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Grade Level: 9 – US History

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Allow students to read and interpret what conditions were like in the meat packing industry during the industrial revolution by answering the questions in order. These questions will allow students to understand what conditions were like not only in the factories but allow them to think of how this type of workplace affected the nation as a whole.

Level I Description:

1. What type of source is being shown?
2. What type of industry is being discussed in the reading?
3. Who are the people discussed in the reading?

Level II Interpretation:

1. Why would injuring oneself at the workplace be such a disturbing occurrence during the industrial revolution?
2. What do you think happens to those who are injured on the job during this time period? Do you think these injuries are occurring at meat packing factories only?
3. What are five different issues that could occur to someone working in a meat packing factory?

Level III Analysis:

1. What does this reading tell someone about the conditions in meat packing factory during the industrial revolution?
2. How do you think that the general public are affected by what occurs in these factories as described in this reading? Are the general public made aware of these occurrences? Give an example from the reading of why or why not the public is made aware of the situation.
3. What do you think should have been done to stop what was occurring in the factories at this time?

The Jungle - Chapter 9 (pages 119-120)

Let a man so much as scrape his finger pushing a truck in the pickle rooms, and he might have a sore that would put him out of the world; all the joints in his fingers might be eaten by the acid, one by one. Of the butchers and floor-men, the beef-boners and trimmers, and all those who used knives, you could scarcely find a person who had the use of his thumb; time and time again the base of it had been slashed, till it was a mere lump of flesh against which the man pressed the knife to hold it. The hands of these men would be criss-crossed with cuts, until you could no longer pretend to count them or to trace them. They would have no nails, – they had worn them off pulling hides; their knuckles were swollen so that their fingers spread out like a fan. There were men who worked in the cooking rooms, in the midst of steam and sickening odors, by artificial light; in these rooms the germs of tuberculosis might live for two years, but the supply was renewed every hour. There were the beef-luggers, who carried two-hundred-pound quarters into the refrigerator-cars; a fearful kind of work, that began at four o'clock in the morning, and that wore out the most powerful men in a few years. There were those who worked in the chilling rooms, and whose special disease was rheumatism; the time limit that a man could work in the chilling rooms was said to be five years. There were the wool-pluckers, whose hands went to pieces even sooner than the hands of the pickle men; for the pelts of the sheep had to be painted with acid to loosen the wool, and then the pluckers had to pull out this wool with their bare hands, till the acid had eaten their fingers off. There were those who made the tins for the canned meat; and their hands, too, were a maze of cuts, and each cut represented a chance for blood poisoning. Some worked at the stamping machines, and it was very seldom that one could work long there at the pace that was set, and not give out and forget himself and have a part of his hand chopped off. There were the "hoisters," as they were called, whose task it was to press the lever which lifted the dead cattle off the floor. They ran along upon a rafter, peering down through the damp and the steam; and as old Durham's architects had not built the killing room for the convenience of the hoisters, at every few feet they would have to stoop under a beam, say four feet above the one they ran on; which got them into the habit of stooping, so that in a few years they would be walking like chimpanzees. Worst of any, however, were the fertilizer men, and those who served in the cooking rooms. These people could not be shown to the visitor, – for the odor of a fertilizer man would scare any ordinary visitor at a hundred yards, and as for the other men, who worked in tank rooms full of steam, and in some of which there were open vats near the level of the floor, their peculiar trouble was that they fell into the vats; and when they were fished out, there was never enough of them left to be worth exhibiting, – sometimes they would be overlooked for days, till all but the bones of them had gone out to the world as Durham's Pure Leaf Lard!