

**Engagement**

**Inquiry  
and  
Investigation**

**Definition**

**Resolution**

**Debriefing**

PROBLEM-BASED LEARNING  
IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

# All Work and No Play

Child Labor in the Progressive Era

Teacher Manual

Shelagh A. Gallagher



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# Problem Narrative:

## The Storyline for *All Work and No Play*

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*Ideally, the direction of a Problem-Based Learning unit is decided through the questions students ask. To some extent, this is made manageable by the structure of the opening scenario presented during Problem Engagement. The opening scenario is carefully designed to point students in the direction of some predictable questions. For example, it would be hard to avoid asking questions about why children worked, their earning power, and whether they went to school. The narrative below and the lesson plans in this unit respond to these more predictable questions and address other desirable learning outcomes. They also provide a helpful guide for teachers new to PBL.*

*Experienced PBL teachers are encouraged to use this unit as a framework, selecting lessons that fit the students' questions (and, as above, many should fit) and adding other lessons to address other questions. It would be easy, for instance, to integrate issues of states' rights and "big government" into this unit, or to increase the emphasis of particular historical figures like Lewis Hine or Jane Addams.*

### Problem Engagement

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It is 1913, and students don the role of members of the National Child Labor Committee (NCLC). Students receive a memo from the chairman of the NCLC welcoming them and asking them to review material gathered during investigations of conditions where children work. Included in the material are photographs by Lewis Hine and a description of boys working in coal mines by John Spargo. The chairman's memo asks the committee members to come to their next meeting prepared to give their impressions of the material, reminding them of an upcoming congressional hearing in which they must make policy recommendations.

At this point, questions that students should raise include:

- What are the conditions of children's working environments in factories, mills, mines, etc.?
- Why are children working in these places?
- Why do they have to work at all?
- Do their parents work?
- What rights do children have as workers?
- Who are Lewis Hine and John Spargo, and what is their connection with the NCLC?
- Why aren't the children in school?
- How do families feel about their children working?

### Inquiry and Investigation

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During Inquiry and Investigation, students research the questions they raised during Problem Engagement and then analyze what they find. Their investigations should lead to them to discover a number of pertinent issues, including:

- the extent of child labor in various industries
- working conditions children faced, particularly health and safety hazards
- hours and wages of child workers

- the impact of child labor on education—how many children attended school, the effect of work hours on learning, etc.
- children’s attitudes toward school
- reasons that children worked—economic need of families, size of families, etc.
- the *zeitgeist*—or “spirit of the times”—in the U.S. that allowed children to be used, and what caused movement toward change during the Progressive Era
- reasons employers give for employing children
- background on Lewis Hine and John Spargo

In the midst of their research, students receive data that describe the background of a group of newsboys. They analyze the data to identify trends for this group of boys. Through their analysis, they consider the significance of the time children spend in school and at work, the nationalities of most child workers, and trends in their typical hourly wages. Information revealed through this analysis includes:

- relative earnings of a child laborer during the Progressive Era
- the demographic backgrounds of child laborers, the majority of whom are immigrants
- the makeup of households of child laborers

A few activities are included in this section to help students organize and analyze the information they gather during their research. The *Force-Field Analysis chart* is a graphic organizer that could be introduced at any point during student research, but introducing it early will give students a head start in determining the relative importance of different issues as they emerge. A lesson on how to think conceptually about the problem helps the students see the big ideas at the heart of the problem. Thinking conceptually is one of the hallmarks of a good thinker, making this a particularly important lesson.

### **Kicker (see Appendix A)**

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An optional kicker is included in case students do not run across information giving reasons for why some people resisted regulating child labor. Two letters and an excerpt of a news article arrive in a package from the chairman of the NCLC. One of the letters is from the parent of a mill worker, the other from a farmer. The letters make a case for a parent’s right to choose what children do and point to the severe economic need that leads parents to put their children to work. The excerpt is from an article by Helen Todd recounting her visits to some factories. When she asks children whether they would prefer to work or go to school, the overwhelming majority say they want to work, throwing into question any assumptions that child labor is inherently “undesirable” and school is inherently “desirable.”

Issues that should emerge from research resulting from this new information include:

- differing perspectives of people involved in the problem
- reasons children work
- children’s negative attitudes toward school
- the depth of impoverishment during the Progressive Era
- the desire of some employers to decrease the cost of their goods in order to benefit the consumer
- the influence of economic need on behavior

As students consider the new information along with what they already know, they also begin to take in the bigger picture by looking at the many different relationships among the individuals, groups, and institutions involved in the problem.

## **Problem Definition**

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After grappling with the issues, students are ready to make a precise statement of the problem they have to solve. At this point students should understand that a wholesale ban of child labor is neither realistic nor entirely good for children. Instead, a more feasible resolution involves figuring out what must be done to make child labor safe and to keep it from interfering with healthy development.

The problem definition should be grounded in research conducted during Inquiry and Investigation. By the end of class, students should have a problem definition that contains both the issues to be resolved and the constraints that put limits on their actions. The final definition should take the form:

*How can we (issue) in a way that (constraints)?*

Example 1:

*How can we create a safe environment for children who work in a way that minimizes change and maximizes profit for ethical companies, provides the best quality of life for children, allows children to contribute to the family income, and keeps families intact?*

Example 2:

*How can we control child labor in a way that allows children to thrive but also help their families?*

## **Problem Resolution**

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It's time for the students to decide what to do. During Problem Resolution, students are provided with a structure to analyze the different options facing them as members of the NCLC. As they consider the short- and long-term consequences of these options, they will come to realize that there is no perfect solution. Rather, their decision will have to involve selecting the criteria that describe the best solution and choosing the option(s) that come closest to meeting those criteria. Ultimately, they select the most reasonable solution based on their problem definition and present their solution to a mock congressional subcommittee.

## **Problem Debriefing**

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Problem Debriefing occurs after students have presented their solution in the congressional hearing. They review the essential information in the problem and learn information about how these situations have been and are currently being handled. They also are encouraged to think about their journey through the problem and how their thinking compares to "experts" on the issue at the time.

Part of the discussion should focus on the thinking skills and habits of mind that were the emphasis of this unit, such as perspective taking, attention to consequences, and intellectual empathy. The nature of ill-structured problems, their real-world basis, and the frustrations encountered when working with them are other fruitful topics of conversation.

Another approach is to strengthen students' conceptual understanding of the problem by describing it in terms of the individuals, groups, and institutions involved.

# Problem Engagement




## Welcome to the NCLC

### Goals:

- Complete the Learning Issues Board.
- Prioritize learning issues, and identify the next steps.

**Grouping:** Small groups; whole group

**Generalization:** Institutions sometimes take advantage of vulnerable individuals and groups.

 <b>Materials</b>	 <b>Problem Log</b>	 <b>Teacher Reference</b>
<p><b>Included in Unit</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Memo to the NCLC</li> <li>• Photos by Lewis Hine</li> <li>• Excerpt from <i>The Bitter Cry of the Children</i>, by John Spargo</li> <li>• Learning Issues Board</li> <li>• Reflective Moment</li> </ul> <p><b>Additional Materials</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Additional Lewis Hine photos (Resource Book)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Memo to the NCLC</li> <li>• Photos by Lewis Hine</li> <li>• Excerpt from <i>The Bitter Cry of the Children</i>, by John Spargo</li> <li>• Learning Issues Board</li> <li>• Reflective Moment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sample Learning Issues Board</li> </ul>

### Summary:

Students are introduced to the problem with the presentation of a memo from the Commissioner of the NCLC and several photographs from Lewis Hine. Students complete the Learning Issues Board and identify the high-priority questions that need to be answered first.

### Things to Do Before Class:

1. Photos by Lewis Hine are included in this book and are reproduced in the students' Problem Logs. Many more are available to download from the Resource Book or from [www.historyplace.com/unitedstates/childlabor](http://www.historyplace.com/unitedstates/childlabor). Collect a sampling of photos to give to students once they have read the Commissioner's memo and to display in the classroom.
2. Prepare a Learning Issues Board on a whiteboard, smartboard, or LCD projector for whole-class discussion.
3. Prepare some background information so students can research at the end of class, time permitting.

### Things to Do During Class:

1. Refer students to the memo from the Commissioner of the NCLC, the photos by Lewis Hine, and John Spargo's excerpt in their Problem Logs. Allow the students some time to look over the documents either individually or in groups. Ask them to jot down their hunches about what they

think the problem(s) might be. Make sure they understand that they are members of the National Child Labor Committee.

2. Bring the class together, and complete a class Learning Issues Board. Begin the conversation by having students discuss their hunches about what is going on. As the conversation progresses, ask students probing questions to ensure that: (1) the facts listed under What We Know are relevant, and (2) the questions under Learning Issues are specific and researchable (see Key Questions below and the Sample Learning Issues Board). Students should fill in the Learning Issues Board in their Problem Logs to reference at home.

### **Key Questions:**

- *What do you think is going on?*
- *Who are we? What issues might we be facing as members of the NCLC?*
- *What do committees do?*
- *What tasks have we been given?*
- *What are the pieces of information we've been given?*
- *What do you know based on the information in the memo and the information you got with it?*
- *What seems to be the most important information in the piece about coal mining? In the pictures?*
- *How many children did Spargo refer to?*
- *What assumptions would you make about conditions in the mills, based on these pictures?*
- *How many different kinds of jobs are represented here?*
- *How do suppose children came to be vulnerable?*

3. Help students prioritize the questions listed under Learning Issues by selecting the three they think should be answered first. Discuss the priorities as a class, expanding the list to five high-priority questions.
4. Create a plan of action to find answers to the high-priority questions. Assign students to groups, varying the size of the groups depending on the nature of the questions they will research. Some questions require only one person to work on them, while others may need a group of four or five.

### **Key Questions:**

- *Which questions do you think should be answered first?*
- *What resources do you think will help you find answers?*
- *What can we use besides books or the internet to research our answers?*
- *How much time do you think we need for this?*

5. Assign the Reflective Moment either as homework or to close class.

**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



Source: [www.kentlaw.edu/ilhs/hine.htm](http://www.kentlaw.edu/ilhs/hine.htm)



## 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:

<b>What We Know</b>	<b>Learning Issues</b>	<b>Plan of Action</b>



## Sample Learning Issues Board

Hunches: Children are being taken advantage of at work. Lewis Hine and John Spargo would like to be advocates for these children. Maybe their parents make them work. Hine may be exaggerating the photos—maybe they are fake.

What We Know	Learning Issues	Plan of Action
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lewis Hine has pictures of many children working in factories.</li> <li>• Children working in the mines are injured, and they work long hours.</li> <li>• The boys are 10 to 12 years old.</li> <li>• We are on the NCLC, and our job is to figure out whether child labor conditions should change.</li> <li>• The pictures show dirty children working in some kind of factory.</li> <li>• The kids are in dark rooms, and they all look dirty.</li> <li>• We have 10 days.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the age range we will consider “children”?</li> <li>• <b>Why are children working in the factories?</b></li> <li>• What rights do children have?</li> <li>• Where is the rest of the family, and what are they doing?</li> <li>• How much money do the children make?</li> <li>• What are their responsibilities?</li> <li>• Who is Miss Addams?</li> <li>• <b>Who is Lewis Hine, and why did he take these pictures?</b></li> <li>• Where were these photographs taken?</li> <li>• <b>What is the “terrible Shirtwaist incident”?</b></li> <li>• Are there limits on what kind of work kids can do?</li> <li>• <b>What kinds of laws are there for working children?</b></li> <li>• Why aren’t they in school?</li> <li>• <b>What is the NCLC?</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask specific industries (factories, mills, and mines) for information on child labor.</li> <li>• Look on the internet for information on the NCLC, and research child labor laws.</li> <li>• Interview historians or social workers about child labor.</li> <li>• Talk to our relatives who might have worked as children or whose parents might have worked in these conditions.</li> </ul>

Bold items represent students’ top priorities for research.