Number #4 Victorian Era Jobs

Do Not Write On This Paper

(It will be used in other class periods)

Source 1: <http://www.victorianchildren.org/victorian-child-labor/>

**Coal Mines**

Steam was the number one source of energy during Victorian times. Steam powered everything from trains and steamships to factories that used steam to power their machines. In order to make steam you must have water and heat. To provide heat they had to burn coal, and lots of it. Therefore coal mines used a large part of the Victorian Child Labor force in the 1800’s.

The thought of using children for working the coal mines was very attractive to mining companies. Children were much smaller, enabling them to maneuver in tight spaces and they demanded a lot less pay. One of the on the job aspects of Victorian Child Labor was the dreadful working conditions. This was particularly magnified in the coal mines. It was dark in the mines making it hard to see and at times would cause permanent problems with sight from the constant strain on the eyes.

Due to a lack of proper ventilation, coal dust was very thick in the air. Considering that Victorian Children would work from 12 to 18 hours a day it is easy to see how respiratory problems could arise. There was constant noise, and rat infestation was very common in the mines. Some children developed permanent spine deformation from having to walk stooped over constantly. Explosions or cave-ins were an ever-present fear.

Due to the lack of safety awareness in the mines and all of Victorian child labor for that matter, Death was a constant and ever-present danger.

**Chimney Sweeps**

The life of a chimney sweep in Victorian times was nothing like what you see in Mary Poppins. It was a brutal, dreary existence for Victorian child chimney sweeps. Some were as young as 3 years old. Their tiny size made them a popular choice for going down the narrow chimney stacks.

A Victorian Child Chimney Sweep may have been the most dangerous job for children in the 1800’s, especially when the child first started doing the job. Being sent down the chimney the first several times would cause the child’s arms, elbows, legs and knees to be rubbed and scraped raw. At times their knees and elbows looked like there was no skin at all on them. The boss would then wash their wounds with salt water and send them down another chimney without sympathy.

After a time the child would develop calluses making their task a little more bearable. But the dangers of the job were only beginning. Falling was a major fear for chimney sweeps or getting stuck in the stacks also, both could cause death very easily. The constant breathing in of soot caused irreversible lung damage in many children. There were a few reported cases of children getting stuck in chimneys and no one even knowing it, leaving them to die alone from exposure or smoke inhalation or worse.

Source 2: <http://www.theemployable.com/index.php/2014/02/27/worst-jobs-of-the-victorian-era/>

**Worst Jobs in the Victorian Era**

Ok, so we all know that for a lot of people life in the Victorian era was grim to say the least… a quick flick through any Dickens novel will surely convince you of that. But for some, life was particularly ghastly, not least because of the wide range of truly awful career options which were open to the average working class person.

You may complain about your job and how terrible it is… but I guarantee it’s nowhere near as bad as these…

Leech Collector - As the name suggests, this is someone who collected leeches for their use in medical treatment, however the Leech Collector didn’t have a nifty “leech collecting gadget”… oh no all they had was their own blood. That’s right, a Victorian leech collector used themselves as bait to lure the leeches onto their skin. Aside from being a downright repulsive occupation with a meagre salary, the role often caused severe blood loss as well as exposure to all manner of grisly parasites and infections.

Resurrectionist - Certainly the most macabre “job” on our list, resurrectionists (a fancy term for body-snatchers) earned their living through the gruesome practice of stealing human remains from graveyards under contract of some of the Victorian era’s most celebrated physicians. Until 1832, the only supply of bodies available was those who had been executed, however physicians were fascinated with human dissection and as a result there was a constant demand for fresh specimens which led to the heyday of the body snatchers… at least the salaries were quite good…

Pure Collector - Whilst this job may not sound particularly gruesome, what we have here is a classic example of good old fashioned Victorian euphemistic thinking. A pure collector actually collected dog faeces from the streets and sold it on to tanners for use in the leather making process. Dog feces was a major component in the leather making process.

Matchstick-Maker - This was surely one of the worst jobs ever to have existed… not because the work was hard, dirty or unpleasant (which it was) but because of the atrocious illnesses that the chemicals involved almost invariably caused. The match-making process involved the use of white phosphorous which is highly poisonous and caused a condition amongst match-stick factory workers known as “phossy jaw”. The first symptoms of this hideous disease were a toothache which was swiftly followed by swelling of the gums and jaw, abscesses and a foul discharge- essentially the victims jawbone began to slowly rot. In order to stop the spread of the necrosis the only option was to remove the jawbone entirely… which at a time of no anaesthetic and little pain relief was just barely the lesser of two evils.

Tanner - A tanner is someone who processes animal hides into leather and in Victorian times this process was so gruesome and unspeakably filthy that it was possibly the least desirable role available at the time. The process is much too long to describe at every stage, however it included; collecting blood drenched animal hides from the butchers, placing the hides in lime pits to allow them to rot and ‘soften’ for several weeks and soaking them in a festering cocktail of dog feces and water… enough said!