

Name: _____

Date: _____

Student Handout 2-Report of the Department of Mines Excerpt (1908)

In 1907, a boy by the name of Patrick Kearney was killed in a mine accident. The excerpt from document below is a primary source. Read the information below, and use it to answer the follow-up questions.

One of the witnesses, John Wallace...was assistant foreman at the Greenwood Washery and also had charge of the machinery. He said that he did not know the age of the boy [Patrick Kearney], but that the Company had a certificate showing him to be 14 years of age. He had employed the boy and said that he appeared to be “about ten years of age.” ... In answer to further questioning, he stated that he thought the boy was 14 years of age and that he had taken his father’s word for it. He said, “he was kind of a small boy, but I thought he might be older than he looked.”...

The father of the boy, Thomas Kearney, stated that the boy was born June 18, 1898, and was killed when he was 9 years and 5 months old; that he was a large boy for his age. He said the boy had gone to work for the company September 6, 1907, after receiving a certificate from James J. Powell, of Minooka. Mr. Kearney took the boy to the Justice, and in answer to the question of the Justice regarding his age he stated, under oath, that he was 14 years old. The Justice had read the certificate to him and he knew perfectly well what he was doing.

Mrs. Kearney, the mother of the boy, said that she had advised getting the certificate, but did not understand much about it. She admitted that she knew it was not right to send him to work so young, but they needed the money....Her plea was that the family was large and they could not get along very well on her husband’s earnings....

The Department of Mines is of the opinion...that Justice James J. Powell should be prosecuted for issuing a certificate of employment age to a boy who was only a few months more than nine years of

age, and that the foreman, John Wallace, should also be prosecuted for employing a boy of such doubtful age. They should have known by the size and appearance of the boy that he was not fourteen years of age. The boy's father deserves punishment for swearing falsely to his son's age, but possibly the father is punished enough by the loss of the boy.

(Excerpt from Report of the Department of Mines of Pennsylvania. Harrisburg, PA: Harrisburg Publishing Co., 1908. pp. x-xii)

1. Using information from this excerpt, explain why child labor laws are important.

2. Do you think that children should have been allowed to work if they were under the age of 14 in order to help support their families? Explain why or why not.

3. Do you think that Justice James J. Powell deserves to be punished for authorizing a certificate with false information? Consider aspects such as the boy's appearance vs. his word that he was 14.
