

PROBLEM-BASED LEARNING  
IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

# All Work and No Play

Child Labor in the Progressive Era

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Problem Log

Royal Fireworks Press  
Unionville, New York

**National Child Labor Committee  
2246 Massachusetts Avenue  
Washington, DC 20015**

To: Members of the National Child Labor Committee (NCLC)  
From: Dr. H. Walker, Chairman  
Date: October 5, 1913  
Re: Welcome and information from the field

Let me be the first to thank you for agreeing to serve on this important committee investigating whether or how we should change the conditions of children working in the U.S.

In your letter of invitation to the NCLC, I mentioned that we had already commissioned some people to do background investigation on children's working conditions. Attached please find:

- 1) photographs by Lewis Hine of children working in mills, and
- 2) an account from John Spargo regarding children working in West Virginia mines.

Please come to our meeting prepared to give your impressions of this information. Particularly, please consider whether or not you think they provide an accurate portrayal of conditions in which children work.

Let me remind you that one of the reasons you were selected for the NCLC was your dedication to ethical decision making. Our cause is clear—we must investigate the conditions in which children work—but we must attempt, at all times, to be fair to all parties involved. Despite the passions of those like Miss Addams, we cannot afford to ignore the needs of factory owners.

The U.S. Congress expects to hear from us within the next ten days. If changes seem to be warranted, we are to present both recommended policy and legislation. Two years after the terrible Shirtwaist incident, I fear they are losing interest.

Once again, thank you for your time and support for this cause. I look forward to working with you on this important task.



## Photos by Lewis Hine



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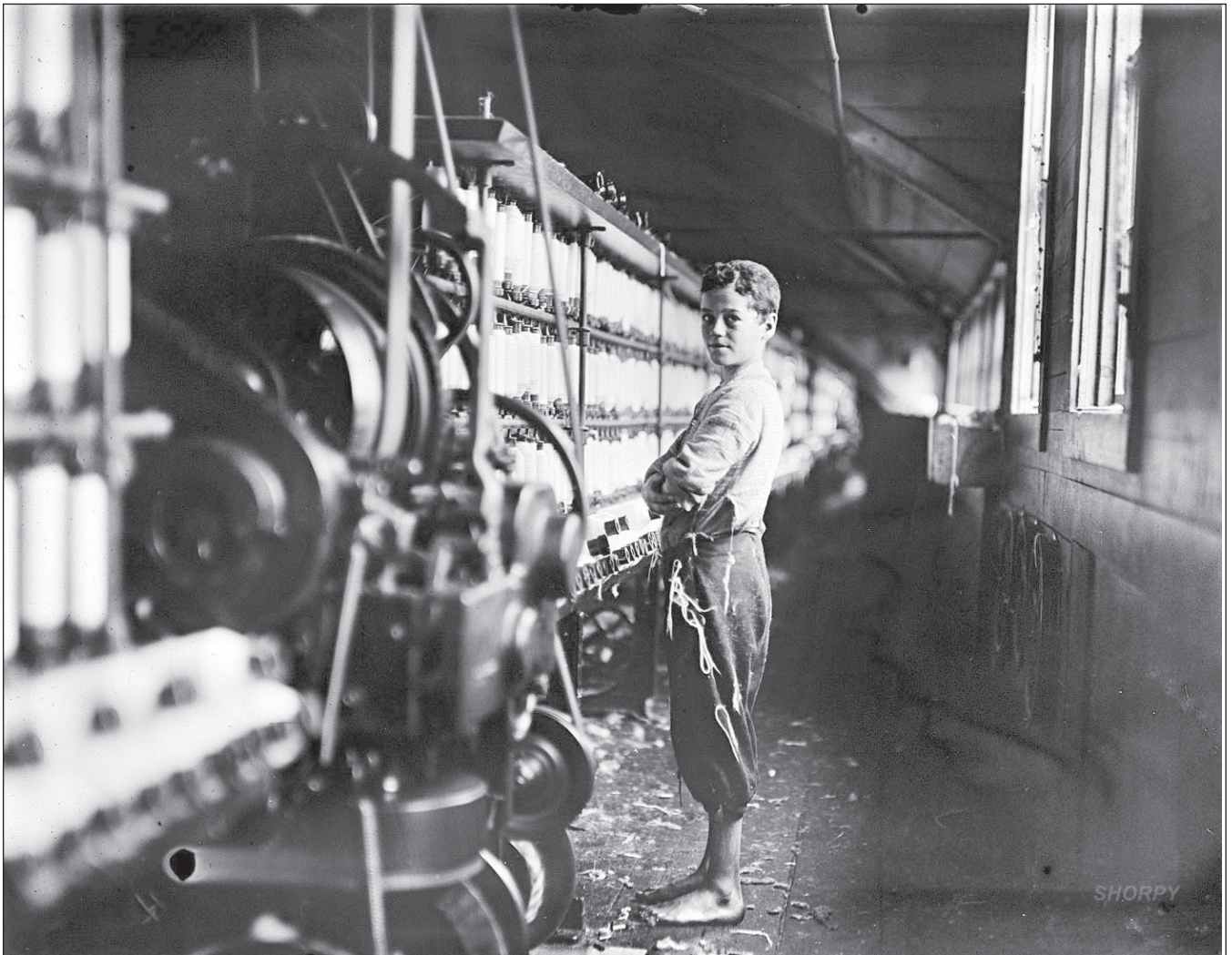




## Photos by Lewis Hine



## Photos by Lewis Hine



Source: <http://shorpy.com/lewis-hine-photos>



## Excerpt from *The Bitter Cry of the Children*

by John Spargo

I once stood in a breaker for half an hour and tried to do the work a twelve-year-old boy was doing day after day, for ten hours at a stretch, for sixty cents a day. The gloom of the breaker appalled me. Outside the sun shone brightly, the air was pellucid, and the birds sang in chorus with the trees and the rivers. Within the breaker there was blackness, clouds of deadly dust enfolded everything; the harsh, grinding roar of the machinery and the ceaseless rushing of coal through the chutes filled the ears. I tried to pick out the pieces of slate from the hurrying stream of coal, often missing them; my hands were bruised and cut in a few minutes; I was covered from head to foot with coal dust, and for many hours afterwards I was expectorating some of the small particles of anthracite I had swallowed.

I could not do that work and live, but there were boys of ten and twelve years of age doing it for fifty and sixty cents a day. Some of them had never been inside of a school; few of them could read a child's primer. True, some of them attended the night schools, but after working ten hours in the breaker the educational results from attending school were practically *nil*. "We goes fer a good time, an' we keeps de guys wots dere hoppin' all de time," said little Owen Jones, whose work I had been trying to do....

From the breakers the boys graduate to the mine depths, where they become door tenders, switch boys, or mule drivers. Here, far below the surface, work is still more dangerous. At fourteen or fifteen the boys assume the same risks as the men, and are surrounded by the same perils. Nor is it in Pennsylvania only that these conditions exist. In the bituminous mines of West Virginia, boys of nine or ten are frequently employed. I met one little fellow ten years old in Mt. Carbon, W. Va., last year, who was employed as a "trap boy." Think of what it means to be a trap boy at ten years of age. It means to sit alone in a dark mine passage hour after hour, with no human soul near; to see no living creature except the mules as they pass with their loads, or a rat or two seeking to share one's meal; to stand in water or mud that covers the ankles, chilled to the marrow by the cold draughts that rush in when you open the trap door for the mules to pass through; to work for fourteen hours—waiting—opening and shutting a door—then waiting again for sixty cents; to reach the surface when all is wrapped in the mantle of night, and to fall to the earth exhausted and have to be carried away to the nearest "shack" to be revived before it is possible to walk to the farther shack called "home."

Boys twelve years of age may be legally employed in the mines of West Virginia, by day or by night, and for as many hours as the employers care to make them toil or their bodies will stand the strain. Where the disregard of child life is such that this may be done openly and with legal sanction, it is easy to believe what miners have again and again told me—that there are hundreds of little boys of nine and ten years of age employed in the coal mines of this state.

## Learning Issues Board

Hunches:

What We Know	Learning Issues	Plan of Action



\_\_\_\_\_ What do you see as odd or surprising about the problem? Why is it surprising?

\_\_\_\_\_ What were your feelings as you looked at the photographs? How did those feelings affect your thoughts about the problem?

\_\_\_\_\_ How would your thinking about the photos change if you knew that Hine had posed the children?

[illegible]