pay near dangerous equipment that could dismember small hands, fingers and legs. To reach high levers on the running equipment very young children would stand on the machine which was extremely dangerous. The conditions in factories were harsh and treatment of the children by adult supervisors was abusive. The death toll in the factories was high, yet there was little concern for children who were injured or even killed because there was always another child to take their place.

Economics was a driving force behind child labor during the Industrial Revolution. Companies depended on the cheap wages they could pay children and would threaten to close or leave the state if any serious child labor legislation stood in their way. Getting the product to the public by any means took precedence over the safety of children.

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**PLACES TO GO & PRIMARY SOURCES TO SEE**

**Jane Addams Hull House.** [http://www.uic.edu/jaddams/hull/](http://www.uic.edu/jaddams/hull/) Hull House was the private home of Jane Addams and Chicago’s first social settlement. Jane Addams and others who lived at Hull House were advocates for child labor reform. Through their efforts, Illinois legislature passed child labor laws in 1916. Addams served as an executive member of the National Child Labor Committee. Hull House offered many services including day-care facilities for working mothers, a kindergarten, an art gallery, music and art classes and an unemployment bureau. By the second year, Hull House was serving over 2,000 residents every week. Jane Addams lived and worked at Hull House until her death in 1935.
They say that a picture is worth a thousand words. Lewis Hine knew this when he was hired by the National Child Labor Committee (NCLC) to cross the country photographing and documenting the atrocity of child labor in America. Hine started out as a school teacher in New York City. He was fascinated with photography and used it in his classes. Hine was outraged at the increasing number of children forced into hard labor for the survival of themselves and their families. When he was approached about becoming an investigative reporter for the NCLC, he quit his job as a teacher and devoted himself full-time to photographing child labor.

Hine had his work cut out for him because children seemed to be working everywhere. An industrial boom caused a high demand for labor but wages stayed low. That required everyone in a family, including children, to work just to supply the basic needs. The number of children working industrial jobs alone jumped to two million in 1910. Children were not only found in factories, they were working in fields, coal mines, on street corners selling newspapers after dark, shucking oysters, and many other dangerous jobs not meant for children. Hine traveled thousands of miles to photograph these children. To gain entry into the factory and the trust of the supervisors, Hine would pose as a photographer working for companies wanting photographs of the machinery the children were using, sometimes while hiding his camera, he would act as an inspector there to review the factory. If he was denied entry into the factories he would photograph and talk to the children as they left for the day.

Lewis Hine believed Americans needed to see the job these children performed and the conditions they endured, both physical and mental. To look into a child’s eyes knowing they could not read or write, were sick from breathing toxic air or tired from working twelve to fourteen hours a day, Hine knew Americans would be outraged. These children had very little education which would chain them to a life of poverty and hard labor. Hine told their stories through his photographs and by interviewing the children asking their age, how long they had been working and what their job entailed. He documented their heart-breaking stories and shared them with the American public. The thousands of photographs he took and documentation he kept helped enforce legislation banning child labor.

Lewis Hine continued to work in photography after leaving the NCLC but struggled to make a living. He won many awards for his photographs but died in extreme poverty on November 3, 1940.

The fight against child labor is not over, today there are still children in America who get up every morning and go to work instead of school. Children of migrant families who are often paid by the piece instead of by the hour, must work alongside their parents. The agriculture and restaurant fields attract young laborers. While it is permissible for children sixteen and older to work in some industries, the jobs they often perform are considered too dangerous. Many products sold in America today are manufactured in other countries which makes it difficult to track child labor. Companies sub-contract to other companies who purchase from companies located all over the world, so finding out if the products purchased were put together by children is nearly impossible. In poverty stricken countries the number of children working is extremely high. Children are not just working in factories or farms, they sometimes end up in human trafficking or illegal drug trade.

The number of children working industrial jobs jump to 2 million in 1910.
The Teacher's Page

The Library of Congress offers classroom materials and professional development to help teachers effectively use primary sources from the Library’s vast digital collections in their teaching. http://www.loc.gov/teachers

Lesson Plans

Teacher created, classroom-tested, lesson plans using primary sources from the Library of Congress. www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/lessons

Child Labor and the Building of America http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/lessons/built/index.html Students are immersed in primary source materials that relate to child labor in America from 1880-1920 to gain a personal perspective of how work affected the American child within a rapidly growing industrial society.

Child Labor in America http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/lessons/child-labor/preparation.html To gain a true understanding of child labor, both as an historical and social issue, students should examine the worlds of real working children. This unit asks students to critically examine, respond to and report on photographs as historical evidence.

American Memory

American Memory provides free and open access through the internet to written and spoken words, sound recordings, still and moving images, prints, maps, and sheet music that document the American experience. It is a digital record of American history and creativity. These materials from the collections of the Library of Congress and other institutions, chronicle historical events, people, places and ideas that continue to shape America, serving the public as a resource for education and lifelong learning. Memory.loc.gov/ammem/index.html

America from the Great Depression to World War II: Black and White Photographs from the FSA-OWI, 1935-1945 http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/fsahome.html The photographs of the Farm Security Administration-Office of War Information Collection are a landmark in the history of documentary photography. The images show Americans at home, work and play, with an emphasis on rural and small town life and adverse effects of the Great Depression, the Dust Bowl, and increasing farm mechanization. Photos of children working in onion fields and cranberry bogs are available in this collection.

Discover exhibitions that bring the world’s largest collection of knowledge, culture, and creativity to life through dynamic displays of artifacts enhanced by interactivity. http://www.loc.gov/exhibits

American Treasures of the Library of Congress: Memory, Child Labor http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/treasures/trm032.html The National Child Labor Committee campaigned for tougher state and federal laws against the abuses of industrial child labor, and Lewis Hine was its greatest publicist. Lewis Hine prepared a number of the Committee's reports and took some of the most powerful images in the history of documentary photography.

The collection for the Prints and Photographs Division include photographs, fine and popular prints and drawings, posters, architectural and engineering drawings. http://www.loc.gov/pictures

National Child Labor Committee Collection http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/nclc/ The NCLC photos are useful for the study of labor, reform movements, children, working class families, education, public health, urban and rural housing conditions, industrial and agricultural sites, and other aspects of urban and rural life in America in the early twentieth century.
Streaming video presentations on all sorts of subjects from book talks by authors, scientific breakthroughs in preservation, and historical footage from the dawn of film. http://www.loc.gov/today/cyberlc

Justice not Pity http://www.loc.gov/today/cyberlc/feature_wdesc.php?rec=4108 Cecilia Tichi, the William R. Kenan Jr. Professor of English at Vanderbilt University, gives her lecture on the career and political force of Julia Lathrop. Lathrop was an American social worker at the turn of the 20th century, a pioneer in the field of child welfare who investigated child labor. Lathrop faced many challenges when she assumed the helm of the Children’s Bureau.

From 2002 to 2011, the Wise Guide to loc.gov highlighted new, interesting or undiscovered treasures from the vast online resources of the Library of Congress via short, fun stories filled with fascinating facts. http://www.loc.gov/wiseguide

Weekday Warriors a.k.a., the Labor Movement http://www.loc.gov/wiseguide/sept07/labor.html Skilled craftsmen weren’t the only ones laboring behind machines. Children tended them as well, especially in the textile industry. Organizations worked to eliminate child labor, including the National Child Labor Committee.

Children at Work http://www.loc.gov/wiseguide/mar05/work.html Founded in 1904, the National Child Labor Committee (NCLC) began a mission of “promoting the rights, awareness, dignity, well-being and education of children and youth as the relate to work and working.” Starting in 1908, the committee hired Lewis W. Hine to carry out investigative and photographic work for the organization.


Picture This: Library of Congress Prints and Photos The Picture This blog invites you to share our love of pictures and the stories they can tell. You’ll see special images that caught our eye and also learn about entire collections as we explore the vast holdings of the Prints and Photographs Division at the Library of Congress. Blogs.loc.gov/picturethis


Teaching with the Library of Congress Discover and discuss the most effective techniques for using Library of Congress primary sources in the classroom. Teaching strategies, outstanding primary sources, lesson plans, teacher resources, and current thinking on effective classroom practice are all open for discussion. Blogs.loc.gov/teachers


Inside Adams, Science, Technology and Business Inside Adams will point readers to the Library’s large and diverse collections of books, journals, prints, photographs, digital collections, finding aids, and Webcasts related to science, technology, and business. Blog.loc.gov/inside_adams/

### Prints and Photographs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Image</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="41x654.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Anti-Saloon broadside advocating passage of Child Labor Laws; illus. of small girl lying on monument to &quot;Profit&quot;; factories belching smoke in background.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="41x611.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>A view of the Pennsylvania Breaker. The dust was so dense at times as to obscure the view. This dust penetrates the utmost recess of the boy's lungs. Location: South Pittston, Pennsylvania.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="41x536.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Blower and Mold Boy, Seneca Glass Works, Morgantown, W. Va. (see label on #171) (see photos 170 &amp; 171). Location: Morgantown, West Virginia.</td>
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<tr>
<td><img src="41x484.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Young oysters shuckers, Port Royal, S.C.</td>
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<tr>
<td><img src="41x430.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Mart Payne, 5 years old, picks from 10 to 20 pounds a day. Mother said, &quot;Mart, he haint old nuff to go to school much, but he kin pick his 20 pounds a day. Mostly 10 or 15 pounds.&quot; See 4560. Lewis W. Hine, photo. Location: Comanche County, Oklahoma.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="41x364.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>488 Macon, Ga. Lewis W. Hine 1-19-1908. Bibb Mill No. 1 Many youngsters here. Some boys were so small they had to climb up on the spinning frame to mend the broken threads and put back the empty bobbins. Location: Macon, Georgia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="41x287.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>7-year old Rosie. Regular Oyster shucker. Her second year at it. Illiterate. Works all day. Shucks only a few pots a day. (Showing process) Varn &amp; Platt Canning Co. Location: Bluffton, South Carolina.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="41x222.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>&quot;I don't never git no rest.&quot; This is the attitude that Henry, a six-year old beet worker takes toward life, on a Wisconsin farm. See Hine Report, Wisconsin Sugar Beet, July, 1915. Location: Wisconsin.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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### Citations: