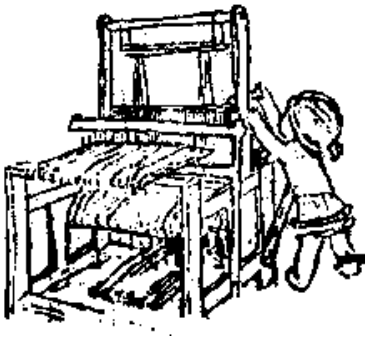
Name: _____ **Child Labor**

Background for *Child's Work* Script:



Around 200 years ago, people figured out how to make goods (things which are bought and sold) in large factories, using water or steam powered machines. Before then, goods had been made by hand in small workshops.

Factory production meant that more goods could be made in a shorter time and at a lower cost. And factories provided lots of people with jobs. However, many factory owners thought only about making money for themselves and cared nothing about their workers

Factory workers worked 12 to 14 hours a day, six days a week without sick days, vacations, or time off to take care of their families. Workers who couldn't keep up with their workload lost their jobs. Factory owners hired young women as workers because they could pay them less than men, and child laborers made profits even greater still.

Immigrant children worked along with their parents in canneries shucking oysters, cutting beans, peeling apples and tomatoes, and processing other foods. Ten-year-old boys sat above rivers of moving coal, picking out stones from the coal flowing by beneath them. Many fell into the moving coal and were mangled or killed, and they all had coughs from the coal dust. At the age of twelve, these boys became coal miners.

Boys and girls under ten years old worked in textile mills at very dangerous jobs. Because they were small and quick, some children ran under machines and tied loose threads. Seven-year-old boys worked as "doffers" replacing the bobbins of thread. Girls worked as spinners, brushing lint from the spinning machines and tying broken threads. Many child workers had limps, scars, and other injuries from their work.

These children had no schooling. They worked 12 to 14 hours a day just like adults, but were paid less than half of what grown men earned. Still many families desperately needed the little money their children earned in order to survive.

SCRIPT: CHILD'S WORK

In this script, Jennifer talks to 3 children who worked at different jobs in 1911.

There are five speakers: Narrator Jennifer Dennis Molly Jacob

Narrator: Welcome to the Living History Channel and our continuing series "A Look at America's Past" hosted by Jennifer Sloan. Each week she takes us back in time to a moment in American history that gives us a glimpse of life during that period.

Jennifer: Good evening, everyone. Tonight we will travel back to 1911, rewind the reels of history, and meet a group of children. These children are hard at work in our nation's mills, canneries, factories, mines, and farms.

Our first guest is Dennis McKee, a young coal breaker in a West Virginia mine. Dennis, how long have you been working at this coal company?

Dennis: Well, Ma'am, I been working here about two years now.

Jennifer: How old are you?

Dennis: I'm 12, but 1 told 'em I was 14 because the law says you gotta be 14. The foreman knew but don't really care anyhow. Most of us boys start work here when we're about 10. If inspectors come around, they just hide us for a couple hours, but then they also dock our pay. That don't seem fair though.

Jennifer: What do you do at the mine, Dennis?

Dennis: I'm a coal breaker. I sit in a little box with coal moving under me and pull out pieces of rock and other stuff that ain't coal. You've got to be real careful though. Two of my friends got caught last month and was carried down the chute and died. I lost two fingers myself a while back.

SCRIPT: CHILD'S WORK (cont'd)

Jennifer: Our next guest is Molly Jackson who works at a Georgia textile mill as a spinner. How old are you, Molly, and what is your job?

Molly: I'm almost nine. I been working here every day since **I** was about seven—except on Sundays, of course. Me and the other girls start work directly at six in the morning.

We work 12-hour shifts. You can't be even a minute late or they dock your pay an hour. We spinners go up and down the aisles between the spinning machines and brush the lint off the machines.

Jennifer: Is it always this dusty in the mill?

Molly: All this dust in the air is mostly just tiny bits of cloth. We can't let it get on the machines, or they'll clog up and break down.

The thread on the bobbins sometimes breaks, so we also have to tie the broken ends together so the machines don't stop. Girls are better at that cause our fingers is smaller and faster. There ain't no time to rest.

Boys are mostly doffers. They replace the spools of thread on the machines. That's tricky work. My younger brother caught his foot in a machine and busted it up bad. He's still working though.

Jennifer: Have you ever been to school, Molly?

Molly: I'd like to go to school, but it ain't likely. Nobody in my family can read or do sums. We all work once we can walk.

Even though I only earn a few cents a day, we need the money to eat and pay the rent on the shack that's our home.

Jennifer: Have you ever been to the doctor for your cough?

Molly: Everybody in the mill has a cough. All us spinners get one after being here a while. Some kids die from it, but most of us is luckier. Can't afford no doctor.

SCRIPT: CHILD'S WORK (cont.)

Jennifer: Our third guest is Jacob Caldwell. He is an oyster shucker in a Mississippi cannery. Jacob, how old are you and what kind of work do you do?

Jacob: I'm six now, but I been workin' with my parents since **I** was four. It took a while to learn how to crack open them oysters and shuck out the meat. **I** was pretty quick to learn how to use the shuckin' knife, but if you ain't extra careful, you'll slice off a finger or two like my brother did.

Jennifer: Your hands are scarred and bleeding. Wouldn't you rather be in school?

Jacob: Can't afford to go to school. We need the money to eat. They pay five cents for a pail of shucked oysters, and I make about 10 or 15 cents on a good day.

The shells are sharp and cut your hands, but they scar over and harden. Shrimp are worse to shuck cause the acid eats the skin off your fingers and makes holes in your clothes and boots. I don't specially like startin' work at three in the morning, either.

Jennifer: Well, that wraps up our show for today. I want to thank my three guests for joining us and telling us about their lives.

Narrator: Today, you have met three young children who worked in the United States in 1911. They were among tens of thousands of children who had to work to help their families survive.

They could not go to school, had very little time for play, and many died early from disease, accidents, and lack of proper food. It was a national tragedy.

Thank you for joining us on "A Look at America's Past."

THE END