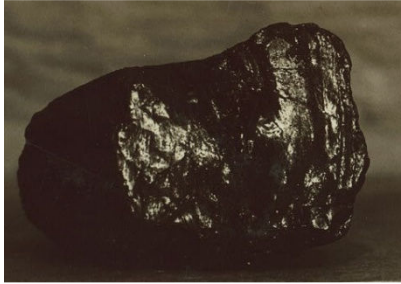


Student Handout 1

Mr. Coal's Story



Mr. Coal

Mr. Coal's Story, an appeal to end child labor in coal mines. (Originally told by the National Child Labor Committee to persuade Americans to support the regulation and elimination of child labor.)

Mr. Coal's Story

Our warm friend, Mr. Coal of Pennsylvania, tells us:

I lay snug and comfortable for many years, way down in the middle of a large mountain, until I grew into a great big coal.

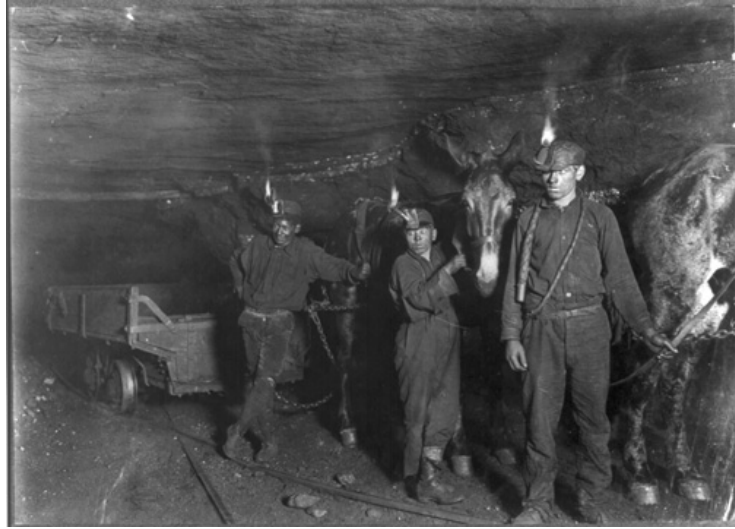


The Miners at Work

One day a sharp steel pick cut through the rocks and I was pulled down from my bed and fell to the ground. All was so dark, I could have seen nothing if it had not been for tiny lamps which two men wore in their caps. The men were miners, digging for coal.

My former neighbor, old Mr. Wise Coal, soon fell beside me. He used to tell about the great world outside, where everyone, to be really good, must make someone else happy. When he heard the picks he said, "We are going there now, and we will make some children and grownups warm and comfortable. But I am

sad when I think of the little boys who must help take us there. Watch to see what happens and you will understand."



Coal Car

A coal car, drawn by mules, came along. I thought they must be men, who threw us in and drove the mules; but on looking closely I found that one of them was a boy about 12 years old. My companion shook his head. "It is only half past seven o'clock in the morning. Boys of his age should be eating breakfast and getting ready for school," he said.

Driving through the mine we came to a big trap door. "When men work in mines, air is forced in to them from the outside," said old Mr. Wise Coal. "The trap doors must be kept closed so that the air will go where the men are working. Boys open and close these trap doors for the cars to pass from one chamber to the other. They are called trapper boys.



The Open Trap Door



The Lonely Trapper Boy

"Look back and see how lonely this one is" I heard him cough and tell one of the drivers that medicine didn't help him anymore. The mine was so damp, he always got a new cold."

The next trapper boy we passed was John. John wanted to go to school but his parents made him work. They didn't know that he could earn better wages later, if he went to school now. The trap door was the nearest thing to a blackboard he had, so he drew pictures on that. John liked birds, and couldn't see any out-of-doors, because it was after dark evenings when he left the mine. So he drew them on the trap door, and played they were alive and he wrote on the door, "Don't scare the birds!" and this was all the fun he had.



John

When we passed a place where the roof had caved in, old Mr. Wise Coal shuddered. "I hope no boys and men are buried there," he said, "they often get killed in that way."



Slate Fall

As we came out of the mine we met James. They call him "a greaser" because he has to keep the axles of the car greased so that they run smoothly. He had grease all over himself and his clothes.



Next we met Harry. He does odd jobs about the mine. When he first started at work, he wanted to go to school, but now he does not care. He is too tired to think about it, even.



Harry, A General Utility Boy



Coal Breaker

At last our car full of coal came to a building, called a "coal breaker." Here the coal was put into great machines, and broken into pieces the right size for burning.



The Breaker Boys at Work

Then the pieces rattled down through long chutes, at which the breaker boys sat. These boys picked out the pieces of slate and stone that cannot burn. It's like sitting in a coal bin all day long, except that the coal is always moving and clattering and cuts their fingers. Sometimes the boys wear lamps in their caps to help them see through the thick dust. They bend over the chutes until their backs ache, and they get tired and sick because they have to breathe coal dust instead of good, pure air.



Pennsylvania Breaker Boys

Hundreds and hundreds of boys work in the mines and in the breakers from early morning until evening, instead of going to school and playing outdoors.

Do you suppose the little fellows sitting all alone in the deep coal mine, or bending over the chutes, ever think of the merry children sitting around the burning coal?



The Children Round the Fire

This bright room is better than the dark mine. The happy talk is better than the silence. The warm fire glow is better than the cold.

Do you suppose that the happy children made warm by the coal ever think of the boys who helped to get it ready for them?

Do they think of the children who make medicine bottles in glass factories and cotton dresses in mills and tenement homes?

What can these children who play around the fire do to help the boys and girls who work in mines and factories? They can do this:

They can ask their fathers and mothers to make laws to help these other children. Fathers and mothers can make laws. They know how to make laws that will help children. They also know how to make sure that the laws are obeyed.

Sometimes fathers and mothers are so busy taking care of their own children-the children round the fire at home-that they forget the others-the children in mines and factories. But we must not let them forget the other children. The most important matter in the world is, that all the children --*all the children*-- shall grow up healthy and intelligent and good.

Credit: The Child Labor Bulletin. Vol 3 No 2, August 1914. NY: National Child Labor Committee. Images Courtesy of the Library of Congress.