

☆ Quicklook: The Factory Girl's Last Day

Developed at a project poetry workshop in 1996 by Jill Baker and Pat McGovern from Willowfield School in Waltham Forest and they drew all but one of the pictures. We have used this activity in English and History when looking at evidence about the conditions in mills at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Sadler was an MP and a reformer and the ballad is written to persuade. The project has other activities online about factory conditions and the industrial revolution.



Pictures for sorting and sequencing



All night with tortured feeling,
He watched his speechless child;
While close beside her kneeling,
She knew him not nor smiled.
Again the factory's ringing
Her last perceptions tried:
When from her straw-bed springing,
"Tis time!" she shrieked, and died!

It is a dark winter morning.
A father wakes up his child
three hours before sunrise.
The factory bell is ringing.

The child gets out of bed
but she is too tired to walk.
She asks her father to carry
her to the mill.

Long after sunset she has to
continue to work. Finally, she
has to pay a friend to do her
last hour of work. She lies
down beside her loom.

That night a chariot passed her,
While on the ground she lay;
The daughters of her master
An evening visit pay:
Their tender hearts were sighing
As negro wrongs were told, -
While the white slave lay dying,
Who earned their father's gold!

Simplified version of the story for
sorting and sequencing

All night long the dying child
is watched over by her
father until she dies.

On the way home the child
collapses and lies still. Her
fellow workers carry her to
her father.

Verses of the ballad for sorting and
sequencing.

Alas! What hours of horror
Made up her latest day;
In toil, and pain, and sorrow,
They slowly passed away:
It seemed as she grew weaker,
The threads the oftener broke,
The rapid wheels ran quicker,
And heavier fell the stroke.

"Father, I'm up, but weary,
I scarce can reach the door,
And long the way and dreary, -
Oh carry me once more!
To help us we've no mother:
And you have no employ;
They killed my little brother, -
Like him I'll work and die.

While she lay on the ground
a carriage went past. The
daughters of the factory
owner were inside. They
were going to a meeting on
the abolition of slavery.

plus extra information on ballad
characteristics