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## Purpose

In this lesson, you learn about child labor and the efforts made by the British Parliament to enact legislation to improve working conditions for factory workers—especially children. This activity will allow you to take on roles in a re-enactment of the parliamentary inquiry into child labor that took place during the Industrial Revolution in Great Britain. By doing so, you’ll be able to develop an understanding and appreciation for the impact of industrialization on children, as well as the significance of the legislation that improved their treatment and position as workers. In addition, you’ll research areas of the world where child labor is still used today. Armed with that information, you’ll craft legislation that might help change these practices today.

## Process

In this activity, you’ll read the Sadler Report (a report on child labor practices submitted to the British Parliament in 1832) and take on roles in a simulation to write and debate child labor laws. Then, you will then apply this knowledge to research and craft laws about the issue of child labor in the world today.

### Part 1

First, think about any local or national laws that affect you as a minor (which is usually defined as anyone under the age of 18, but in some cases refers to those under the age of 16). Then, have a discussion about these laws and how they might protect minors.

### Part 2

Now, you’re going to take part in a simulation that will help you better understand what child labor was like in the 1800s. This simulation will mimic a parliamentary hearing that occurred during this time in history. To mimic this hearing, you will each be assigned a role in society, and you’ll have to write legislation based on that role to present to Parliament for a vote.

Your teacher will either choose three students or ask for student volunteers to read the Sadler Report aloud. One student will play the role of Michael Sadler, the member of Parliament (MP) who led the inquiry into child labor. A second student will be assigned the role of Michael Crabtree, a factory worker who began working at the age of eight. A third student will be Thomas Bennett, a factory worker who supervised many of the children in the factory and whose own children worked at the factory. As these students read the excerpts from the Sadler Report, everyone else in the class will take notes based on the following roles: members of Parliament, child factory workers, adult factory workers whose children also work at the factory, factory owners, and union members. Think about the following questions as you listen to the reading of the Sadler Report and take notes on these roles.

1. If you think about what you’re hearing from the point of view of an MP, what do you think life is like for children who work in the factory? What might be the best form of legislation to pass to help child workers? Also, many MPs might have a financial stake in factories, so how might these MPs respond to legislation that might affect child labor in factories?
2. From the points of view of child and adult factory workers, what were the working conditions like in the factories? At what age did many children begin working in the factory? How long was their work day? What were the punishments for poor work or falling asleep on the job?
3. If you were a factory owner, why would the hiring of child labor and the long working hours be necessary?
4. Finally, from the perspective of a union member, how might a union and collective bargaining benefit you and other workers like you?

### Part 3

Once the reading of the Sadler Report is done and everyone has taken notes, your teacher will break the class into five groups with four or five students in each group, and assign each group one of the roles (child factory workers, adult factory workers, factory owners, union members, and MPs).

Each group will then discuss the notes you all took during the reading of the report and use the worksheet to craft one or two pieces of legislation to protect child laborers. However, you’ll also be writing the legislation based on your assigned role. Think about how your assigned role would write legislation to protect child laborers. For example, if you are a factory worker, you would obviously want laws to help improve working conditions. But if you are a factory owner, you might want to create legislation with minimal protections for laborers because more regulation generally means less profit.

Use the guiding questions on the worksheet to help you craft your legislation. Each piece of proposed legislation should have a brief introductory paragraph outlining the reforms that should be made. After this introduction, your group should craft a bulleted list of proposed legislation that would help your particular group. Your group should be able to justify your proposed legislation with evidence from the Sadler Report.

Next, you’ll arrange the class to resemble a Parliamentary debate. The MPs will sit at the front of the class. The workers and union members will sit on one side of the room facing the MPs, and the factory owners will sit on the other side of the room, also facing the MPs. Each group will then present their proposed laws to the MPs. The members of Parliament are allowed to ask questions of each group. Then, the MPs will present their laws to the class.

Once all groups have presented their laws, the MPs will vote on which law or laws will be passed. The MPs will also have to explain their reasoning for choosing these laws. Your teacher will then present the legislation that was actually passed by Parliament after the British government called for a more official inquiry into child labor practices with witnesses testifying under oath.

### Part 4

Now, your teacher will break the class into new groups to research areas of the world that continue to use child labor. A good place for you to begin your research is the website Our World in Data. This research should include information on the following topics:

* What nations or regions of the world still have a high incidence of child labor?
* What is the age range for these child workers?
* What types of work are these children performing?
* Are these children paid for their work? If so, is it the same as adult workers? If not, why aren’t they being paid for their work?
* Why is child labor still used in these parts of the world?

Once your group has completed your research, you’ll craft two or three laws that might help reform these child labor practices. Once all groups are done, you’ll present these laws to the class. Finally, you’ll vote on the best laws and have a discussion about why these laws were chosen as the best. To extend this activity, your teacher might have you send these laws to your state representatives to inform them of these practices and ask what they can do to help remedy this situation globally.

## The Sadler Report (Report from the Committee on the Bill to Regulate the Labour of Children in the Mills and Factories of the United Kingdom), 1832

Michael Thomas Sadler, Esquire, in the Chair (*Michael Sadler was the member of Parliament [MP] leading the questioning*)

*Mr. Matthew Crabtree*, called in; and Examined. (*Matthew Crabtree was a factory worker who began working at the age of 8*.)

Sadler: What age are you?

Crabtree: Twenty-two.

Sadler: What is your occupation?

Crabtree: A blanket manufacturer.

Sadler: Have you ever been employed in a factory?

Crabtree: Yes.

Sadler: At what age did you first go to work in one?

Crabtree: Eight.

Sadler: How long did you continue in that occupation?

Crabtree: Four years.

Sadler: Will you state the hours of labour at the period when you first went to the factory, in ordinary times?

Crabtree: From 6 in the morning to 8 at night.

Sadler: Fourteen hours?

Crabtree: Yes.

Sadler: With what intervals for refreshment and rest?

Crabtree: An hour at noon.

Sadler: Then you had no resting time allowed in which to take your breakfast, or what is in Yorkshire called your “drinking”?

Crabtree: No.

Sadler: When trade was brisk what were your hours? Crabtree: From 5 in the morning to 9 in the evening. Sadler: Sixteen hours?

Crabtree: Yes.

Sadler: With what intervals at dinner?

Crabtree: An hour.

Sadler: How far did you live from the mill?

Crabtree: About two miles.

Sadler: Was there any time allowed for you to get your breakfast in the mill?

Crabtree: No.

Sadler: Did you take it before you left your home?

Crabtree: Generally.

Sadler: During those long hours of labour could you be punctual; how did you awake?

Crabtree: I seldom did awake spontaneously; I was most generally awoke or lifted out of bed, sometimes asleep, by my parents.

Sadler: Were you always in time?

Crabtree: No.

Sadler: What was the consequence if you had been too late?

Crabtree: I was most commonly beaten.

Sadler: Severely?

Crabtree: Very severely, I thought.

Sadler: In whose factory was this?

Crabtree: Messrs. Hague & Cook’s, of Dewsbury.

Sadler: Will you state the effect that those long hours had upon the state of your health and feelings?

Crabtree: I was, when working those long hours, commonly very much fatigued at night, when I left my work; so much so that I sometimes should have slept as I walked if I had not stumbled and started awake again; and so sick often that I could not eat, and what I did eat I vomited.

Sadler: Did this labour destroy your appetite?

Crabtree: It did. …

Sadler: Were you beaten under those circumstances?

Crabtree: Yes.

Sadler: Frequently?

Crabtree: Very frequently.

Sadler: And principally at the latter end of the day?

Crabtree: Yes.

Sadler: And is it your belief that if you had not been so beaten, you should not have got through the work?

Crabtree: I should not if I had not been kept up to it by some means.

Sadler: Does beating then principally occur at the latter end of the day, when the children are exceedingly fatigued?

Crabtree: It does at the latter end of the day, and in the morning sometimes, when they are very drowsy, and have not got rid of the fatigue of the day before.

Sadler: What were you beaten with principally?

Crabtree: A strap.

Sadler: Anything else?

Crabtree: Yes, a stick sometimes; and there is a kind of roller which runs on the top of the machine called a billy, perhaps two or three yards in length, and perhaps an inch and a half or more in diameter; the circumference would be four or five inches; I cannot speak exactly.

Sadler: Were you beaten with that instrument?

Crabtree: Yes.

Sadler: Have you yourself been beaten, and have you seen other children struck severely with that roller?

Crabtree: I have been struck very severely with it myself, so much so as to knock me down, and I have seen other children have their heads broken with it.

Sadler: You think that it is a general practice to beat the children with the roller?

Crabtree: It is.

Sadler: You do not think then that you were worse treated than other children in the mill?

Crabtree: No, I was not, perhaps not so bad as some were.

Sadler: In those mills is chastisement towards the latter part of the day going on perpetually?

Crabtree: Perpetually.

Sadler: So that you can hardly be in a mill without hearing constant crying?

Crabtree: Never an hour, I believe. …

Sadler: At the time when you were beaten for not keeping up with your work, were you anxious to have done it if you possibly could?

Crabtree: Yes; the dread of being beaten if we could not keep up with our work was a sufficient impulse to keep us to it if we could.

Sadler: When you got home at night after this labour, did you feel much fatigued?

Crabtree: Very much so.

Sadler: Had you any time to be with your parents, and to receive instruction from them?

Crabtree: No.

Sadler: What did you do?

Crabtree: All that we did when we got home was to get the little bit of supper that was provided for us and go to bed immediately. If the supper had not been ready directly, we should have gone to sleep while it was preparing.

Sadler: Did you not, as a child, feel it a very grievous hardship to be roused so soon in the morning?

Crabtree: I did.

Sadler: Were the rest of the children similarly circumstanced?

Crabtree: Yes, all of them; but they were not all of them so far from their work as I was. …

Sadler: Then it is your impression from what you have seen, and from your own experience, that those long hours of labour have the effect of rendering young persons who are subject to them exceedingly unhappy?

Crabtree: Yes.

Sadler: You have already said it had a considerable effect upon your health?

Crabtree: Yes.

Sadler: Do you conceive that it diminished your growth?

Crabtree: I did not pay much attention to that; but I have been examined by some persons who said they thought I was rather stunted, and that I should have been taller if I had not worked at the mill.

Sadler: What were your wages at that time?

Crabtree: Three shillings. [per week, which is roughly the equivalent of 17 dollars per week in 2019]

Sadler: And how much a day had you for over-work when you were worked so exceedingly long?

Crabtree: A half-penny a day. [roughly 25 cents in 2019]

Sadler: Did you frequently forfeit that if you were not always there to a moment?

Crabtree: Yes; I most frequently forfeited what was allowed for those long hours.

Sadler: You took your food to the mill; was it in your mill, as is the case in cotton mills, much spoiled by being laid aside?

Crabtree: It was very frequently covered by flies from the wool; and in that case they had to be blown off with the mouth, and picked off with the fingers before it could be eaten.

Sadler: So that not giving you a little leisure for eating your food, but obliging you to take it at the mill, spoiled your food when you did get it? Crabtree: Yes, very commonly.

Sadler: And that at the same time that this over-labour injured your appetite?

Crabtree: Yes. …

Sadler: Were there girls as well as boys employed in this manner?

Crabtree: Yes.

Sadler: Were they more tenderly treated by the overlookers, or were they worked and beaten in the same manner?

Crabtree: There was no difference in their treatment.

Sadler: Were they beaten by the overlookers, or by the slubber?

Crabtree: By the slubber.

Sadler: But the overlooker must have been perfectly aware of the treatment that the children endured at the mill?

Crabtree: Yes; and sometimes the overlooker beat them himself; but the man that they wrought under had generally the management of them.

Sadler: Did he pay them their wages?

Crabtree: No; their wages were paid by the master.

Sadler: But the overlooker of the mill was perfectly well aware that they could not have performed the duty exacted from them in the mill without being thus beaten?

Crabtree: I believe he was.

Sadler: You seem to say that this beating is absolutely necessary, in order to keep the children up to their work; is it universal throughout all factories?

Crabtree: I have been in several other factories, and I have witnessed the same cruelty in them all.

Sadler: Did you say that you were beaten for being too late?

Crabtree: Yes. …

*Thomas Bennett*, called in; and Examined. (*Thomas Bennett was a slubber, a skilled laborer who worked in the factory and was generally in charge of multiple child laborers. Mr. Bennett’s children also worked in the factory*.)

Sadler: Where do you reside?

Bennett: At Dewsbury.

Sadler: What is your business?

Bennett: A slubber.

Sadler: What age are you?

Bennett: About 48.

Sadler: Have you had much experience regarding the working of children in factories?

Bennett: Yes, about twenty-seven years.

Sadler: Have you a family?

Bennett: Yes, eight children.

Sadler: Have any of them gone to factories?

Bennett: All.

Sadler: At what age?

Bennett: The first went at six years of age.

Sadler: To whose mill?

Bennett: To Mr. Halliley’s, to piece for myself.

Sadler: What hours did you work at that mill?

Bennett: We have wrought [worked] from 4 to 9, from 4 to 10, and from 5 to 9, and from 5 to 10.

Sadler: What sort of a mill was it?

Bennett: It was a blanket-mill; we sometimes altered the time, according as the days increased and decreased.

Sadler: What were your regular hours?

Bennett: Our regular hours when we were not so throng[ busy], was from 6 to 7.

Sadler: And when you were the throngest [busiest], what were the hours then?

Bennett: From 5 to 9, and from 5 to 10, and from 4 to 9.

Sadler: Seventeen hours?

Bennett: Yes.

Sadler: What intervals for meals had the children at that period?

Bennett: Two hours; an hour for breakfast, and an hour for dinner.

Sadler: Did they always allow two hours for meals at Mr. Halliley’s?

Bennett: Yes, it was allowed, but the children did not get it, for they had business to do at that time, such as fettling and cleaning the machinery.

Sadler: But they did not stop in at that time, did they?

Bennett: They all had their share of the cleaning and other work to do.

Sadler: That is, they were cleaning the machinery?

Bennett: Cleaning the machinery at the time of dinner.

Sadler: How long a time together have you known those excessive hours to continue?

Bennett: I have wrought so myself very nearly two years together.

Sadler: Were your children working under you then?

Bennett: Yes, two of them.

Sadler: State the effect upon your children.

Bennett: Of a morning when they have been so fast asleep that I have had to go up stairs and lift them out of bed, and have heard them crying with the feelings of a parent; I have been much affected by it.

Sadler: Were not they much fatigued at the termination of such a day’s labour as that?

Bennett: Yes; many a time I have seen their hands moving while they have been nodding, almost asleep; they have been doing their business almost mechanically.

Sadler: While they have been almost asleep, they have attempted to work?

Bennett: Yes; and they have missed the carding and spoiled the thread, when we have had to beat them for it.

Sadler: Could they have done their work towards the termination of such a long day’s labour, if they had not been chastised to it?

Bennett: No.

Sadler: You do not think that they could have kept awake or up to their work till the seventeenth hour, without being chastised?

Bennett: No.

Sadler: Will you state what effect it had upon your children at the end of their day’s work?

Bennett: At the end of their day’s work, when they have come home, instead of taking their victuals [food], they have dropped asleep with the victuals in their hands; and sometimes when we have sent them to bed with a little bread or something to eat in their hand, I have found it in their bed the next morning.

Sadler: Had it affected their health?

Bennett: I cannot say much of that; they were very hearty children.

Sadler: Do you live at a distance from the mill?

Bennett: Half a mile.

Sadler: Did your children feel a difficulty in getting home?

Bennett: Yes, I have had to carry the lesser child on my back, and it has been asleep when I got home.

Sadler: Did these hours of labour fatigue you?

Bennett: Yes, they fatigued me to that excess, that in divine worship I have not been able to stand according to order; I have sat to worship.

Sadler: So that even during the Sunday you have felt fatigue from your labour in the week?

Bennett: Yes, we felt it, and always took as much rest as we could.

Sadler: Were you compelled to beat your own children, in order to make them keep up with the machine?

Bennett: Yes, that was forced upon us, or we could not have done the work; I have struck them often, though I felt as a parent.

Sadler: If the children had not been your own, you would have chastised them still more severely?

Bennett: Yes.

Sadler: What did you beat them with?

Bennett: A strap sometimes; and when I have seen my work spoiled, with the roller.

Sadler: Was the work always worse done at the end of the day?

Bennett: That was the greatest danger.

Sadler: Do you conceive it possible that the children could do their work well at the end of such a day’s labour as that?

Bennett: No.

Sadler: Matthew Crabtree, the last Witness examined by this Committee, I think mentioned you as one of the slubbers under whom he worked?

Bennett: Yes.

Sadler: He states that he was chastised and beaten at the mill?

Bennett: Yes, I have had to chastise him.

Sadler: You can confirm then what he has stated as to the length of time he had to work as a child, and the cruel treatment that he received?

Bennett: Yes, I have had to chastise him in the evening, and often in the morning for being too late; when I had one out of the three wanting I could not keep up with the machine, and I was getting behindhand compared with what another man was doing; and therefore I should have been called to account on Saturday night if the work was not done.

Sadler: Was he worse than others?

Bennett: No.

Sadler: Was it the constant practice to chastise the children?

Bennett: Yes.

Sadler: It was necessary in order to keep up your work?

Bennett: Yes. …

Sadler: Were your own children obliged to employ most of their time at breakfast and at the drinking in cleansing the machine, and in fettling the spindles?

Bennett: I have seen at that mill, and I have experienced and mentioned it with grief, that the English children were enslaved worse than the Africans. Once when Mr. Wood was saying to the carrier who brought his work in and out, “How long has that horse of mine been at work?” and the carrier told him the time, and he said “Loose him directly, he has been in too long,” I made this reply to him, “You have more mercy and pity for your horse than you have for your men.”

Sadler: Did not this beating go on principally at the latter part of the day?

Bennett: Yes.

Sadler: Was it not also dangerous for the children to move about those mills when they became so drowsy and fatigued?

Bennett: Yes, especially by lamplight.

Sadler: Do the accidents principally occur at the latter end of those long days of labour?

Bennett: Yes, I believe mostly so.

Sadler: Do you know of any that have happened?

Bennett: I know of one; it was at Mr. Wood’s mill; part of the machinery caught a lass who had been drowsy and asleep, and the strap which ran close by her catched her at about her middle, and bore her to the ceiling, and down she came, and her neck appeared to be broken, and the slubber ran up to her and pulled her neck, and I carried her to the doctor myself.

Sadler: Did she get well?

Bennett: Yes, she came about again.

What time was that? - In the evening.

Sadler: You say that you have eight children who have gone to the factories?

Bennett: Yes.

Sadler: There has been no opportunity for you to send them to a day-school?

Bennett: No; one boy had about twelve months’ schooling.

Sadler: Have they gone to Sunday-schools?

Bennett: Yes.

Sadler: Can any of them write?

Bennett: Not one.

Sadler: They do not teach writing at Sunday-schools?

Bennett: No; it is objected to, I believe.

Sadler: So that none of your children can write?

Bennett: No.

Sadler: What would be the effect of a proper limitation of the hours of labour upon the conduct of the rising generation?

Bennett: I believe it would have a very happy effect in regard to correcting their morals; for I believe there is a deal of evil that takes place in one or other in consequence of those long hours. …

**Directions**: Complete the worksheet based upon your assigned role.

## Part 3 Questions: Child Labor in the 1800s

1. What is your assigned role?

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1. What aspects of child labor would you like to see changed?

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1. Do you think all of these changes might be accepted by the MPs? Explain your reasoning. If you don’t think all of these changes will be accepted by the MPs, then how might you craft your legislation so that the MPs might accept it?

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1. How would your proposed changes improve the working conditions of children in factories?

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1. Write an introductory paragraph for your legislation outlining the reforms that should be made.

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1. Provide a bulleted list of the specific changes you would like to include in your legislation.

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## Part 4 Questions: Child Labor Today

1. What nations or regions of the world still have a high incidence of child labor?

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1. What is the age range for these child workers?

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1. What types of work are these children performing?

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1. Are these children paid for their work? If so, is it the same as adult workers? If not, why aren’t they being paid for their work?

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1. Why is child labor still used in these parts of the world?

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