

Child Labor in the Mines

Introduction:

The fight to end child labor was one of the most important of the Progressive Era. This lesson seeks to place the issue of child labor in the context of local history by focusing on boys working in the mining industry.

Guiding Questions:

What were conditions like for boys who worked in the mining industry?

Why did boys go to work in the mining industry?

Learning Objectives:

The learner will analyze primary and secondary sources to determine what working conditions were like for boys involved in the mining industry

The learner will demonstrate knowledge of child labor in the mines by responding to the writing prompt with a piece of historical fiction for two to three paragraphs.

Curriculum Standards:

History

US.14 Describe working conditions in industries, including the use of labor by women and children. (C, E)

English Language Arts

11-12.W.TTP.3 Write narrative fiction or literary nonfiction to convey experiences and/or events using effective techniques, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences. a. Engage and orient the reader by setting out a problem, situation, or observation and its significance, establishing point of view, and introducing a narrator/speaker and/or characters. b. Sequence events so that they build on one another to create a coherent whole and build toward a particular tone and outcome. c. Create a smooth progression of experiences or events. d. Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, reflection, and multiple plot lines to convey experiences, events, and/or characters. e. Provide a conclusion that follows from and reflects on what is experienced, observed, or resolved over the course of the narrative. f. Use precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters. g. Use appropriate language and techniques, such as metaphor, simile, and analogy. h. Establish and maintain an appropriate style and tone.

Materials Needed:

[Tennessee Youth Wage Poster](#)

Presentation: Child Labor in the Mining Industry (The presentation is available as a stand alone file at [TeachTNHistory.org](#))

Boy's Jobs in the Mines Poster Set and Graphic Organizer (included)

Fraterville Disaster Excerpt from [A History of the Coal Miners of the United States, from the Development of the Mines to the Close of the Anthracite Strike of 1902 by Andrew Roy.](#) and Graphic Organizer (included)

Background Reading:

Growing Up in Coal Country by Susan Campbell Bartoletti

Kids on Strike by Susan Campbell Bartoletti

Kids at Work: Lewis Hine and the Crusade against Child Labor by Russell Freedman

Writing Prompt:

Taking into account what you have learned child labor in the mining industry, write a short autobiographical narrative describing Harley Bruce's experiences in the mines. The narrative should be in first person.

Lesson Activities:

Activity 1- Youth Workers Today

Whole Class Activity Using the presentation

Slide 2: Ask students to list rules for youth workers today. You may wish to show the Tennessee Youth Wage poster to expand the discussion.

Slide3: Ask students when rules concerning youth or child labor were put in place.

Slide 4: Briefly describe Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938

Slide 4: Ask students to consider why such rules are necessary. Answers will vary, but should realize that prior to 1938 child labor was common.

Slide 5: Brief description of National Child Labor Committee and Lewis Hine

Slide 6: Discuss Loudoun Mill photograph as stereotypical image of child labor



Slide 7: Discuss Greaser/Coupler Photo as typical of child labor in mining industry

Activity 2 – Boys’ Jobs in the Mines Poster Set and Graphic Organizer

Option 1: Small Group Activity

Divide students into groups. Give each group one graphic organizer and one set of posters. Have them work together to complete the graphic organizer

Option 2: Partner Activity

Print 2 or 3 sets of the posters and hang them around the classroom or in the hallway. Have students work with a partner to complete the graphic organizer while travelling around the space to view the posters.

Once students have completed the graphic organizer, lead a discussion on the types of jobs boys held in the mining industry

Activity 3- Fraterville Mine Disaster Excerpt

Partner Activity or Individual Activity

Students will work with a partner or individually to read the text excerpt on the Fraterville disaster. Students will complete 5 W’s organizer as they read. Once students have completed the reading and organizer discuss the event focusing on the outcome for children.

Activity 4 –Writing Activity

Individual Activity

Slide 6: Show the students the image of Harley Bruce and discuss the title/caption that Hines provided.

Slide 7: Read and discuss writing prompt with students.

Students will need 10-20 minutes to write.



Assessment: The writing prompt that will be used to assess mastery of the objective was created in step 3. Students will be instructed to write two to three paragraphs in response to the prompt. Because of the extensive preparation provided in the analysis activities, students should complete the writing quickly. Using either the rubric created by the state or a modified version of it will streamline the grading process.

Extending the Lesson:

1. Have students research the stories behind other photographs that Lewis Hine took of children at Tennessee using the [National Child Labor Committee Collection](#) at the Library of Congress.
2. Have students create a Found Poem using the text from the Fraterville Mine Disaster Excerpt. A lesson plan for creating found poems, along with examples, can be found at [ReadWriteThink.org](#)
3. Have students create a concrete or shape poem based on the lesson. Directions for creating a shape poem can be found at [Young Writers](#). An internet search for “shape poem” images will yield many examples to inspire your students
4. Have students interview a family or community member about their experiences as a young person in the workforce.



Boys' Jobs in the Mine

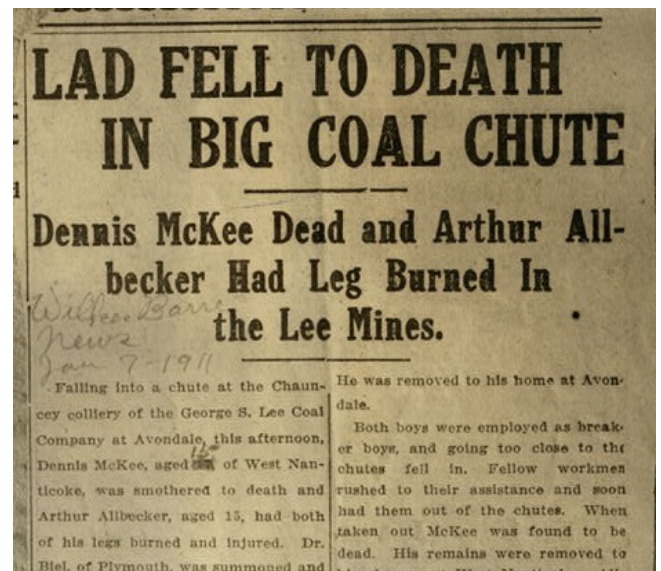
Study the images and text on each of the posters to complete the graphic organizer below.

Job	Description	What are the potential dangers of doing this job?
Greaser/Coupler		
Breaker boy		
Trapper/Nipper		
Tipler		
Spraggers		
Drivers		

Breaker Boys



Breaker boys were the youngest boys involved in anthracite coal mining operations. While they were supposed to be 14 years old, many boys started work at age 11. They worked outside the mine separating the slate and other rock from the coal after it was broken up. Conveyor belts passed under their feet carrying the ore. The boys sat bent over for hours each day removing the rocks. The breaker boss oversaw the boys and used a stick to hit boys who worked too slowly. Though they worked outside the mine, breaker boys could still be injured or killed.



Top Image Citation: Hine, Lewis Wickes, photographer. *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. Pennsylvania South Pittston, 1911. January. Photograph. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/ncl2004002616/PP/>. (Accessed June 27, 2017.)

Right Image Citation: Hine, Lewis Wickes, photographer. *A clipping. See also label 1931.* Location: Chauncy, Pennsylvania. Chauncy Pennsylvania, 1911. January. Photograph. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/ncl2004002618/PP/>. (Accessed June 27, 2017.)

Drivers



Mules were used to pull the coal cars in the mines. Boys in their early teens worked as mule drivers. Each boy had to travel to certain work chambers, collect the filled cars and leave an empty car behind. Because the drivers had the freedom to travel throughout the mine, they were envied by the other boys especially the trappers. The boys took excellent care of the mules they worked with and in the smaller mines the mules went home with their drivers in the evenings.



Top Image Citation: Hine, Lewis Wickes, photographer. *Vance, a Trapper Boy, 15 years old. Has trapped for several years in a West Va. Coal mine. \$.75 a day for 10 hours work. All he does is to open and shut this door: most of the time he sits here idle, waiting for the cars to come. On account of the intense darkness in the mine, the hieroglyphics on the door were not visible until plate was developed.* Location: West Virginia. West Virginia, 1908. September. Photograph. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/ncl2004000186/PP/>. (Accessed June 27, 2017.)

Right Image Citation: Hine, Lewis Wickes, photographer. Drivers going home, 5:30 P.M. from mine Macdonald, W. Va. Witness - E. N. Clopper. Location: MacDonald, West Virginia. Macdonald West Virginia, 1908. October. Photograph. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/ncl2004000172/PP/>. (Accessed June 27, 2017.)

Greaser/Coupler



Greasers carried heavy buckets of grease that were used to lubricate gears on machinery and the wheels of coal cars. Couplers maneuvered the heavy coal cars into position and then connected them together. Injuries were common.



Top Image Citation: Hine, Lewis Wickes, photographer. Hard work and dangerous for such a young boy. James O'Dell, a greaser and coupler on the tippie of the Cross Mountain Mine, Knoxville Iron Co., in the vicinity of Coal Creek, Tenn. James has been there four months. Helps push these heavily loaded cars. Appears to be about 12 or 13 years old. Location: Coal Creek, Tennessee. Coal Creek Tennessee, 1910. December. Photograph. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/ncl2004002591/PP/>. (Accessed June 27, 2017.)

Right Image Citation: Hine, Lewis Wickes, photographer. *A greaser in a Coal Mine. See 1835.* Location: Bessie Mine, Alabama. Alabama Bessie Mine, 1910. November. Photograph. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/ncl2004000589/PP/>. (Accessed June 27, 2017.)

Spraggers



Spraggers had a very dangerous job in the mines. They had to slow the heavily loaded mine cars by jamming heavy pieces of wood or iron bars into the wheels to stop them from rolling. Spraggers ran alongside the mining cars to jam their sprags into the wheels. Spraggers sometimes lost fingers or hands when they became wedged in the wheels. The coal companies did not pay boys who were injured on the job even if the injuries were severe.



Top Image Citation: Hine, Lewis Wickes, photographer. *[At the close of the day. Just up from the shaft. All work below ground in a Pennsylvania Coal Mine. Smallest boy, next to right hand end is a nipper. On his right is Arthur, a driver, Jo on Arthur's right is a nipper. Frank, boy on left end of photo, is a nipper, works a mile underground from the shaft, which is 5000 Ft. down. Location: South Pittston?, Pennsylvania].* Pennsylvania South Pittston, 1910. [December or 1911 January] Photograph. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/ncl2004002589/PP/>. (Accessed June 27, 2017.)

Right Image Citation: Hine, Lewis Wickes, photographer. *Monongah, W. Va. Nola McKinney, Secretary, 1910, West Virginia Child Labor Committee. Frank P....., whose legs were cut off by a motor car in a coal mine in West Virginia when he was 14 years 10 months of age. Location: Monongah, West Virginia.* Monongah West Virginia, 1910. March. Photograph. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/ncl2004001959/PP/>. (Accessed June 27, 2017.)

Tippler



Tipplers emptied coal cars once they had exited the mine. One of the boys pictured reported that "Ain't hardly a day goes by that someone don't get pinched or hurt."

Image Citation: Hine, Lewis Wickes, photographer. *On the tippie at the Bessie Mine, Sloss-Sheffield Steel & Iron Co. These young boys work around and on these coal cars, loaded and empty, while they are running at full speed. It is dangerous. One of these boys said, "Ain't hardly a day goes by that someone don't get pinched or hurt." "I got my leg jammed a while ago and was laid up a week."* Location: Bessie Mine, Alabama. Alabama Bessie Mine, 1910. November. Photograph. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/ncl2004000586/PP/>. (Accessed June 27, 2017.)



Link to video on Chinese coal miners

Trapper/Nipper



Ventilation was key to mine safety. Trappers or nippers open and closed doors along the mine tunnels. The doors had to remain closed to direct the flow of air into the side tunnels where the miners were working. The boys sat alone in the darkness for hours each day. It was so dark in the tunnel that Lewis Hine remarked that he had no idea there was writing on the door until the picture was developed. To stay awake, the boys whittled or trapped the rats that lived in the mine tunnels.

Image Citation: Hine, Lewis Wickes, photographer. Vance, a Trapper Boy, 15 years old. Has trapped for several years in a West Va. Coal mine. \$.75 a day for 10 hours work. All he does is to open and shut this door: most of the time he sits here idle, waiting for the cars to come. On account of the intense darkness in the mine, the hieroglyphics on the door were not visible until plate was developed. Location: West Virginia. West Virginia, 1908. September. Photograph. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/ncl2004000186/PP/>. (Accessed June 27, 2017.)

5 W's of the Fraterville Disaster

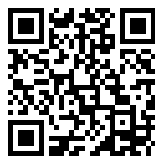
Read the excerpt from [*A History of the Coal Miners of the United States, from the Development of the Mines to the Close of the Anthracite Strike of 1902 by Andrew Roy*](#). Complete the graphic organizer

What?	
When?	
Where?	
Who?	
Why?	
How were children affected by this disaster?	

This is a reproduction of a library book that was digitized by Google as part of an ongoing effort to preserve the information in books and make it universally accessible.

GoogleTM books

<https://books.google.com>



A HISTORY
OF THE
COAL MINERS
OF THE
UNITED STATES

FROM THE
DEVELOPMENT OF THE MINES TO THE CLOSE
OF THE ANTHRACITE STRIKE OF 1902
INCLUDING
A BRIEF SKETCH OF EARLY BRITISH MINERS

BY
HON. ANDREW ROY
Author of "The Coal Mines," "The Practical Miners' Companion,"
"Recollections of a Prisoner of War."

THIRD EDITION
REVISED AND ENLARGED

COLUMBUS, OHIO
PRESS OF J. L. TRAUGER PRINTING COMPANY



my deep sympathy with the wives, children and friends of the unfortunate victims of the explosion."

The president of the Republic of France sent a message of condolence to President McKinley, which was delivered by Ambassador Cambon, and the *London Telegraph* said editorially, "That there will be deeper sympathy with the American people in this awful catastrophe, than has been evoked by any event on the other side of the Atlantic since the loss of the *Maine*."

The generosity of the coal company which operated the mine was manifested by a contribution of twenty-five thousand dollars for the relief of the widows and orphans of the stricken families; John C. Osgood, president of the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company, subscribed five thousand dollars; Salt Lake City gave five thousand dollars; the town of Provo three thousand. Many wealthy citizens contributed a thousand dollars each. The local branch of Armour & Company of Chicago shipped a liberal supply of canned goods to the families of the stricken miners.

On Monday morning, May 19, 1902, another terrible explosion occurred at the Fraterville mine in the State of Tennessee. An old and abandoned mine belonging to the Knoxville Coal & Iron Company had been broken into from the Fraterville workings, on Friday preceding the catastrophe. On Saturday there was no work. On Monday the miners had not been in the mine more than an hour when vast volumes of smoke and debris were observed to rise from the ventilating shaft and shoot high in the air, and to issue from the mouth of the mine, accompanied by a loud, dull noise resembling distant thunder. The explosion startled the inhabitants of the village and soon the wives and relatives of the miners were collected around the mouth of the mine in a state of uncontrollable terror and excitement.

George Camp, the mine superintendent, and three assistants, entered the mine to ascertain the cause of the explosion.

Begin
here

ion and the resulting damages. They had not gone in more than a few hundred yards when they came upon one of the miners stretched full length in the entry in an unconscious condition. He no sooner heard the roar of the ignited gas than he started to get out to escape the effects of the after-damp,¹ but had fallen, where he was found. He was carried outside and recovered consciousness.

Two rescuing parties, consisting of fifty men each, were organized to enter the mine and search for the living and the dead. The first party penetrated about two thousand feet, when they came upon a dead miner who had been making his way out and became a victim of the deadly after-damp. The air was so foul that the rescuers could go no further, and they returned to the open air, to await the dispersion of the deadly gas.

At four o'clock in the afternoon a rescuing corps again entered the mine, going as far as the butt entries fourteen, fifteen and sixteen, and found twenty-two bodies in entry fourteen, nine in the left butt of entry fifteen, five in the right one, and eight in the left of entry sixteen. They were all dead, having been overcome by the insidious after-damp,² as they were making their way out. Some of them had taken off their shirts and wrapped them around their heads, in the hope of keeping out the gas. In the region of the rolling volume of burning air the rescuers found men burned in a most horrible manner. Some of them had been lifted off their feet and thrown against the pillars, mutilating their bodies almost beyond recognition. One, a mere boy, had his head stricken entirely off. Two other decapitated bodies were found.

Five of the unfortunate men had sought refuge behind a trap-door in one of the butt entries. They had hermetically closed up the cracks at the foot, top and sides of the door for the purpose of keeping out the surcharged atmosphere. Finding that the after-damp was spreading toward them

1. After-damp is a mixture of toxic gases left after a mine explosion. It is a mixture of carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide and nitrogen.
2. A butt entry is the opening of a side passage.

from the ~~break-throughs~~, they retreated to the face of the entry. One of ~~them~~, J. L. Powell³, had a pencil with which they each wrote ~~messages~~ on yellow paper used for cartridges, as follows:

"To My Wife:—We are shut up at the head of the entry with a little air; but the bad air is closing in on us fast. It is now 12 o'clock, Monday. Dear Ellen, I have to leave you in bad condition. Now, dear wife, put your trust in the Lord to help you raise my little children. Ellen, take care of my darling little Lillie. Ellen, little Elbert said that he trusts in the Lord. Charlie Wilkes said that he is safe in Heaven if he should never see the outside again. If we should never get out we are not hurt, only perished. There are but a few of us here and I don't know where the other men are. Elbert said for you to meet him in Heaven. Tell all the children to meet with us both there.

J. L. POWELL."

"My Darling Mother and Sister:—I am going to Heaven. I want you all to meet me in Heaven. Tell all your friends to meet me there; and tell your friends that I have gone to Heaven. Tell my friends not to worry about me as I am now in sight of Heaven. Tell father to pay all I owe, and you stay there at home or at my house, and bury me at Pleasant Hill, if it suits you all. Bury me in black clothes. This is about 1:30 o'clock Monday. So good-bye dear father and mother and friends, good-bye all. Your boy and brother.

JOHN HENDRON."

4 "From Henry Beach:—Alice, do the best you can; I am going to rest. Good-bye dear little Ellen darling, good-bye for us both. Elbert said the Lord had saved him. Do the best you can with the children. We are all praying for air to support us; but it is getting so bad without any air. Howard, Elbert said for you to wear his shoes and clothing. It is now 2:30 o'clock. Powell Harmon is in Audrey Wood's hands. Ellen, I want you to live right and come to Heaven.

3. The author is actually Jacob Vowell.

4. Continuation of Jacob Vowell's letter. There are a number of transcription errors. A more accurate transcription has been added after the excerpt.

Raise the children the best you can. Oh, how I wish to be with you. Good-bye all of you, good-bye. Bury me and Elbert in the same grave. My little Eddie, good-bye. Ellen, good-bye. Lillie, good-bye. Jimmie, good-bye. Horace. There are a few of us alive yet. Oh, God, for one more breath. Ellen, remember me as long as you live. Good-bye darling."

"To My Wife and Baby:— My dear wife and baby, I want you to go back home and take the baby there, so good-bye. I am going to Heaven, so meet me there.

JAMES A. BROOKS.

"To Everybody:— I have found the Lord. Do change your way of living. God be with you." (No name).

"To Geo. Hudson's Wife:— If I don't see you any more, bury me in the clothing I have. I want you to meet me in Heaven. Good-bye. Do as you wish.

GEO. HUDSON.

Another letter was found in the mine, which had been written by Powell Harmon, a member of the church, and the father of seven children. It read as follows:

"Dear Wife and Children:— My time has come. I trust in Jesus. He will save. Teach the children to believe in Jesus. He will save. It is now ten minutes to 10 o'clock, Monday morning, and we are almost smothered. May God bless you and the children, and may we all meet in Heaven. Good-bye till we meet to part no more.

POWELL HARMON.

The following note to his two sons, aged respectively twelve and fourteen years, was written below Harmon's letter to his wife and children:

"To My Boys:— Never work in coal mines. Henry, and you Condyl, be good boys and stay with your mother and live for Jesus.⁵

POWELL HARMON."

5. Condyl Harmon did not take his father's advice. He died in the Cross Mountain Mine Disaster on December 9, 1911.

The last survivor of the catastrophe, Uncle Billy Morgan, who was the first man rescued, but who afterwards died in the arms of his daughter, was an aged miner, a native of Wales; who had been in one explosion in his native country, and another in Pennsylvania. He was universally respected, and before he died requested that Rev. J. C. Carnes, a Methodist minister of the gospel, should conduct religious services at his grave. Over a thousand miners attended the funeral of this aged victim of the mine disaster. ⁶ He was buried under the auspices of the Knights of Pythias, of which society he was a member.

The most tragic and pathetic scene of this heart-rending catastrophe was the death of little James Chapman, a boy twelve years of age. He went to work with his father for the first time the morning of the explosion. His father had planned another career for him, but the boy had set his heart on becoming a miner. When the dead bodies of the father and son were found the father had the body of his little son wrapped in his arms. Their bodies were the last recovered.

The Sunday following the terrible calamity the church services were mournfully impressive. When the minister asked the worshippers to arise and sing "Rock of Ages," sixty widows dressed in deep mourning arose, and with streaming eyes and wailing voices joined in the hymn, to hide their sorrows in the bosom of their Savior who died that they might have eternal life.

On each recurring anniversary of the terrible catastrophe, the people of Coal Creek and the neighboring towns hold memorial services over the graves of the men and boys who lost their lives in the explosion. At the third anniversary the various societies of these towns turned out in the regalia of their respective orders, and marched to Longfield church, where memorial services were held in the church grove. The graves of all the victims of the great catastrophe were strewn

6. The Knights of Pythias is a fraternal organization similar to the Freemasons.

with flowers. In the afternoon services were held in the opera house, and the visitors listened to an address by the Rev. K. I. Cox. The names of all who perished in the explosion were read, and committees were appointed to visit the different cemeteries, where any of the dead were buried, to decorate their graves.

A history of the heart-rending mining catastrophes which have occurred in the coal mines of the United States would fill several volumes. These dreadful "accidents" which are confined to no single district or state, surpass in their frequency and destruction of human life the combined fatalities of the coal mines of the world.

Transcription- Jacob Vowell's letter

Note on transcription: The original spelling has been retained. The original letter had no punctuation. Punctuation was added to the transcription for clarity.

We are all praying for air to suport us but it is getting so bad without any air.

Horace, Elbert said for you to wear his shoes and clothing. It is now half past one.

Powell harmon's watch is in andy Wood's hands.

Ellen, I want you to live Right and come to heaven.

Rais the children the Best you can.

O how I wish to be With you, good bye all of you, good bye.

Bury me and Elbert in the Same Grave by little Eddie.

Good bye Ellen

Good bye Lillie

Good bye Jimmie

Good bye Minnie

Good bye Horace

We are to Gather