UNDERSTANDING PRIMARY SOURCES

JUST THE FACTS

For many immigrants in the late 1800s and early 1900s, life in the United States was brutally difficult. What was it like for workers forced to toil in a sweatshop? Below is an excerpt from a first-person account published in a New York newspaper in 1909. Read it, then answer the questions.

Life in the Shop

by Clara Lemlich

The regular work pays about $6 a week. [The] girls have to be at their [sewing] machines at 7 o'clock in the morning, and they stay at them until 8 o'clock at night, with just one-half hour for lunch. . . .

There is just one row of machines that the daylight ever gets to—that is the front row, nearest the window. The girls at all the other rows of machines . . . have to work by gaslight, by day as well as by night. Oh, yes, the shops keep the work going at night, too. . . .

The shops are unsanitary—that's the word that is generally used, but there ought to be a worse one used. Whenever we tear or damage any of the goods we sew on, or whenever it is found damaged after we are through with it, whether we have done it or not, we are charged for the piece and sometimes for a whole yard of the material.

At the beginning of every slow season, $2 is deducted from our salaries. We have never been able to find out what this is for.

QUESTIONS

1. What is the title of the article?

   _____

2. Who wrote the article? _____
3. Has the author experienced the conditions she describes firsthand? How do you know? _____

   _____

4. What is the author's general view of the working conditions she describes? Explain. _____

   _____

   _____

5. What feelings are the workers likely to have experienced? _____

   _____

6. How many hours a day did the girls work?

   _____

7. How much were they paid?

   _____

8. Why do you think the author wrote the article?

   _____

   _____

9. Do you think the author made her case effectively? Explain. _____

   _____

   _____

10. Which details best help you understand the working conditions of the individuals described?

    _____

    _____

    _____

    _____

Uses: copy machine, opaque projector, or transparency master for overhead projector. Scholastic Inc. grants teacher-subscribers to *Junior Scholastic* permission to reproduce this Skills Reproducible for use in their classrooms. Copyright © 2009 by Scholastic Inc. All rights reserved.