

The Power of Money: Long Hours, Low Pay

Subject: History/Social Studies/Geography/Mathematics

Grades: 7-12

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| Skills: <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Research● Writing● Math● Critical Thinking | Materials: <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Printed worksheets below● Pencils <p>*copy of the catalog of goods available in travel trunk</p> |
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Summary:

Maine is many miles away from the “cotton belt,” made up of southern states like Texas, Louisiana, Virginia and Georgia, where cotton is grown under a baking hot sun. Cotton plants are grown in fields by cotton farmers where once ready for harvest, they are picked and piled high in huge baskets. First done only by hand, and in the days before Emancipation, performed largely by enslaved African Americans, it was a difficult and tedious job. Today, machinery aids in the process. Once the cotton is picked, seeds located in the fluffy balls of cotton fiber are removed and “bales” of cotton fiber are packed and shipped to mills across the country for the making of useful material. At the mill, the cotton is prepared for the production of the material end products. Carding is the next step, where the fibers are combed to link them together, followed by spinning, warping and then weaving a fabric.

The Lewiston-Auburn area was one of those locations where cotton bales arrived at mills to make materials. The Bates Mill in Lewiston, famous for its bedspreads and fabrics, is an example of a textile mill in Maine. In the first 20 years of mills opening for business in Lewiston-Auburn, mill girls earned between \$2 and \$4 per week. This was good pay compared to other jobs women could get which included sewing or "domestic work." But, first, \$1.25 was deducted from their paycheck to pay for their room and board at the mill-owned boarding house. That left 75 cents to \$2.75 to save or spend or send home.

Instructions:

Use the Museum L-A Child Labor Travel Trunk collection of books and the digital collection to learn more about the Industrial Revolution and child labor. For this activity focus questions on working conditions and wages. Discussion questions include: Why did people leave their agrarian lives for industrial work? How did this affect how they obtained goods and services? What might be some reasons children need to work to support families today? What is the difference between items needed to survive (needs) vs. luxury items (wants).

For this activity teachers may choose to have students work independently or alternatively students may be divided into “family groups.” Begin by displaying the “Notice” on the classroom projector. Explain that students will be going to “work” in the mills and that they are going to have to plan how to spend their money. A chart for the costs of goods and services can be found [here](#). Allow students 15-20 minutes to complete the assignment and for time to share as a group.

Extension Activities

Writing Prompts

1. How would you handle a work situation where you felt that you were being paid unfairly and working too many hours? What if the conditions you were working in were dangerous? Who could you contact?
2. Covid 19 has brought about a global change in the way people work. Consider what it was like when you were distance learning. Would you rather work from home or in an office? Where do you think you would be more productive? What do you think are the advantages of working from home? What about the disadvantages? What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of working in an office?

NOTICE.

On and after April 1, 1854, the Bagging Mill will start at 15 minutes past 6 A. M., and run till 12 M. An intermission of 45 Minutes will be given for dinner. After dinner the Mills will start at 15 minutes before 1 o'clock, and run till 7 P. M.

On Saturdays the time for stopping work will be 30 minutes past 6 P. M.

**M. FRENCH, Agent.
Lewiston, March 22, 1854.**

Name: _____

Date: _____

How would you have spent \$2?

If you lived in Lewiston between 1858 to 1908, YOU could easily have been a child working in one of the mills. Back then, everyone over the age of eight was expected to work and help support their family. Mill workers were paid in cash and made an average of \$2 a week. Could you have managed your cash AND saved some money back then?

Using the provided price list decide how you would spend your money over the course of a month. List the item, how much it costs and why you need it. This gives you a total of \$8 to spend.

| Item | Cost | Why this item? |
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Total \$ spent: _____