

# ★ Quicklook at Cotton Mill 1830

A roleplay and jigsaw activity which examines evidence of working conditions in an English cotton mill in about 1830. Once pupils have worked on examining evidence collaboratively they will hopefully be more adept at searching for further evidence. The class are divided in five groups.. Each group takes on one of five roles: Overseer, Child Worker, Adult Spinner, Mill Owner or Parent of Child Worker. Each group has a selection of evidence which they must examine to prepare a scene about life in the mill. Groups then present their scene and watch the other groups present theirs. They return to their same groups and work out questions to ask the other characters and each member copies these questions on the proforma.

Groups then jigsaw: they form new groups which contain one person from each role group. Individuals then answer questions in role in turn.

**You are the Overseer. Your job is to supervise the child factory workers and make sure they obey the rules. The more the children do, the more you get paid. Look at the sources on this page to help you get into your role.**

**Joseph Birley, Manchester factory owner, interviewed in 1832**  
 "There are isolated cases of children being treated badly in factories. Some are true, some exaggerated, some entirely false. It is not in the interest of the owners of factories to injure the persons they employ."

**William Cobbett: Political Register (November 1824)**  
 "In cotton spinning work these creatures are kept fourteen hours in each day..in the heat of between eighty to eighty-four degrees ..children are rendered deformed, and thousands die before the age of sixteen."

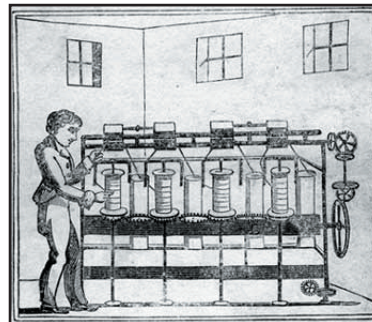
**Mark Best, an overseer describes the straps:**  
 "They are about a foot and a half long, and there is a stick at the end, and that end they beat with is cut into five or six thongs."

OVERSEER - QUESTIONS TO ASK TO - In your group you must find what conditions were like in the factories, and how the people listed below feel about these conditions.

ADULT SPINNER	
CHILD WORKER	
MILL OWNER	
PARENT OF CHILD WORKER	

**John Hall, overseer at a mill in Bradford, was questioned by the Parliamentary Committee:**  
 'At the top of the spindle there is a fly goes across and the child takes hold of the fly by the left hand and he throws the left shoulder up and the right knee inward and he has to stoop his head down to see what he is doing. All the children that I have seen that are made cripples by this work are bent in the right knee.'

Drawing of a spinning jenny



**Fines that could be imposed on spinners in Tydesley in 1823. From a pamphlet circulated by strikers:**

Offence	Fines
Any spinner found with his window open	1 shilling
Any spinner found dirty at his work	1 shilling
Any spinner found washing himself	1 shilling
Any spinner heard whistling	1 shilling
Any spinner being five minutes late after the bell rings	1 shilling
Any spinner having a little waste on his spindles	1 shilling
Any spinner being sick and cannot find another spinner (to replace him)	6 shillings

An engraving of child workers being punished. 1840

