

Middle School Social Studies – Textile Mills in the early 1900's

What was the quality of life for a textile family in the early 1900’s										
Standards and Content	SC History 8 th Grade									
	Standard 4: Demonstrate an understanding of South Carolina’s role in and response to the dynamic economic, political, and social developments in the United States and around the world during the period 1862–1929.									
	8.4.P Summarize the economic changes that emerged in South Carolina and the U.S.									
	8.4.E Utilize a variety of primary and secondary sources to analyze multiple perspectives of the challenges and changes within South Carolina and the nation that allowed the U.S. to emerge as a global power during the time period 1862–1929.									
Staging the Compelling Question	What was the difference in working on the farm verses working at the mill?									
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*Featured sources are suggested. It may be that these resources are no longer available, and we apologize in advance for the inconvenience.

What was the quality of life for a textile family in the early 1900's?

Overview

Inquiry Description

This inquiry asks students to examine the quality of life for a family leaving the farm in the early 1900's to work at the textile factory. This inquiry should be studied after students have talked about life on a SC farm up to 1900. It will allow students to use this prior knowledge as a background. This inquiry will take students through a progression from job dodger to the jobs themselves to the pay that was received for their work. Students will be asked to examine the evidence to see if the work and pay was beneficial to the rural family. This inquiry will allow students to use 3 different types of sources to answer the compelling question.

Structure of the Inquiry

In addressing the compelling question “what the quality of life for a textile family in was the early 1900's?” students work through supporting questions, formative performance tasks, and featured sources to construct an argument supported by evidence while also acknowledging competing perspectives. The supporting questions and sources will allow students to build an understanding of moving from the farm to the mill village. Students will think about does a change in location or job mean a better life? This can be individualized to the students understanding that sometimes a move or what would be considered “better” doesn't always equal better. The progression will asks students to examine the sources from here's what they were promised, here is what they did, here is what they were paid, and argue whether the quality of life would have improved.

Staging the Compelling Question

To introduce the inquiry, the teacher will have students brainstorm what it was like to live on the farm. This will focus the students to reach in their background knowledge of the farm system in SC. While work is a major focus of the inquiry, it will ask students to think about how a job would affect all aspects of life such as life choices, spending, etc. To begin the lesson, students will be asked what was the difference in working on the farm verses the mill? The teacher can make a running list on the board of the student's responses.

Supporting Question 1

The first support question, “Why would a family leave their farm to work at the mill?” introduces to the students to the need and benefits of moving from the farm to the factory. Students will create a list of jobs on the farms and how this would affect pay, living conditions, and limitations to the farm life. Moving forward, students will examine the dodger soliciting workers to Pacolet Mill. Students will then list the benefits that are promised in the advertisement. This

introduces them to a primary source. The teacher can modify the list by having students draw the jobs on the farm and the benefits of the mill.

Supporting Question 2

The second supporting question “How did work in the mill differ from work on the farm?” asks students to build on their lists from jobs on the farm. Students will then make a t-chart comparing the work schedule, type of work, supervision, conditions, and number of people on the farm verses working in the mill. For instance, work on the farm may have been sunup to sundown, depending on weather, supervised by the father, and had certain dangers. Whereas work at the mill was a set time, usually 10-12 hours rain or shine, very poor conditions, very crowded, and constantly supervised. The sources will have students examine the conditions of the mill in early 1900’s. This can be modified by having students make cards drawing the differences rather than writing a t-chart or list.

Supporting Question 3

For the final question, students will answer “How did the way mills pay the workers or operatives place limits on the family?” A mill token will be examined, and students will define the phrases listed on the coin. Not transferable, Payable in Merchandise Only, Union-Buffalo Mills Only? They will be asked to think about what these really meant in that they could only be used at one mill company store, was not transferable in cash, could only be used to buy at merchandise at the store. This will allow students to discuss the limitations placed on the family. The student will then write a paragraph describing how and why tokens placed limits on the mill family and share their ideas with the class.

Summative Performance Task

At this point in the inquiry, students have examined various jobs at the mill, working conditions, and pay. 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 multiple sources to answer the compelling question “What was the quality of life for a textile family in the early 1900’s?” Students will be asked to pick a negative or positive side and debate their argument based on evidence they have examined.

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

- After examining all the evidence, the class will pair together to brainstorm the positives of the farmer moving to work in the mill.
- Next, the class should think about the negatives effect the families faced by leaving the farm for the mill village and share their responses.
- Lastly, the class will divide into two groups, those who think that moving to the mill bettered life, and those who oppose and debate the question.

As an extension task, students will write a journal entry as if you were moving from the farm to the mill. Construct a story of why your family had to move to the mill village. Describe the work you did on the farm and your new job in the mill. Describe how you are paid and how your family would spend its money at the company store. As a modification, students can draw work on a farm and work in mill. In this they can draw the farm fields and home, as well as a mill and mill village.

To take informed action, students will be asked to think about someone in your neighborhood or community that is considering moving to another location. They can make a list of the pros and cons of moving from your area to another. Then, reflect personally on how would address the question if your family was wanting to move to another community. Do you think this would be better or worse? Why or why not?

Supporting Question 1: Featured Sources

Source A: Pacolet Mill “Dodger” <https://www.loc.gov/resource/gdcmassbookdig.cottonmillsofsou00kohn/?sp=31>

This “dodger” was an advertisement sent to the mountain areas soliciting families to come work at the mill.

Supporting Question 2: Featured Sources

Source A: Excerpts from *The Woman Who Toils* (1903) pages 228-229, 232, 251-256.

https://brittlebooks.library.illinois.edu/brittlebooks_open/Books2008-04/vanvjo0001womwho/vanvjo0001womwho.pdf

Supporting Question 3: Featured Sources

Source A: “Loonie” (token) from Union Buffalo Mill.

Source B: Excerpts from *Textile Town* (2002) pages 101, 133, 134.