Child Labor Laws:
An Examination of Lewis Hine Photos and
the Federal Fair Labor Standards Act

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Abstract:
Students will analyze photos of children working at various U.S. jobs during the period 1908–1912 and consider the history of child labor laws in the U.S. dating from the 1830’s to the Federal Wage and Hour Law of 1941.

Essential questions/enduring understandings:

• Where does child labor exist?
• What conditions have led to the existence of child labor?
• What are some of the problems, risks, or dangers associated with child labor?
• What measures have been taken to protect children from child labor in the United States?

Assessment: graphic organizer

Setting the Purpose:
During a study of the American Industrial Revolution, students will analyze Lewis Hine photos of children at work. These photographs gained widespread publicity and aided work reform attempts. As a result of reform movements during this period, laws regulating working conditions and limiting or forbidding child labor were passed. In 1938, Congress passed the Fair Labor Standards Act, better known as the Federal Wage and Hour Law. The Act set a work week of 40 hours, with a minimum wage of 40 cents per hour. It prohibited child labor under age 16 while allowing minors 16 and over to work in non-hazardous occupations. The Act set 18 as the minimum age for work in industries classified as hazardous. No minimum age was set for non-hazardous agricultural employment after school hours and during vacations. Children aged 14 and 15 could be employed in non-manufacturing, non-mining, and non-hazardous occupations outside of school hours and during vacations for limited hours.

Lesson:
Students will view printed photos or web site images of children at work. Students complete the “Connect, Predict, and Infer” sections of the four-square graphic organizer. The teacher leads a class discussion about the images and the class reads and discusses the Fair Labor Standards Act (Federal Wage and Hour Law). Students complete the Synthesis square on the organizer.

Extension activities:
• Students may study the Illinois Child Labor Law. Students working in small groups may study a portion of the law and jigsaw the information learned with the rest of the class. Illinois Law can be compared to the Federal Labor Standards Act.
• Have students draft a ‘help wanted’ ad for a child labor position in 1900.
• Interview a senior citizen about his/her first job, salary and working conditions.
• View web linked photos of modern day child labor issues. View videos of present day working conditions around the world. Discuss implications relating to poverty, economy, education, and consumerism.

Analysis of Primary Sources:
Lewis Hine photographed children in factories, fields, mines and street corners from 1908 to 1912. These famous images contributed to the child labor law reform movement.

http://www.state.il.us/AGENCY/IDOL/laws/LAW205.HTM
link to Illinois child labor law 820 ILCS 205/1-22

http://www.dol.gov/compliance/laws/comp-flsa.htm#overview
Fair Labor Standards Act

Ties to resources:

Lewis Hine photos and history.

http://www.stolenchildhoods.org/mt/videostories/index.php
video stories of child laborers – USE THESE BUT PREVIEW THEM IN ADVANCE

http://www.stolenchildhoods.org/mt/photosforsale/index.php
current photos of children working around the world

http://www.continuelearn.uiowa.edu/laborctr/child_labor/
Child Labor Public Education Project. A resource page for contemporary child labor issues.

http://www.state.il.us/AGENCY/IDOL/laws/LAW205.HTM
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