

LESSON 6

The Importance of Worker Safety Laws



Description:

Students are introduced to the importance of worker safety laws through a presentation of their history, a review of child labor standards, and a discussion of the rights of young workers.

Learner Outcomes:

Students will be able to do the following:

1. Describe the state of safety in the workplace before laws were enacted.
2. Perceive that worker safety laws are important in protecting the health of young workers.

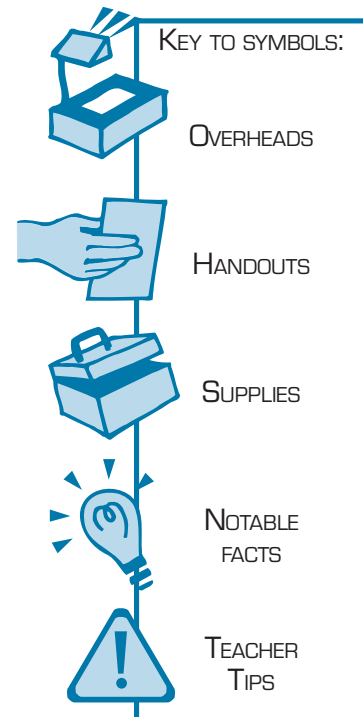
3. Recognize the need for worker safety and child labor laws.
4. Perceive that everyone has the right to a safe workplace.

Key Concepts:

1. Before the enactment of worker safety laws, working conditions for many young people were dangerous and unhealthy. In some places, problems still exist.
2. Child labor laws were made to protect young workers.

Fact:

In 1900, over two million American children under the age of 16 were employed in factories, mines, farms, and other workplaces.¹ At that time, children were three times as likely to get injured as were adults.² Even today, some American children continue to work long hours picking vegetables and doing other field work.



Materials

Needed:

- “Performance Criteria and Checklist” (one per student)
- Photographs 1 through 6 (one set per student group)
- “Looking at the Lives of Child Laborers” script for teacher review
- “Child Labor Photo Assignment” (one per student)
- Chalkboard or easel
- “Workplace Safety Laws” fact sheet (one per student)
- “Examining Workplace Safety Laws” homework assignment (one per student)

Preparation Needed:

1. Read through the “Looking at the Lives of Child Laborers” script a few times, so you can read it smoothly.
2. Review the photographs and their descriptions. Think about your own reactions to the images. How would you answer the questions outlined in the lesson? Remember, no answers are right or wrong.
3. Make copies (one per student) of the “Performance Criteria and Checklist,” “Child Labor Photo Assignment,” and “Workplace Safety Laws” fact sheet.
4. Make class copies of the “Examining Workplace Safety Laws” homework assignment.
5. The laws discussed in this lesson represent a summary of the child labor laws. If you want to review a more comprehensive list of child labor laws, please refer to the web sites listed in the back of the curriculum under “Worker Safety and Health Education Resources.”

Directions:

A Brief History of Child Labor (20 minutes)

1. Give each student a copy of the “Performance Criteria and Checklist.” Say:
Your participation in the next four class sessions will be graded on the tasks outlined on this form.

Read through the form and answer any questions students may have about the tasks or the quality of work you expect.

Students can keep track of their progress by placing an X in the left-hand column as they complete each task. Take time at the end of each class period to have students check off tasks they completed that day. At the end of the unit, review each student’s work and place an X or grade next to each task that he or she has completed.

2. Explain:
Previously, you learned about hazards in the workplace and how workplace injuries and illnesses can be prevented. During the next two class sessions, we will focus on the role that worker safety laws play in protecting you in the workplace.
3. Ask:
How many of you are currently working? How many think you will have a job before you finish high school? How many



“PERFORMANCE CRITERIA AND CHECKLIST” HANDOUT

of you are aware of the laws that govern safety at work and the work done by people under 18? Who can describe any of these laws?

Take a few minutes to allow students to share what they know about worker safety laws.

4. Explain:

You may or may not know about the laws that are in place to keep you safe in the workplace. These laws address many issues, including how long you can work, what kind of work you may do, and the minimum amount you must be paid.

Before we discuss these laws, I would like to talk about the working conditions of children in the United States before worker safety laws were in place. The child labor laws we are going to talk about today were created because of abusive child labor situations. During our country's earlier history, many children were exploited as a source of cheap labor with little regard for their health and well-being.

We are also going to talk about the working conditions of children in other parts of the world. Even today, many of these children are not protected by any kind of worker safety laws.

5. Have students form pairs. Give each pair of students copies of photographs 1 through 6. Read the "Looking at the Lives of Child Laborers" script. The script indicates when to stop your presentation to discuss the corresponding pictures.

Discuss the following questions as you look at each picture:

- How would you describe the child in this picture? What do you notice about his or her face or expression?
- What might this person be thinking? What might he or she be feeling?
- How would you feel, if you were in the same situation?

TEACHER TIP:
You may want to use only a few of the photographs and shorten the script, so you have more time for discussion.



PHOTOGRAPHS 1-6
"LOOKING AT THE LIVES OF CHILD LABORERS" SCRIPT

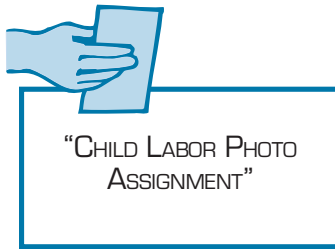
Creating Laws to Protect Workers

(30 minutes)

1. Ask:

If you could do something about the tremendous hardships of these young workers, what would you do? Imagine for a few minutes that you work in the government and are in

charge of creating laws to protect the health and safety of these workers. You don't own or work at the companies they work at. You are in charge of making laws by which these companies must abide.



2. Assign each pair of students one of the child labor photographs. More than one pair of students may be working on each photograph. Give the "Child Labor Photo Assignment" handout to each student. Each pair should discuss possible laws they would create to protect the young worker in the photograph and record their answers on the handout. Encourage each pair to come up with at least 10 specific laws. Remind them that no answers are right or wrong. Collect the handout at the end of this activity.
3. Explain:
Discuss the situation and develop a list of reasonable laws you think would improve these childrens' lives. We will discuss each situation and your lists of laws when you are done. You will have ten minutes to develop your lists. Once you have completed this assignment, we will discuss each photograph. You will be turning in this assignment for a grade.
4. When done, discuss each photograph and the laws recommended for that worker. Have all the pairs assigned that photograph contribute some of the possible laws. If time allows, have the whole class add to each list, if they can.

Possible Laws For The Scenarios:

- Establish a minimum age for children to work.
- Limit hours and number of days children are allowed to work in a week.
- Require children to go to school.
- Require the minimum wage be based on hours children work and not on how much they do.
- Make the minimum wage the same for adults and children.
- Make it illegal for children to work around dangerous equipment or chemicals.
- Require employers to give adequate breaks, places to sit, and proper ventilation, heat, or shade.
- Make it illegal for children to work in dangerous occupations (e.g., on fishing platforms or in tanning drums).
- Require employers to provide proper protective equipment (e.g., shoes, gloves, hats).
- Limit the amount of weight children may carry.
- Make it mandatory for children to get vacation and sick time.
- Make it mandatory for children to get leave time for family emergencies, funerals, etc.
- Allow children to get workers' compensation if they are injured at work.
- Require frequent parental visits or leave to visit families.
- Make it illegal for parents to forge papers.
- Allow children to form a union.
- Require verification of children's ages.
- Require unannounced inspections on a regular basis.

5. Explain:

Dangerous and unhealthy situations, such as those we discussed today, motivated people to create laws to protect young workers. Your right to work in a safe and healthy workplace is a direct result of these laws.

We are going to spend the remainder of this unit looking more closely at the laws that protect you in the workplace. We will discuss what these laws are, how these laws work for you, and who can help you, if you are in a work situation in which these laws are not being followed.

6. Ask:

Based on what you learned today, what would you say are the benefits of worker safety laws? List students' ideas on the chalkboard or easel.

(Possible answers: These laws protect children from being exploited; children are encouraged to be in school so they can live better lives; children's health is improved; children can really enjoy their childhoods; the laws protect workers from injuries or illnesses.)

7. Give each student a copy of the "Workplace Safety Laws" fact sheet. Have students read through the fact sheet silently or read it together as a class. Students should be prepared to discuss and apply these laws during the next two class sessions.

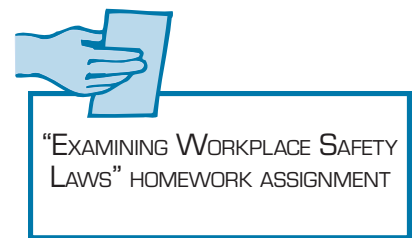


8. Have each pair of students hand in their list of laws at the end of class.

9. Have students read through their "Performance Criteria and Checklist" and check the Lesson 6 activities they participated in today.

Taking It Home:

Give each student a copy of the "Examining Workplace Safety Laws" homework assignment, or write the assignment on the chalkboard. Have each student complete this assignment before the next class session.



Footnotes:

- ¹ Saller, Carol. *Working Children*. Minneapolis: Carolrhoda Books, Inc., 1998.
- ² Mofford, Judith H. *Child Labor in America*. Carlisle: Discovery Enterprises, Ltd., 1997.

Resources Consulted In Developing the Lesson Script and Scenarios:

- Mofford, Judith, ed. *Child Labor in America*. Carlisle: Discovery Enterprises, Ltd., 1997.
- Parker, David. *Stolen Dreams: Portraits of Working Children*. Minneapolis: Lerner Publications Company, 1998.
- Saller, Carol. *Working Children*. Minneapolis: Carolrhoda Books, Inc., 1998.

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Name: _____ Class Period: _____

Performance Criteria and Checklist

Place a check mark in the appropriate box when the criteria is met. Corresponding lesson is listed in ().

Student Checklist	Performance Criteria	Teacher Checklist
<input type="checkbox"/>	1. Recite the major laws that apply to students (hours, wages, types of jobs). (7)	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	2. Accurately apply those laws to new work safety situations. (7 and 9)	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	3. Participate as much as you can in a small group, without dominating the group. (6, 7, and 9)	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	4. During discussions, speak clearly and think through what you will say before you say it. (6 through 9)	<input type="checkbox"/>

When applying the ten steps to resolve safety issues in the workplace, you do the following:

<input type="checkbox"/>	5. Clearly identify the decision that needs to be made. (9)	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	6. Clearly identify and describe the choices you have in how you will resolve the problem. (9)	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	7. Apply specific criteria to help you select the best choice. (9)	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	8. Deal with the conflict in ways that are respectful. (9)	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	9. Deal with the conflict in ways that are persuasive. (9)	<input type="checkbox"/>



Photograph 1:

They called them “newsies.” Boys as young as four and five would sell newspapers on the street corners. Joe was often up late at night and early in the morning, peddling newspapers in all kinds of weather. Sometimes he stayed away from home for days at a time. Barefoot and bedraggled, Joe had to watch out for a variety of dangers: getting run over by a street-car or a horse; or being robbed.

Joe was not paid an hourly wage. He was paid by the number of papers he sold. Because he had to pay for the papers he didn't sell, Joe had to work long into the night. Joe had to carry heavy loads while constantly walking up and down the streets. He received no overtime, no breaks, no vacations, and no raises. Joe was forced to turn all his wages over to his father, who was often drunk.

Joe had no time for school or play. He sold newspapers all day long. If he complained about his work conditions, he would be replaced by another worker. If Joe had a family emergency, he could not leave his job or he would be replaced.

Photograph 2:

This photograph, taken in 1907, is a picture of a boy named David, whose right arm was cut off by an unguarded saw in a box factory. Factory children as young as six or seven often worked 10- to 12-hour days. David dropped out of school and began working when he was ten.

David was forced to work quickly around dangerous equipment, with very few breaks or rests. Some children worked through the night, sleeping on the floor between shifts.

David, like other children, was provided no protective gear or equipment, and the factories had very little ventilation in summer and little heat in the winter.

Children such as David worked for very low wages with no hope of a better future. They had no time for school, play, or vacations. If David complained about the conditions or was sick one day, he was immediately replaced by another worker.

The government never inspected these workplaces, and the factory owners had little regard for their young workers. No one was looking out for the welfare of these children. Without going to school, David had little chance to better his life. Children like David usually ended up working in the same factory for their entire lives.





Photograph 3:

Haji, an Indonesian boy of 12, works on a fishing platform off the coast of Indonesia. Wood platforms on stilts stand anywhere from one-half mile to several miles out to sea.

Boys are taken from their homes to the platforms to help fish for krill. They must stay there for up to six months, away from their families and friends. Each day, they live only on

rice and fish. Fresh fruit and vegetables are a rare treat. Fresh water is scarce. Three to six children sleep on the floor of a shelter that may be no larger than six feet by ten feet.

Haji has no protection from falling into the ocean, and often children like Haji do not know how to swim. The platforms have many holes, and it is easy for children to slip through the floor. Even if the children know how to swim, waves and the force of the current make it difficult for them to get to safety. If a child is killed or injured, he is merely replaced by another worker.

He receives no sick time, vacation, or medical care. He does not attend school. He has no way to better his life. Fishing for krill is all he will know.



Photograph 4:

Amine, a 5-year-old weaver from Nepal, works 10 to 12 hours per day. Her small little hands, like those of many carpet weavers, are bruised, and she suffers from severe skin problems due to the rough course wool. When children knot the carpets, they often cut their hands, and the cuts never have a chance to heal. Amine often has open cuts on her hands, which become sore as she works.

Each knot must be pulled tightly, and the process is repeated up to 100 times or more per square inch in a fine carpet. Amine is pressured to work quickly for long periods of time. Wages are only 30 cents per day.

Amine lives at the factory, sleeping on the floor. She has not seen her family in over a year. She gets outside once a day for only a few minutes; otherwise, she is working at her loom. She is given very little food. No bathroom facilities are in the factory. If Amine, or any other weaver, gets sick or injured, she is replaced by another worker and is thrown out into the street with no place to go and no medical help. If Amine complains about her situation, she will be replaced as well, which would make her family very angry with her.

Amine will never have the opportunity to go to school. She does not know how to read or write and has not learned any other skills. Amine will be weaving carpets for the rest of her life, if her hands can tolerate the work.

Photograph 5:

In Nepal, as in much of the world, bricks are made by hand. After being fired in huge kilns, the bricks are carried to large stacks by children such as Krishna. Even a small brick factory may produce as many as 500,000 bricks a year. Each brick weighs 2 to 4 pounds. Each day, a small child may haul over 1,000 bricks (2,000 pounds) on his or her head or back.



The work is dusty and dangerous. As bricks are removed from the kiln, they may fall several feet onto a worker's unprotected feet. Because of the large amount of dust, the children often get lung diseases that lead to early death. No one inspects the working conditions of these factories. No medical care is available, if the children get injured. If a child, such as Krishna, becomes sick or permanently disabled, he or she is sent away, and a new child worker is brought in to work.

Children as young as five years old are required to work in these factories by their parents. They are given few breaks and very little food during the day. Children work through extreme weather conditions. Children live at the factory and sleep on dirty, dusty floors. They have no time for school or play. They work seven days a week, 10 to 12 hours per day, for no wages other than food and minimum shelter.



Photograph 6:

Mohamed, from Bangladesh, works in a tannery making leather from animal hides. Some of the children in this factory actually work inside the tanning drums, standing bare-foot in hazardous chemicals, such as chromic acid and formaldehyde. The chemicals burn their skin and their lungs when they breathe in the fumes, but they are required to keep working.

Some of the children, like Mohamed, must cart animal waste from the tanning process to a waste dump down the road. No sanitation is provided. Workers are given no protection for their hands, and animal parts such as intestines touch their skin. Diseases from the decaying animal waste may infect the children, causing them to become sick.

Mohamed, along with the other children, works very long hours, seven days a week. He gets no breaks, vacation, or sick time. The wages he earns are very low. If a child gets sick from working at this factory, he or she is simply replaced by someone else. No medical help is available.

Looking at the Lives of Child Laborers

A Script to Assist You

Young people are much the same in every country and time period. They have feelings, hopes, and dreams. They want a life that is happy and filled with good things. Unfortunately, the lives of some young people have not always been easy, because they worked in places or lived during times in which worker safety laws did not protect them. Young workers were, and still are, at the mercy of adults to protect them from being abused and exploited.

Child Labor In The United States

1700s

In our country's early history, it was not uncommon for children to work long hours in hard or dangerous situations. From the time the first colonists arrived in what was to become the United States, children were working. Many served as apprentices to older workers. They worked for those people for several years for no pay, sometimes living away from their families. In some instances, they learned a trade, such as blacksmithing or carpentry. In others, they learned nothing and were just a source of free labor.

After the Civil War, the nation became more industrialized, with large factories turning out textiles, pottery, and other products. Factories were in desperate need of workers, so they hired children as well as adults. Children were not required to go to school, and no labor laws were in place. Children as young as five and six worked 12 hours a day, six days a week.

1800s

Children worked in very dangerous situations, around large machines, sharp knives, and coal cars. Since employers were not required to provide safety equipment, many children were permanently disabled or killed. Injured or sick employees were simply replaced. No compensation was given, if they were injured and could no longer do their jobs.

Life for child laborers was very difficult. They had no childhood. They had no future. Because they did not go to school, all they would know for the rest of their lives was hard work.

Have students look at photographs 1 and 2. These are photographs of child laborers earlier in our country's history. Discuss the photographs using the questions suggested in the lesson.

Gradually, child labor in the United States became regulated. In 1938, most of the Fair Labor Standards Act was passed, protecting the health and well-being of young workers. This act set standards for child labor and established the laws that govern child labor today. The act regulated how many hours a child could work, how old a child had to be to work, and what jobs were too dangerous for children.

Thanks to these laws, if you are under 18 and working today, your workplace is relatively safe, and your health and welfare are protected. Health and safety laws have greatly improved the working conditions of young people in the United States. However, this is not true for migrant workers, who still spend long hours in fields picking vegetables and being exposed to dangerous chemicals.

Child Labor In Other Countries

Unfortunately, workplace health and safety laws do not exist and are not enforced today for 250,000,000 children around the world. In many countries, children still work in very dangerous and unhealthy situations. They are often forced to work at a very young age, sometimes being removed completely from their families.

In some instances, no laws regulate how much or how long a child may work. No laws prohibit children from working around dangerous machinery without protective equipment. No laws require that children receive a fair wage. In some instances, adults doing the same job will earn more money. No sick time, vacation time, or medical insurance is provided. In other instances, laws exist but are not enforced.

Like children in the early history of the United States, these children have no childhood and no future. They are destined to spend their whole lives working for very low wages. They have no time to attend school, so the children end up working in the same job for the rest of their lives. Worker safety laws are not in place to protect them. These same conditions still exist for some American migrant families as well.

Look at photographs 3 through 6. Complete the student learning activity provided in the lesson. Discuss as many of the photographs as time allows.



Workplace Safety Laws

Protect Your Health. Know Your Rights.

By law, your employer must provide the following:

- A safe and healthy workplace.
- Training about health and safety, including information on chemicals that could be harmful to your health.
- Protective clothing and equipment.
- Payment for medical care, if you get hurt or sick because of your job. You may also be entitled to lost wages.
- At least the minimum wage, which is generally \$5.15 per hour.

You have a right to do the following:

- Report safety problems.
- Work without racial or sexual harassment.
- Refuse to work, if the job is immediately dangerous to your life or health.
- Join or organize a union.
- Get paid overtime, if you work more than 40 or 48 hours per week, depending on the size of the company. Check with your supervisor.

What are my safety responsibilities on the job?

- Follow all safety rules and procedures.
- Use safety equipment and protective clothing when needed.
- Look out for coworkers.
- Keep work areas clean and neat.
- Know what to do in an emergency.
- Report any health or safety hazards to your supervisor.

Should I be working this late or this long?

Child labor laws protect teens from working too long, too late, or too early. This table shows the hours teens may work. Exceptions exist for students in work experience programs.

<u>Work Hours For Teens</u>		
Under 14	Ages 14 and 15	Ages 16 and 17
A person under 14 years of age cannot be employed, except as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• newspaper carrier.• agriculture worker.*• actor, actress, or model.	Between Labor Day and June 1st: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Not before 7 a.m. or after 7 p.m.• Not over 3 hours/day on a school day, and not over 18 hours/week• Not during school hours.• No more than 8 hours on a non-school day. From June 1st to Labor Day: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 7 a.m. to 9 p.m.• Not over 8 hours in any 24-hour period.• Not more than 40 hours per week.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Not before 5 a.m. or after 11 p.m. on school nights (no restrictions on weekends or holidays).

* Children must be at least 14 to work outside school hours in any agricultural job. Twelve- and 13-year-olds may work, if parental consent is given and if they are working on the same farm as their parent. No age restrictions exist for children who work on their family's farm.

Required Breaks:

Employers should give bathroom breaks for every four hours worked and meal breaks for every eight hours worked.

Name: _____ Class Period: _____



Examining Workplace Safety Laws Homework Assignment

Think about the photographs you saw in class today. Think about your own work or the work you want to do in the future. After reviewing the handout titled “Workplace Safety Laws,” do the following:

1. Choose three labor laws from the handout.
2. Think about why you agree or disagree with the laws you choose and describe your reasons in the space below. No answers are right or wrong.
3. Include any suggestions you may have for rewriting these laws or changing them in any way.
4. Your assignment should be at least three paragraphs long, one paragraph for each law you choose.

We will discuss the homework assignment during the next class session.

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