

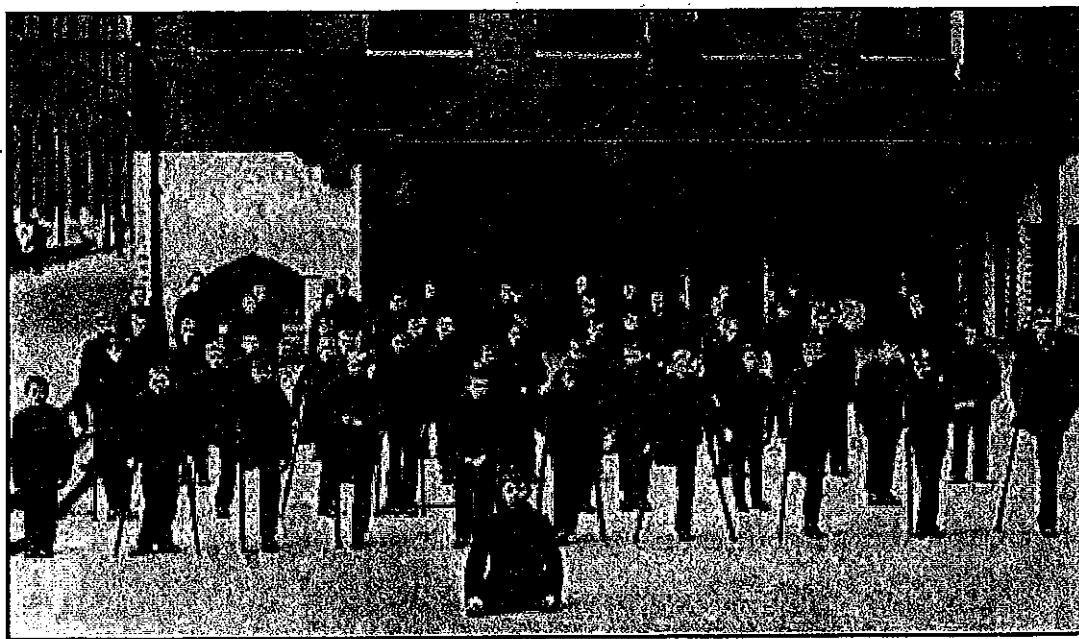
Name _____

Industrial Revolution Factory Working Conditions

Work today is usually pretty safe due to laws that the government has created and enforced. This was not always the case though. Factory work during the **Industrial Revolution** was extremely dangerous. Workers faced safety and health hazards and cruel treatment. Factory owners were not concerned with safety, but the latest machines that increased production rates. Workers did not have a lot of leverage with their employers due to the large population increase and not enough jobs for everyone.

The dangerous parts of the machines were not blocked off and there were no safety features to make the machine automatically turn off in case of an emergency.

Young women and girls were often employed in textile mills and were paid less than men. They were forced to reach over and around dangerous machinery to complete their job. **Scavengers** crawled under machines to gather small pieces of cotton. The youngest children in the factories did this job because they were small enough to fit into the tiny spaces. Once they grew a little older, they worked as **piecers**. This task required them to step up on the machines and retie loose threads. Workers in these positions were often injured. Mill towns were full of employees who had lost an arm or leg in a machine accident.



When I was a surgeon in the infirmary, accidents were very often admitted to the infirmary, through the children's hands and arms having being caught in the machinery, in many instances the muscles, and the skin is stripped down to the bone, and in some instances a finger or two might be lost. Last summer I visited Lever Street School. The number of children at that time in the school, who were employed in factories, was 106. The number of children who had received injuries from the machinery amounted to very nearly one half. There were forty-seven injured in this way.

Dr. Ward, from Manchester, Interviewed March 25th, 1819

Medical problems were another risk factory employees faced. The mill's air was full of pollution and dust that led to an illness called **mill fever**. Workers with mill fever developed headaches and general sickness for no real reason. People with this disease suffered greatly and many died from the condition. Factory workers often had to eat while working and had to dust off their food to eat it. They usually ingested a lot of the cotton fibers, which was not good for their body. Lung diseases, such as tuberculosis, bronchitis, and asthma were common at this time from the polluted air. Many workers developed pneumonia from going into the cold night air after being in the warm conditions of the factory. Also many workers' hearing was damaged by the loud machines.

The noise was what impressed me most. Clatter, rattle, bang, the swish of thrusting levers and the crowding of hundreds of men, women and children at their work. Long rows of huge spinning-frames, with thousands of whirling spindles, slid forward several feet, paused and then slid smoothly back again, continuing the process unceasingly hour after hour while cotton became varn and varn changed to weaving material.

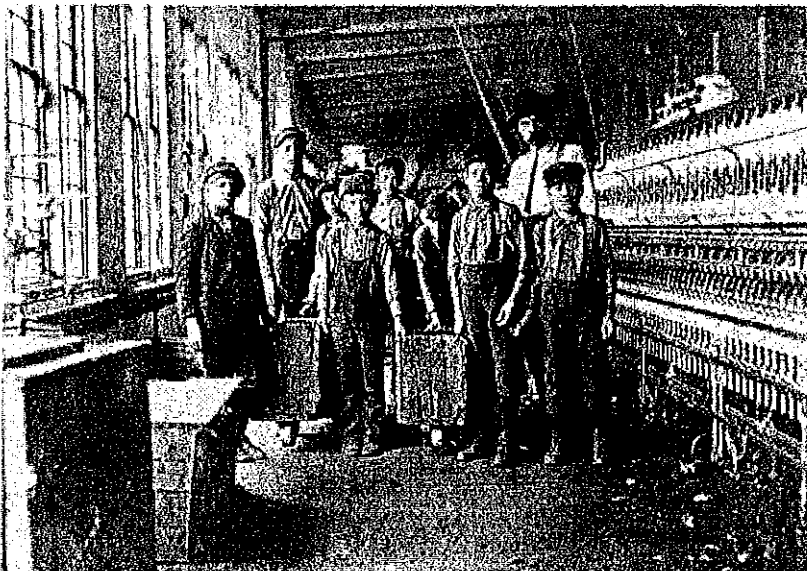
J.R. Clynes account of a cotton mill from when he was ten years old.

Many factory workers developed physical **deformities** from working in the factories. This was especially true in children because they had to stoop under the machines constantly. This wore out their arches, and they often gave way after a few years of working in the factory. Another common injury was ankle injuries since all factory workers were on their feet all day long, often up to fifteen hours. The knees of the factory workers tended to give out after years of working. This led to **knock-knees**, a condition where the knees begin turning inward because their knees can no longer support their weight.



These illnesses led to workers in their thirties, and younger, finding they could not keep up with their assigned work. They had to give up their jobs and often were unable find new work. If a worker was injured on the job, they were fired.

Factory workers, especially children, were often treated cruelly. Children were often sleepy in the middle afternoon and need to rest. They were too tired to stay alert and on their feet. Overseers often beat children to keep them working beyond their limits. All workers suffered from fatigue due to the long work days, the constant standing, and six day work week. **"Strapping,"** hitting people with leather straps was a common type of punishment. Some of the other punishments included hanging iron weights around the kids' necks, hanging children from the roof in baskets, nailing their ears to tables, and dunking them in water to keep them awake. Girls were often chained together like prisoners to prevent them from escaping. If workers were caught trying to run away, or caught as a runaway, they could be put into prison. Children usually suffered the worse because they were unable to defend themselves against the cruel overseers.



Source: CORBIS

When I was seven years old I went to work at Mr. Marshalls factory at Shrewsbury. If a child was drowsy, the overlooker touches the child on the shoulder and says, "Come here". In a corner of the room there is an iron cistern filled with water. He takes the boy by the legs and dips him in the cistern, and sends him back to work.

**Jonathan Downe, Interviewed
June 6th, 1832**

If a worker talked, whistled, left a room without permission, or had any dirt on a machine, they were fined. Many workers said employers adjusted their clocks to make employees late so they could fine them. Workers were not allowed to carry watches, so they were at the mercy of the overseers and their clocks. Often employers demanded their overseers meet a minimum amount of fines each week. Working in factories was a difficult life that led to many negative effects.