

8th Grade – From Farm to Factory

Compelling Question	
There was a big shift to cotton mills from farms. What do you think you would have done?	
Standard	8.3.CX Evaluate the economic significance of agriculture on South Carolina, the U.S., and the world. This indicator was designed to encourage inquiry into the economic implications of the expansion of the cotton industries. This indicator was also developed to promote inquiry into the mutually beneficial impact of cotton on Northern factories and Southern plantations, and the emerging national and international markets.
Disciplinary Practice	Working with evidence
Staging the Question	Read the sources in Cotton Fields Unit 2 Life as a Millhand Part 1 to see what life was like in a southern cotton mill. Look at pictures taken by Lewis Wickes Hine , in South Carolina In York County in early 1900s.
Supporting Question	
How are the lifestyles of the farm and the mill similar and different?	
Formative Performance Task	
Farm v. Factory Comparison Chart	
Featured Sources	
Source 1: “Moving Off the Farm”	
Source 2: Excerpt from Hard Times Cotton Mill Girls – working conditions	
Source 3: Excerpt from Hard Times Cotton Mill Girls – experiences of an eleven-year-old worker	
Source 4: Mill owner discusses discipline of children who worked in the mill.	

**Summative
Performance
Task**

Using what you've learned in today's lesson about life as a millhand and in a previous lesson about life as a farmer, respond to one of the following prompts in a paragraph. Decide whether you agree or disagree with the statement and explain why you chose that position.

- Statement 1: Textile mills provided good opportunities for workers in the late 1800s and early 1900s.
- Statement 2: In the late 1800s and early 1900s, people should have stayed on the farm because it was better than work in the textile mills.
- Statement 3: In the late 1800s sharecropping provided a good option for workers looking to start a way out of poverty.

EXTENSION

Create a board game or chose your own adventure story that helps the readers or players understand ***"How to Win Against Cotton"***. Your story or game should illustrate how difficult it was to win against or defeat cotton.

There was a big shift to cotton mills from farms. What do you think you would have done?

Overview

Inquiry Description

Through this inquiry students will continue to evaluate the economic significance of agriculture on South Carolina, the U.S., and the world specifically through the expansion of the cotton industries. Through previous knowledge of Southern plantations, and lessons in the rise of Southern agriculture and sharecropping students will be able to compare the impact cotton had on the region and make an informed decision on whether working in a mill, on a farm or as a sharecropper would be their best option as a lifestyle. Learning about working conditions within the mill should take one to two class periods – previous lessons on farming and sharecropping took 1-2 days each as well.

Structure of the Inquiry

In addressing the compelling question “There was a big shift to cotton mills from farms. What do you think you would have done?” students work through the supporting question, formative performance tasks, and featured sources to construct an argument supported by evidence while also acknowledging competing perspectives. The featured sources reflect similar formats and time periods and different perspectives that situate events at various mills in the Carolinas showing lifestyles in a broader context.

Staging the Compelling Question

To introduce the lesson, teachers can ask students to look at citations for the author of the [sources](#), to see when the citations were written, the age of the author, the gender and the circumstances of the author. Teachers can also share pictures of [Lewis Wickes Hine](#), from his South Carolina mill collection focusing on York county and the areas near where students live. Students can identify what they see farmers or mill workers doing, how they see changes in York, Chester and Lancaster County from the past to present and how the lifestyles of the subjects would have caused a work shift.

Supporting Question

The supporting question “How are the lifestyles of the farm and the mill similar and different?” directs students’ attention to specific events that prompted occupational shifts, which students may draw upon when answering the compelling question.

Students examine four sources, which detail the wages and daily routines of new textile workers who came from the farms to the new mills in Carolinas. Descriptions of mill workers, mill villages, owners and schools are included. These sources allow students to consider if working in a mill is a preferable occupational lifestyle than farming or sharecropping as learned about in previous lessons with similar source and citation readings. The formative performance task helps students organize their thoughts by listing various factors they have learned about in a [chart](#).

Summative Performance Task

At this point in the inquiry, students have examined shifts to cotton mills from farms. Students should be expected to demonstrate the breadth of their understandings and their abilities to use evidence from multiple sources to support their claims. In this task, students construct an evidence-based argument using sources to answer the compelling question **“There was a big shift to cotton mills from farms. What do you think you would have done?”** Since the focal disciplinary practice of this inquiry is working with evidence, teachers may engage students in discussing the strengths and shortcomings of the different types of evidence used in the inquiry.

Students’ arguments will likely vary, but could include any of the following:

- Textile mills provided good opportunities for workers in the late 1800s and early 1900s.
- In the late 1800s and early 1900s, people should have stayed on the farm because it was better than work in the textile mills.
- In the late 1800s sharecropping provided a good option for workers looking to start a way out of poverty.

As an extension task, students Create a board game or chose your own adventure story that helps the readers or players understand **“How to Win Against Cotton”**. Your story or game should illustrate how difficult it was to win against or defeat cotton.

Featured Sources

[Bring the Mills to the Cotton: Life as a Millhand Part 1 1880s-1930s Sources](#)

Source A: “Moving Off the Farm” details the wages and daily routines of new textile workers who came from the farms to the new mills in Carolinas. Descriptions of mill workers, mill villages, owners and schools is included.

Source B: Excerpt from Hard Times Cotton Mill Girls discusses percentages of men, women and children who worked in mills from 1090-1895, hours, wages, and descriptions of their work is detailed as well.

Source C: Excerpt from Hard Times Cotton Mill Girls, Bertha Miller discusses working as an eleven-year-old and the skills she was taught first in a hosiery then a silk mill.

Source D: Mill owner DA Thompkins, a Charlotte Mill owner, discusses discipline of children who worked in the mill.