

Then/Now: Child Labour & Sweatshops

1. Start-up Task:

What do you know about sweatshops? What are they and where do you think they exist? Do you think child labour is common in the world today?

2. Ten word summary:

In exactly ten words, describe what a sweatshop is.

3. Arguments for/against Sweatshops

Argument made	Is it for/against?	Your Response
<p>Sweatshop labour is better than the alternative. Those who work in sweatshops CHOSE to work there, so they must be the BEST option. Their other options are much worse (starvation, prostitution, etc.) Without them these people would be faced with something worse.</p>		
<p>“Consent” is not valid. We might think that they have chosen to work there, but maybe they had no choice, or the other options are so horrible that it isn’t really a choice at all.</p>		
<p>Boycotting it could result in something worse. If we boycott or end sweatshop labour, the factory would shut down and there would be no work, so they would be worse off than at the factory.</p>		

<p>Something is better than nothing. By <i>outsourcing</i> labour to poor countries, we are contributing some of our own wealth as a country to those poor countries' economies.</p>		
<p>"No one should have to work 17-hour days just so we can save a few dollars on clothes."</p>		
<p>"Better than the alternative" is not an excuse. Just because one thing is better than another does not make the better thing "good."</p>		
<p>Sweatshops are a natural part of industrialization. They were common in Industrial Britain, and helped us gain the workers' rights that we have today. So we are helping these countries to become industrialized by supporting sweatshops, and eventually their standards will be as good as ours.</p>		
<p>Sweatshops are not helping to solve issues of poverty. The wages are not high enough to end the cycle of poverty, and may actually decrease quality of life for workers.</p>		
<p>Businesses who do not use sweatshops will fail. They will have to use more expensive labour, sell their products for higher prices, and not make as much profit. People are not willing to pay more money if there are similar items from other companies for lower prices. This might make the company go out of business.</p>		

<p>Sweatshops are not necessary for industrialization. Just because it happened in Britain, doesn't mean it had to happen for the country to become industrialized. We have the technology to make working conditions better today so that this does not have to happen.</p>		
<p>When we buy items that were made in sweatshops, such as iPhones, it seems we are saying <i>"That's bad, but not as bad as me not having this phone."</i> Is this the outlook we should be taking?</p>		
<p>The price of the product doesn't have to go up to pay workers better wages. The companies could choose to use their profits to pay their workers more fairly.</p>		

4. Connections:

What are the similarities and/or differences between working conditions during the Industrial Revolution in Britain (factories, "worst jobs"), and working conditions throughout the world today (sweatshops, child labour, etc.)?

4. Follow-up Journal Response

What is your opinion on sweatshops? (Do you think they should exist / be banned / be supported / be left alone) Why do you feel this way?