

CHAPTER
9
Section 1

SKILLBUILDER PRACTICE *Forming Historical Questions*

In the years following the turn of the century, many women and children could find no other means of survival than to work long hours in unsafe conditions. Progressive reformers sought to end unfair treatment by employers. Read the passage below by a progressive reformer about child labor in Pennsylvania's anthracite coal-mining region. Think of questions that would lead you to find out more about the situation. Fill in the chart with a question for each category. (See Skillbuilder Handbook, p. R12.)

The slate is sharp so that the slate pickers often cut or bruise their hands; the coal is carried down the chute in water and this means sore and swollen hands for the pickers. The first few weeks after a boy begins work, his fingers bleed almost continuously and are called red tops by the other boys. Slate picking is not itself dangerous; the slate picker is, however, sometimes set at cleaning-up jobs, which require him to clean out shakers, the chute, or other machinery. . . .

Accidents that had occurred to boys in the breakers as well as underground were recounted to the Children's Bureau agents. One boy told of a friend who had dropped a new cap in the rollers and how, in trying to pull it out, his arm was caught, crushed, and twisted. The older brother of another boy, a jig runner, slipped while at work and his arm was caught in the jig [a sorting machine] and mashed. One boy told of the death of another while watching the dam beneath the breaker. He and some of the other breaker boys had helped to extricate the mutilated body from the wheels in which their companion was caught; he himself had held the bag into which the recovered parts of the dead body were put.

As reported by the boys, 42 percent of these accidents kept them from work less than two weeks. . . . According to the reports made to the Children's Bureau, no compensation was paid forty-four boys who were incapacitated for a period of two weeks or more as the result of injuries received while they were employed in the mines, although the Pennsylvania Compensation Law entitled them to receive it.

It would be superfluous to point out that in view of the hazards of mining, young boys should not be employed in the mines or around the breakers. Public opinion had already prohibited underground work in Pennsylvania and in most other states, and the federal government had imposed a penalty in the form of a tax if children under sixteen were employed in or about a mine. The real problem here, as in many other parts of the country, was how to secure the enforcement of the child labor laws that had been enacted.

*from U. S. Department of Labor, *Child Labor and the Welfare of Children in an Anthracite Coal-Mining District* (Washington, D. C.: Children's Bureau Publication No. 106, 1922).*

Your Questions
Who?
What?
When?
Where?
Why?
How?