

**Title of Lesson: *Reformers Target Child Labor in Alabama in the Early 1900s***  
(Suggested grade level: 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Grade Advanced U.S. History Since 1877)

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**Background Information:**

The entire collection of photographs taken in Alabama by photographer Lewis Hine can be accessed [here](#). The following images provide background on child labor in Alabama in the early 1900s:

- [Group of some of the youngest workers in the Merrimack Mills. Everyone \(except the boy behind the fence\) has a steady job in the Merrimack Mills. Huntsville, AL](#)
- [Gracie Clark, 268 A Street \(with a white dress\) has been a spinner in the filling room of Merrimack Mill for three years. Her Life Insurance Policy gives her age thirteen years Huntsville, AL](#)
- [Workers in Avondale Mills. Location: Birmingham, Alabama.](#)
- [Typical workers in Barker Cotton Mills where good conditions prevail. Location: Mobile, Alabama](#)
- [A study of ages. The boy on the right said, "I ain't old enough to work in the mill; I am ten years." The boy in the middle, Buford Fox who has been working in the Merrimack Mills for one year said he was twelve years old, but School Record says ten years. Sanford Franklin, boy on the left has been working four months, and I could not prove his age. Merrimack Mfg. Co. See also Hine report. Location: Huntsville, Alabama.](#)
- [A young sweeper in Central Mills. Location: Sylacauga, Alabama](#)
- [Young girl working in Anniston Yarn Mills. Location: Anniston, Alabama.](#)
- [Dotheboys Hall in session tucked away upstairs over the store. Equipped with antique, dilapidated benches and chairs. The lessons begin at 6 A.M. and last for six hours, and these children who attend in the morning go into the mill in the afternoon and vice versa for the required eight weeks, which the law specifies. Taking everything into consideration it shows what travesty vocational guidance may become, and is in itself the best example of Dotheboys Hall I have ever seen, except that it is not half so practical as was Squeer's school.](#)
- [Doffers in Pell City Cotton Mill. Location: Pell City, Alabama.](#)
- [All these \(except the baby\) work in Avondale Mills. Location: Birmingham, Alabama.](#)
- [One of the young workers of the Stevenson Cotton Mills. Apparently Under twelve years. Location: Stevenson, Alabama.](#)
- ["OUR BABY DOFFER" and some of the other infants all working in Avondale Mills. Location: Birmingham, Alabama.](#)
- [Overseer and two of the doffer boys, Charles Hennessy and John Douglass in Avondale Mills. Noon hour. Overseer said, "We've got 30 of 'em." Location: Birmingham, Alabama.](#)
- [Group of young workers in Merrimack Mill \(not the youngest\). Location: Huntsville, Alabama.](#)
- [These four children of H.T. Thompson, 267 A Street all work in the Merrimack Mill. The youngest, a girl, has been there three years. Location: Huntsville, Alabama.](#)
- [Closing hour, Saturday noon, at Dallas Mill. Every child in photos, so far as I was able to ascertain, works in that mill. When I questioned some of the youngest boys as to their ages, they said they were 12](#)

and then other boys said they were lying. (Which sentiment I agreed with.) Location: Huntsville, Alabama.

- [The mill school of the Anniston Mfg. Co. These are boys at the mill school who have to make the 8 weeks schooling for the year. The school is miserably equipped. Willie Laty, the shortest boy, said he was 10 years old, and been working there about 1 year. He and the other boy said he had a job as a spinner and sweeper, but that he had just been fired (probably after the boss saw the investigator photograph them.) Collie Webb and Archie Croll are also probably under 12, and some girls not in this photograph.] Location: Anniston, Alabama.
- Typical workers in Barker Cotton Mill where good conditions prevail. See Alabama report. Location: Mobile, Alabama.
- Group of spinners in Cotton Factory. Location: Talladega, Alabama.
- Noon hour. Montgomery Cotton Mill. Investigator saw none under 14. Location: Montgomery, Alabama.

### **Overview of lesson:**

This lesson fits with a unit on the Progressive Era in American history. It highlights the efforts of two individuals, photographer Lewis Hine and author Bessie Van Vorst, both social reformers from the North who visited Alabama in the early 1900s to document the exploitation of child labor in textile mills. Students will: 1) read a small portion of Van Vorst's book describing her visit to a mill in Anniston, 2) analyze the excerpt in terms of its point of view and persuasive techniques, 3) view and analyze photographs taken by Hine in Alabama, 4) select one photo that they believe corresponds in a meaningful way to the excerpt they read, 5) explain in writing the underlying connections between their chosen image and the text, and 6) re-title Van Vorst's book.

### **Content Standards**

*Alabama Course of Study: Social Studies* (Bulletin 2004, No. 18)

Grades 10/11: Content Standard 11.2

- Describe social and political origins, accomplishments, and limitations of Progressivism.

### *National Standards for History in the Schools*

Era 7, Standard 1A – The student understands the origin of the Progressives and the coalitions they formed to deal with issues at the local and state levels.

- Assess Progressive efforts to regulate big business, curb labor militancy, and protect the rights of workers and consumers.

### *National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies*, (Bulletin 111, 2010)

Standard 2: Time, Continuity, and Change

Standard 5: Individuals, Groups, and Institutions

Standard 6: Power, Authority, and Governance

### **Primary Learning Objective(s):**

Students will:

- Learn about the extensive use of child labor in Alabama textile mills in the early 1900s
- Discuss how the conditions those children faced affected their lives
- Analyze the efforts of 2 reformers who wanted to abolish child labor, paying particular attention to their point of view and persuasive techniques
- Describe in writing how a visual image relates to a written text

**Additional Learning Objective(s):**

- This lesson promotes historical thinking skills because it requires a close reading of primary documents and requires students to draw their own conclusions based on those documents. It also calls for students to think imaginatively about the ways images and written words interact and enhance each other.
- On a personal level, students will be asked to consider why children need special legal protection, especially as it relates to jobs. What kinds of work are acceptable, even beneficial, for minors to do? What kinds of work should they not be allowed to do and why? This calls for them to think reflectively and analytically about a topic relevant to their lives.

**Time allotted:** 140 minutes

**Materials and Equipment:**

- Copy of an excerpt from the book [\*The Cry of the Children: A Study of Child Labor\*](#) (attached). This excerpt is twelve pages long and covers most but not all of chapter two. If it's not practical to give each child an individual copy, the teacher can read the selection out loud. In that case, though, it would be helpful at the end of the reading to project copies of each page (via a digital projector or an overhead projector) to facilitate class discussion. The entire book is available on line at <http://www.archive.org/stream/cryofchildrenstu00vanv#page/n5/mode/2up>
- Assignment (attached) for each student as he or she reads (or listens to) the excerpt.
- Instructions for accessing the [Lewis Hine photographs on the Library of Congress website](#) (attached).
- [Alabama Department of Labor "Alabama Child Labor Laws" poster](#): This poster gives essential information about the most current federal and Alabama labor laws which apply to minors. It lists a website address for the Department of Labor in Alabama, where students can obtain more detailed information.

**Technological Resources:**

- Teacher needs computer with internet access and digital projector (or overhead projector).
- To complete the assignment, students need computers with internet access so they can get to the Library of Congress website and view the Lewis Hine photographs.
- Students also need access to a printer so they can print out one photograph.

**Background/Preparation:**

The student should know the following:

- Although Alabama passed a law in 1887 prohibiting the employment of women and children in factories and manufacturing establishments, the legislature did not pass any provisions for enforcement. The law was eventually repealed in the 1890s. It was during that time period that many textile mills began relocating from northern states to southern states.

**Procedures/Activities:****Engagement/Motivation Activity:**

- Poll the class to see how many students have part-time jobs. Ask them to describe the work they do.
- Put the terms: "Advantages" and "Disadvantages" on the board. Ask students to identify and explain different kinds of benefits young people can derive from a job. List these on the board. (Some possible advantages include: money, learning about expectations in the work world, independence.) Then ask them to identify and explain some drawbacks. List those. (Some possible disadvantages: less time for other activities including homework and sleep, low pay, low-skill work.)

- Pose this question: Should some kinds of work be totally off-limits for anyone under the age of 18? If so, what kind and why?
- Tell students that forms of child labor have existed throughout American history (e.g. young indentured servants in the colonies, children working on their parents' farms), but it wasn't until 1938 that Congress finally passed national legislation restricting child labor. Pose this question: "WHY do you think Congress eventually felt it was necessary to pass a **federal** law regulating the labor of children? Emphasize that students aren't expected to know the exact answer, only to venture some guesses and explain their reasoning. (Students will probably mention that children were exploited as workers and needed legal protection. Some students may even remember specific information about large-scale textile mills that were built in the northeast in the first half of the 1800s, many of which employed very young workers, e.g. Lowell Mill. Point out that because of reform efforts in the mid to late 1800s, several northern states instituted laws restricting child labor. As a response, many textile mills simply relocated to southern states, where such laws either didn't exist or weren't enforced.)
- Tell students they'll be studying child labor in Alabama in the early 1900s. The first document they'll examine is an excerpt from a book published in 1908.

<p><b>Step 1</b></p>	<p>Write the title of the book, <i>The Cry of the Children: A Study of Child Labor</i>, on the board. Pose two questions: 1) What is the obvious topic of this book? 2) Looking at the wording of the title, what point of view can you assume the author has on this topic? (The first five words show that the author is sympathetic to child workers and hopes to expose their plight.) Provide the author's name (Bessie Van Vorst). Tell students that for six weeks, Von Vorst, a northerner, traveled to mill towns in Alabama, Georgia, Maine, and New Hampshire on an investigative tour. She interviewed mill families in their homes, toured textile factories when owners would allow her entry, and spoke with child laborers, both on and off the job. Von Vorst never intended to produce an unbiased examination of child labor. She proudly proclaimed her ultimate goal in her preface when she said she wanted her book to "... stir those it reaches into procuring some remedy for the existing condition of things which is contrary to every principle of civilization and Christianity." In short, this book was propaganda in pursuit of reform.</p>
<p><b>Step 2</b></p>	<p>In order to help students deconstruct and analyze the excerpt, pass out 1 of 5 different assignment sheets to each student. These sheets (attached) tell students to analyze the reading with 1 of 5 tasks in mind. Give students time to read the instructions and answer any questions they have about what they're supposed to do.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Task #1: students will look for (or listen for) and then list all the "loaded" words or phrases Van Vorst uses. (The term "loaded" is defined for students on the instruction sheet.)</li> <li>• Task # 2: students will look for and list specific details that relate to children (their ages, appearance, health, clothing, pay, etc.).</li> <li>• Task # 3: students will look for and list specific details related to the mother Van Vorst meets (clothing, appearance, health, etc.).</li> <li>• Task # 4: students will look for and list specific details related to the mill workers homes.</li> <li>• Task #5: students will look for and list specific details related to the mill factory.</li> </ul>

	(There is some overlap among the tasks; they're not all mutually exclusive.)
<b>Step 3</b>	Prepare students for the second chapter by summarizing what happens in the first. In chapter one, Von Vorst recounts researching state records in Montgomery, Alabama, to determine where the state's cotton textile mills were located. Finding that Birmingham, one of the largest cities in the state, had a textile mill, she headed there. But when she approached the mill owner with a letter of introduction and asked to tour his factory, he denied her entry. According to Von Vorst, "It was of no interest to him that a piece should be written about his help." She was also dismayed by the lack of serious commitment for reform among the more genteel women in Birmingham who claimed to be opposed to child labor. According to Von Vorst, one of them said, "Child labor in Alabama is a necessary evil...If we made laws restricting labor, we should frighten away capitalists and wreck our very surest chances of progress and prosperity." Having come to a dead-end in Birmingham, Von Vorst travels to Anniston, the site of several mills, which is where chapter two picks up.
<b>Step 4</b>	Distribute individual copies of the <a href="#">excerpt</a> for the students to read. If it isn't practical to make that many copies, read the selection out loud. (You want students to interact closely with the text, however, so if you read it out loud, ask them at the end if they need to hear certain portions read again. Alternatively, you could display portions of the excerpt using a digital or overhead projector.)
<b>Step 5</b>	After checking to make certain that each student took his or her own notes, place them in groups according to which task assignment they had (all number ones together, twos together, etc.) Give them time (15-20 minutes) to compare and compile their observations using these questions as a guide (students can disregard any question that obviously doesn't apply to their task): <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. According to Von Vorst's account, what were some of the tragic effects the children (and even the mother) suffered as a result of being part of the mill system in Anniston?</li> <li>2. On a scale of 1-10, with 10 being the strongest score, how would you rate this selection in terms of its ability to convince readers of the evils of child labor in Alabama textile mills? Identify and explain what evidenced you found most convincing and why.</li> <li>3. How large a part do you think Von Vorst's language played in eliciting reader sympathy? Identify and explain some particularly effective words and phrases.</li> </ol>
<b>Step 6</b>	Conduct a whole-class discussion in which each group shares its answers. Insist that students support their generalizations with specific details. (Refer to a copy of the text if necessary).
<b>Step 7</b>	Show students the entry web page into the Library of Congress's digital collection of Lewis Hine photographs of child workers (site is listed below). Tell them that they'll be examining some of the pictures of child laborers that this famous photographer took at various textile mills that employed children in Alabama. They'll choose one of these photos and link it to the Von Vorst

	reading. The website address and exact instructions are provided on the assignment sheet (attached). Distribute this sheet and the rubric that will be used to grade the essay. Go over each so that students understand what's expected.
<b>Step 8</b>	Collect the written assignment linking image and text. If you can, project some or all of the images, and ask students to share their insights and comments about how the photographs matched Van Vorst's writing in terms of eliciting sympathy from the viewer/reader. Also, have students share their new titles for the book and explain why they chose them.
<b>Step 9</b>	To bring the topic of child labor up to date for students, display the Alabama Department of Labor on-line "Youth Rules" poster. It lists the most current federal and Alabama child labor laws in simplified and understandable form and tells students where they can find additional information on the topic.

**Assessment Strategies:**

- Evaluate task assignment sheets for effort and completeness.
- Award points for participation in class discussions (optional)
- Evaluate the essay explaining the connection between one photograph and the Van Vorst text (rubric attached)

***The Cry of the Children: A Study of Child Labor by Bessie Von Vorst (1908)***

**Chapter Two**

**Task # 1:** As you read (or listen to) this excerpt, write down any “loaded” words or phrases you notice. “Loaded” words or phrases are ones with strong emotional overtones, specifically chosen to elicit positive or negative reactions. (Example: describing a thin woman as “anorexic” versus just calling her “slim.”) Also, feel free to write down ANY descriptive words or phrases that you believe communicate Van Vorst’s point of view, even if you’re not certain they qualify as “loaded” in the definitional sense.

*The Cry of the Children: A Study of Child Labor* by Bessie Von Vorst (1908)

Chapter Two

**Task # 2:** As you read (or listen to) this selection, jot down specific details Van Vorst provides about the children she meets. Include such things as: age, clothing, appearance, health, income, attitudes, interests, general demeanor (e.g. friendly or unfriendly, aggressive or shy), etc. Capture as many different specifics as you can.

*The Cry of the Children: A Study of Child Labor* by Bessie Von Vorst (1908)

Chapter Two

**Task # 3:** As you read (or listen to) this selection, jot down specific details Van Vorst provides about the one mother she meets. Include such things as: appearance, clothing, health, and how she interacts with her children and with Van Vorst. Capture as many different details as you can.

*The Cry of the Children: A Study of Child Labor* by Bessie Von Vorst (1908)

Chapter Two

**Task # 4:** As you read (or listen to) this selection, jot down specific details that Van Vorst provides about the mill worker home she visited. Include information about both the exterior and interior.

*The Cry of the Children: A Study of Child Labor* by Bessie Von Vorst (1908)

Chapter Two

**Task # 5:** As you read (or listen to) this selection, jot down details Van Vorst provides about the textile factory she visits. Include such things as: conditions within the factory, the nature of the work, and how workers seem to feel about what they do. Although most of this information comes at the end of the excerpt, pay special attention in the early part of the chapter when the author says she doesn't need to ask directions to the mills. How does she know where they are? What is the giveaway? **NOTE:** When referring to specific pieces of textile machinery, Van Vorst uses words that will be unfamiliar to you, words such as "bobbins," "quills," and "doffers." Don't let these terms throw you. A "bobbin," also called a "quill," was a large spool that held the cotton thread used in spinning. A worker would "doff" or "remove" full bobbins from the textile machines. They were very heavy.

## INSTRUCTIONS FOR EXAMINING PHOTOGRAPHS OF CHILD WORKERS IN ALABAMA IN THE EARLY 1900S

1. Go to this Library of Congress web address: <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/pp/nclhtml/nclcabt.html>.
  - Information at the top of this page mentions that the National Child Labor Committee (NCLC) hired [Lewis Hine](#) as an investigative photographer in the early 1900s. NCLC's goal was to lobby Congress into passing a federal law banning child labor. Both NCLC and Hines believed that if people could see for themselves the abuses and injustices inflicted on child workers, they would demand laws ending the practice. (A federal law was finally passed in 1938.) One interesting note...One of the founding members of NCLC was [Edgar Gardner Murphy](#), an Episcopal minister serving in Montgomery, Alabama. In 1902, two years before the national organization was formed, he established the Alabama Child Labor Committee. (The on-line Encyclopedia of Alabama has a biography of [Reverend Murphy](#).)
2. All the photographs listed below by number were taken in Alabama. Click on the following photographs. (There are 1,813 photos in this lot alone, which gives you some idea of the scope of Hine's photo journalistic efforts. All of these were taken in Alabama):
  - [Group of some of the youngest workers in the Merrimack Mills. Everyone \(except the boy behind the fence\) has a steady job in the Merrimack Mills. Huntsville, AL](#)
  - [Gracie Clark, 268 A Street \(with a white dress\) has been a spinner in the filling room of Merrimack Mill for three years. Her Life Insurance Policy gives her age thirteen years Huntsville, AL](#)
  - [Workers in Avondale Mills. Location: Birmingham, Alabama.](#)
  - [Typical workers in Barker Cotton Mills where good conditions prevail. Location: Mobile, Alabama](#)
  - [A study of ages. The boy on the right said, "I ain't old enough to work in the mill; I am ten years." The boy in the middle, Buford Fox who has been working in the Merrimack Mills for one year said he was twelve years old, but School Record says ten years. Sanford Franklin, boy on the left has been working four months, and I could not prove his age. Merrimack Mfg. Co. See also Hine report. Location: Huntsville, Alabama.](#)
  - [A young sweeper in Central Mills. Location: Sylacauga, Alabama](#)
  - [Young girl working in Anniston Yarn Mills. Location: Anniston, Alabama.](#)
  - [Dotheboys Hall in session tucked away upstairs over the store. Equipped with antique, dilapidated benches and chairs. The lessons begin at 6 A.M. and last for six hours, and these children who attend in the morning go into the mill in the afternoon and vice versa for the required eight weeks, which the law specifies. Taking everything into consideration it shows what travesty vocational guidance may become, and is in itself the best example of Dotheboys Hall I have ever seen, except that it is not half so practical as was Squeer's school.](#)
  - [Doffers in Pell City Cotton Mill. Location: Pell City, Alabama.](#)
  - [All these \(except the baby\) work in Avondale Mills. Location: Birmingham, Alabama.](#)
  - [One of the young workers of the Stevenson Cotton Mills. Apparently Under twelve years. Location: Stevenson, Alabama.](#)
  - ["OUR BABY DOFFER" and some of the other infants all working in Avondale Mills. Location: Birmingham, Alabama.](#)
  - [Overseer and two of the doffer boys, Charles Hennessy and John Douglass in Avondale Mills. Noon hour. Overseer said, "We've got 30 of 'em." Location: Birmingham, Alabama.](#)
  - [Group of young workers in Merrimack Mill \(not the youngest\). Location: Huntsville, Alabama.](#)
  - [These four children of H.T. Thompson, 267 A Street all work in the Merrimack Mill. The youngest, a girl, has been there three years. Location: Huntsville, Alabama.](#)

- [Closing hour, Saturday noon, at Dallas Mill. Every child in photos, so far as I was able to ascertain, works in that mill. When I questioned some of the youngest boys as to their ages, they said they were 12 and then other boys said they were lying. \(Which sentiment I agreed with.\) Location: Huntsville, Alabama.](#)
- [\[The mill school of the Anniston Mfg. Co. These are boys at the mill school who have to make the 8 weeks schooling for the year. The school is miserably equipped. Willie Laty, the shortest boy, said he was 10 years old, and been working there about 1 year. He and the other boy said he had a job as a spinner and sweeper, but that he had just been fired \(probably after the boss saw the investigator photograph them.\) Collie Webb and Archie Croll are also probably under 12, and some girls not in this photograph.\] Location: Anniston, Alabama.](#)
- [Typical workers in Barker Cotton Mill where good conditions prevail. See Alabama report. Location: Mobile, Alabama.](#)
- [Group of spinners in Cotton Factory. Location: Talladega, Alabama.](#)
- [Noon hour. Montgomery Cotton Mill. Investigator saw none under 14. Location: Montgomery, Alabama.](#)

3. Allow yourself time to examine each image carefully. Look at the content (what's in the photo), but consider composition as well (the focus, the angle, the arrangement of visual elements). Think about the tone and mood of each photo. What emotive characteristics does each have? How did Hine produce those effects?
4. Assume that Van Vorst's book is being reissued, and you're in charge of selecting one photo to put on the cover. Which one do you think most closely relates to the material you read?
5. Print that picture.
6. On a separate sheet of paper, respond to this prompt in a minimum of 250 words:

“Describe the interplay between the photograph you selected and the Van Vorst excerpt. What common elements and approaches to the topic do these two works share, and how does each enhance the other? Support your statements by referencing specifics from both the photo and the excerpt.”

7. Lastly, if you were instructed to come up with a new title for Van Vorst's book, based on the photograph you selected, what would that title be?

### RUBRIC FOR ESSAY LINKING PHOTO TO VAN VORST'S TEXT

Category	Above Standard	Meets Standard	Approaches Standard	Below Standard	Score
Introduction	First sentence or two provides background information: early 1900s, social reform efforts, textile mills in Alabama, Lewis Hine's photograph, Van Vorst's book. Includes a clear and analytical thesis which identifies the major ways (at least two) in which the photo and text connect.	May fail to include one of the essential pieces of background information. Offers a clear and analytical thesis.	May fail to mention two pieces of background information. Thesis lacks clarity.	May fail to mention two or more pieces of background information. Thesis is a restatement of prompt without identifying any ways in which the photo and text connect.	
Body Paragraphs (there should be at least two)	Each starts with a topic sentence. All paragraphs contain substantive evidence that is clearly explained and meaningfully connected to the thesis. Discusses both the photo and the text.	One paragraph may be missing its topic sentence. Adequate evidence is cited, but it lacks sufficient development and/or clear connection to thesis. Discusses both the photo and the text in each paragraph.	One or more paragraph may be missing its topic sentence. Paragraphs, although not well developed, still bear a loose connection to thesis. Supporting evidence may be thin. Discusses both the photo and the text in each paragraph.	One or more paragraphs may be missing its topic sentence. Paragraphs offer little specific evidence and/or simply contain a list details from the photo and text without any (or very little) explanation. One of the paragraphs discusses only one of the two major components: photo or text.	
Conclusion	Doesn't repeat the thesis word-for-word but still link back to the major point/s. Answers the "so what?" question in a sophisticated way and wraps up the essay in a controlled fashion.	Doesn't repeat the thesis word-for-word and still links back to the major point/s. Attempts to answer the "so what?" question but may do so in a less comprehensive or convincing way.	Makes some effort to rewrite the original thesis. While attempting the answer the "so what?" question, statement/s fall short of complete development so thoughts lack clarity and/or relevance.	Repeats the thesis almost word-for-word. No closure provided in terms of answering the "so what" question (in a meaningful way)	