

The Industrial Revolution

Section 2

Section Summary

PRODUCTION BEFORE FACTORIES

Before the Industrial Revolution, most people worked in cottage industries, such as weaving and farming. Family life revolved around the business, and people decided how much to produce and when. Weaving families, for example, worked from their homes, transforming the raw materials they purchased from merchants into finished goods.

Working in a cottage industry also had disadvantages. A business could be ruined by fire, flood, the loss of livestock, or the death of an older, highly skilled family member. Factory work offered the end of these drawbacks, as the owners knew.

List two types of cottage industries. Underline the disadvantages people working in them faced.

FACTORIES AND FACTORY TOWNS

Working in factory-based industries known as the factory system helped people support their families, but it also caused hardships. Each factory worker was assigned a simple task to be done repeatedly. Though most factory workers were adult men, owners preferred hiring children because they could be paid lower wages. Factory workers worked 12 to 18 hours each day in dreadful, dangerous conditions. Many workers had left the countryside to find factory work and found themselves living nearby in poor quality, factory-owned housing. They endured pollution created by the factories, especially the dangerous soot and smoke from burning coal. These unsanitary conditions caused disease to spread rapidly.

Underline the hardships faced by factory workers. Why were children hired?

THE FACTORY SYSTEM AND WORKERS

The factory system needed three levels of workers. Business people invested in and owned the factories, mid-level employees supervised day-to-day operations, and workers ran the machines.

Some cottage industry workers resorted to violence to protest that their goods could not compete with the less expensive versions produced in factories. Their actions, called the Luddite Movement included burning factories and smashing machines. It was short-lived, however, as several Luddites were caught and hanged.

Circle the three types of factory employees. Who owned the factories?

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Factory workers were also unhappy. In the 1800s, first in Britain and then in America, many of them formed **labor unions** that represented their interests. Unions organized **strikes**, or work stoppages, to protest low wages and poor working conditions.

Change happened slowly. Reports told the public about abuses in the factories. Britain passed laws that limited work hours and kept children under nine from working. Some people became more prosperous. Increased productivity created more jobs for managers, accountants, salespeople, and transporters.

FACTORIES AND MASS PRODUCTION

Many new methods of improving industry began in the United States. American industry became expert in **mass production**, the system of manufacturing large numbers of identical items. Many goods produced this way were made of **interchangeable parts**—all the exact same size and shape, creating a standard of measurement that made it easy to replace broken parts later. This is much different from cottage industry production, in which every part was handmade, and therefore slightly different. Henry Ford used a new system called the **assembly line** to speed production. Instead of moving around a product as they worked, workers stayed in place while products moved on belts. This saved time and forced people to work as fast as the belt brought the items to them. Because of these factors mass production increased the amount of goods available for sale and made products more affordable.

How was working on an assembly line different from working in a cottage industry?
