



A Teacher's Guide to The Mill Children

An exhibit of art, music, film and narrative
inspired by the photographs by
Lewis W. Hine of child laborers at the Eclipse Mill

What was it like to be a child worker
in a mill 100 years ago?

In late August of 1911, Lewis Wickes Hine visited the Eclipse Mill in North Adams, Massachusetts to photograph child laborers on behalf of the National Child Labor Committee. Hine's photographs contributed to the social movement to reform laws for child and adult workers. Many children photographed in the Eclipse Mill by Hine were age 11 and 12 with the youngest being nine. A companion piece to the exhibit, *Child Labor at the Eclipse Mill*, was written by Joe Manning and provides historical information that will be useful to the teacher. In addition, the exhibit guide describes the art, film and music created for this show.

This guide is intended to be flexible in its use and adaptable for multiple grades and disciplines. Some of the activities take advantage of research on mills in North Adams, MA and Pownal, VT, however, all of the activities are relevant and adaptable to mills in other locations. Suggestions for websites that will guide you to resources close to your area are listed in the Resources section. The contents include: suggested learning activities for before, during and after viewing the exhibit; historical timelines; resources; connections to standards from the MA Curriculum Frameworks; and excerpts from the children's novel *Counting on Grace* by Elizabeth Winthrop.

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A Brill Gallery Production

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The Mill Children



Above: Lewis Hine photo of child workers at the Eclipse Mill in North Adams, MA. August, 1911 Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Right: Dawn Nelson, *Cotton and Smoke*, oil on loose canvas, 115 x 52 inches, 2011



Suggested Activities Before Viewing the Exhibit

1. Read the book or excerpts of *Counting on Grace*, a novel by Williamstown, MA author Elizabeth Winthrop. The book is about a twelve-year-old girl named Grace Forcier who is forced to leave school to work as a bobbin doffer in a cotton mill in North Pownal, VT. The story is written through the voice of Grace. With the help of their teacher, Grace and her friend, Arthur, write a letter to the National Child Labor Committee. As part of his work for them photographing child laborers around the country, Lewis Hine arrives in North Pownal and photographs the child workers in North Pownal. The author was inspired to write the story after she saw a photograph of a young girl by Hine. Hine's note about the photo reads "Anemic little spinner in North Pownal Cotton Mill, 1910". The girl was identified as Addie, and after conducting an initial search, Winthrop commissioned local historian Joe Manning to further research her story. To learn more about Manning's research, visit: <http://www.morningsonmaplestreet.com/addiesearch1.html>

For additional teacher guides to the novel as well as other resources, visit the author's website: <http://elizabethwinthrop.com/teachers/counting-on-grace-teachers-guide/>

Suggested excerpts are reprinted with the author's permission at the end of this guide.

Excerpt 1: Through Grace's voice, the author uses highly descriptive words to depict the sensory experience of the mill. After reading or listening to this excerpt, ask students: "What does Grace taste, smell, hear, see and feel?" Ask students to imagine the sensations that are described. Direct children to stand up and use their hands and feet to create the sounds and sensations of the weaving room.

Questions for discussion:

What health risks and dangers did the mill workers face?

Why did the children hide in the elevator?

What consequences could there be if the state inspector saw the children?

Excerpt 2: After church on Sunday morning, Grace searches for Arthur and finds him working secretly with the teacher, Miss Lesley, in the mill school.

Questions for discussion:

- Why were Arthur and the teacher sneaking lessons?
- How would you feel if you were not allowed to go to school?
- What would happen if children did not learn to read?
- What would happen if children were not allowed to use math?
- Why would the mill owners not want the children to be educated?

Excerpt 3: Grace meets Lewis Hine in the mill and she discovers his notebook. He asks her about the child workers and takes her photo. As the children read or listen to this excerpt, display the photograph of Addie Card.

<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/nclc/item/ncl2004001725/PP/>

Questions for discussion:

- Why does Grace lie about her age?
- Why are the lessons on Sunday a secret?
- Grace refers to Mr. Hine's "perfect little notebook". Why does the notebook make such an impression on her?
- Activity: Have each student prepare and personalize a "perfect little notebook" using small, spiral-bound notepads and entering the prompts from the "While Viewing the Exhibit" activity.



Addie Card photographed by Lewis Hine, North Pownal, VT, August, 1910.
Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Excerpt 4: Grace arranges for Lewis Hine to photograph the other mill children. As the children read or listen to this excerpt, display photos of other children photographed by Hine in the mills. Enter North Pownal, VT in the "Search this collection" field at:

<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/nclc/>

Questions for discussion:

- Grace is worried that Miss Lesley will get fired. What would cause that to happen?
- What do you think about the character of French Johnny? Why does he help Mr. Hine?
- Why would the mill owners want to keep the workers uneducated?
- How would the National Child Labor Committee use the photographs?
- Can photographs change history?

Lewis Hine photo of child mill workers in North Pownal, VT, 1910. Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress.



2. Observe, Listen, Sing: Dorsey Dixon was forced to leave school in the fourth grade to work in a cotton mill in South Carolina. His sister went to work as a spinner at age eight. This video is a montage of photos including many of child laborers taken by Lewis Hine with Dorsey Dixon performing his original song *Babies in the Mill*. Follow up with discussion about music as a catalyst for social change. Learn to sing the song.
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xNeBgpuNMSI>

Babies in the Mill (Lyrics to this version)

I used to be a factory hand when things were moving slow,
When children worked in cotton mills, each morning had to go.
Every morning just at five the whistle blew on time
And called them babies out of bed at the age of eight and nine.

Come out of bed, little sleepy heads,
And get your bite to eat.
The factory whistle's calling you,
There's no more time to sleep.

The children all grew up unlearned, they never went to school.
They never learned to read and write. They learned to spin and spool.
Every time I close my eyes, I see that picture still
When textile work was carried on with babies in the mill.

To their jobs those little ones was strictly forced to go.
Those babies had to be on time through rain and sleet and snow.
Many times when things went wrong their bosses often frowned.
Many times those little ones was kicked and shoved around.

Oldtimer can't you see that scene back through the years gone by
Those babies all went on the job the same as you and I
I know you're glad that things have changed while we have lots of fun
As we go in and do the jobs that babies used to run



William Oberst,
Mill Girl Standing Study,
gouache on gray paper,
6 x 11.5 inches, 2011

3. Research: Joe Manning’s website includes a gallery of photos taken by Lewis Hine at the Eclipse Mill in North Adams and his research about the children and adults in the photographs. <http://www.morningsonmaplestreet.com/northadams.html>

Activity: Mr. Manning has researched the history of six individuals photographed by Hine at the mill. Assign small groups to explore his research on one individual.

Questions for group research:

Name of Individual:

Age at time of photograph:

Job in the mill:

What methods did Mr. Manning use to get information?

What primary sources are included in this report?

What information did he find about this individual?

Do you recognize family, street or building names?

William Oberst, *Mill Girl*,
oil on linen, 50 x 40 inches,
2011



Suggested Activity While Viewing the Exhibit

Have each student carry a clipboard, paper and pencil or a “perfect little notebook” if they have read the third excerpt from *Counting on Grace*. Students should write the prompts on their notebook or paper prior to arrival.

Writing prompts:

1. Stand quietly and listen carefully to the music.
 - a. How does the music make you feel?
 - b. Write a list of at least five adjectives that describe the music.

2. Choose one painting to study further. Look closely at the painting.

Write responses to:

- a. What do you see? Use descriptive words. You may also make sketch of the painting in your notes.
- b. How do you feel when you look at this picture?
- c. How do you imagine the child or person shown in the painting is feeling?
- d. How old do you think the child or person is?
- e. What question would you like to ask the artist?
- f. How does the artist use color, lines, and imagery to portray the subject?



Dawn Nelson,
Grungy Vibrating Cathedral,
Oil on loose canvas,
83 x 95 inches,
2011

Suggested Activities After Viewing the Exhibit

Many of the following activities involve students in service-learning experiences. For resources on service-learning, visit the National Service-Learning Clearinghouse at: <http://www.servicelearning.org/>

Persuasive Writing: Have students identify a contemporary issue that concerns them. Write persuasive letters to authorities, officials or the media to advocate on behalf of the issue.

Photography Action Project: Have students walk around the school or neighborhood and take photographs of images that convey an issue of concern or problem. The teacher can keep the problem area unspecified or narrow to a concern such as graffiti, energy, litter, etc. Students conduct additional research about the problem. Students then articulate a message and decide on the best medium to communicate their message such as posters, PowerPoint, exhibit, etc.

Personal Stories: After viewing a digital photo collection of child laborers, have children select one child depicted in a photograph and create a 'Voki' with an avatar and script that imagines the identity and tells a personal story inspired by the child's image. http://www.voki.com/Voki_for_education.php

Animated History: Have children write a script and create an animation that tells historical facts about child labor in the United States or about the children photographed by Hine at <http://goanimate.com/>

Lewis Hine photo of child workers in the spinning room at the Cornell Mill in Fall River, MA. January, 1912. Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress.



Music as a Catalyst for Social Change: Explore contemporary music that relates to current social problems. Have students compose a song, rap, or spoken word piece about child laborers or another issue of concern to the students. Find or produce photographs that portray the concern. Create a PowerPoint slideshow using the photos and music. Upload it to YouTube or TeacherTube and show it to your school or via local television.

Traditional French Canadian Music: Explore the role of music in the lives of the immigrant mill workers. Mill families sang traditional folk songs from Quebec and played music on treasured fiddles and accordions. Music helped to preserve their language and culture and also provided entertainment and relief from the daily stresses. Research collections of traditional music and select pieces to learn and perform. Collaborate with local folk musicians to host a performance celebrating French Canadian folk music. Find information in the Resources section.

Research the History of Child Labor in the United States: Investigate the digital photo collection *Let Children Be Children: Lewis Wickes Hine's Crusade Against Child Labor* at the George Eastman House- http://www.geh.org/ar/letchild/letchil_sum00001.html Assign student groups to research the different industries that employed children. How do the children appear in the photos (health, clothing, hygiene)? Conduct an Internet search to learn more about the identified job. What did the job entail? What hours did they work? How much did they earn? Did they go to school? Was there an ethnic group associated with the job? What were the dangers inherent in the job? Identify the locations of the different sites on a map of the United States.

Research and Preserve Local History: Have students explore the website about the history of industrialization and immigration in North Adams created by Drury High School students: <http://sites.google.com/site/windowstohistorynorthadams/> Have students create a similar website using primary source documents and partnering with your local historical society.

Oral Histories: Have students interview local community residents who have memories of the mills. Create movies, audio recordings or books with the interviews to preserve their stories.

Global Child Labor Issues: Have students research current child labor issues around the world such as locations, types of jobs, working conditions, and organizations that are involved with the issue. Develop a service-learning project to raise awareness or provide resources to the cause.

Health Issues with Child Labor: In Lewis Hine's note to his photo of Addie Card, he refers to her as an "anemic little spinner". Have students research the causes of anemia, and other health conditions associated with child labor and/or poverty. Extend to a service-learning project that addresses local hunger or nutrition issues.

Additional topics for extension activities:

- Current labor and union issues
- History of public education and child truancy laws
- Contemporary human rights issues facing children- child soldiering, slavery, forced labor, drug couriering, sexual exploitation, child abuse
- Children's Rights- The Convention on the Rights of the Child
- The 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist Fire in New York City, 146 young females perished

TIMELINES

Excerpts from the timeline posted on the Child Labor Education Project website at:
http://www.continuetolearn.uiowa.edu/laborctr/child_labor/about/us_history.html

1832 New England unions condemn child labor

The New England Association of Farmers, Mechanics and Other Workingmen resolve that “Children should not be allowed to labor in the factories from morning till night, without any time for healthy recreation and mental culture,” for it “endangers their . . . well-being and health”

1836 First state child labor law

Massachusetts requires children under 15 working in factories to attend school at least 3 months/year

1842 States begin limiting children’s work days

Massachusetts limits children’s work days to 10 hours; other states soon pass similar laws—but most of these laws are not consistently enforced

1892 Democrats adopt union recommendations

Democratic Party adopts platform plank based on union recommendations to ban factory employment for children under 15

1904 National Child Labor Committee forms

Aggressive national campaign for federal child labor law reform begins

1938 Federal regulation of child labor achieved in Fair Labor Standards Act

For the first time, minimum ages of employment and hours of work for children are regulated by federal law

Excerpts from Education Timeline from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts website at:
www.mass.gov/?pageID=mg2subtopic&L=6&L0=Home&L1=State+Government&L2=About+Massachusetts&L3=Interactive+State+House&L4=Key+Events&L5=Education+Timeline&sid=massgov2

1852 School Attendance Law Massachusetts is the only state to require school attendance prior to the Civil War. It requires children between ages eight and fourteen to attend three months of school. Towns rarely enforced this rule, but it popularizes the norm of schooling.

1873 School Year Extended, Enforced by Truant Officers The school year in Massachusetts expands to twenty weeks per year. State truant officers are hired to enforce attendance, towns are required to comply.

RESOURCES

Article about Joe Manning's research about people photographed by Lewis Hine:
[The Memory Keeper](#) by Justin Shatwell in *Yankee Magazine*, March/April, 2011.

Child Labor in the Cotton Mills of the American South- Lesson plans for grades 7-12 in ELA and Social Studies including oral history projects, use of primary source documents, and action projects against contemporary child labor
<http://www.lib.unc.edu/stories/cotton/instructors/index.html>

Child Labor Public Education Project

http://www.continuetolearn.uiowa.edu/laborctr/child_labor/materials/k-12.html

K-12 teacher lesson plans available in PDF format *Child Slavery*, *Child Soldiers*, *Child Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation and Hazardous Child Labor*

Cornell University Child Labor Resources at the Catherwood Library and the Kheel Center. Excellent website with multiple resources- links to other sites, teaching materials, literature, history

<http://guides.library.cornell.edu/content.php?pid=37294&sid=274313>

Counting on Grace: Elizabeth Winthrop, author website

<http://elizabethwinthrop.com/2010/03/counting-on-grace/>

<http://elizabethwinthrop.com/teachers/counting-on-grace-teachers-guide/>

Joe Manning's website-

Lewis Hine Project

<http://www.morningsonmaplestreet.com/lewishineold.html>

Lewis Hine photos from the Eclipse Mill

<http://www.morningsonmaplestreet.com/northadams.html>

Library of Congress- National Child Labor Committee Collection Photographs by Lewis Hine. This collection can be searched for photos in a specific location.

<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/nclc/>

Library of Congress photos of child workers at Eclipse Mill in North Adams- enter Eclipse Mill in the "Search this collection" field at the url address above.

The Canadian Society for Traditional Music

<http://www.yorku.ca/cstm/resources.htm>

The Children's Rights Information Network

<http://www.crin.org/>

The History Place: Child Labor in America, 1908-1912 Photographs by Lewis W Hine with original captions

<http://www.historyplace.com/unitedstates/childlabor/>

The Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage
<http://www.folklife.si.edu/>

The Smithsonian Folkways Tools for Teaching
http://www.folkways.si.edu/tools_for_teaching/introduction.aspx

Selected Connections to Standards from the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks

**English Language Arts & Literacy: College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards,
Pre-K–5 and 6 -12**

Reading

1. Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
10. Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.

Writing

1. Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
3. Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.
6. Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with others.
7. Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.
10. Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

Speaking and Listening

1. Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
3. Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.
Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas
5. Make strategic use of digital media and visual displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of presentations.

The PreK–12 Standards for the Arts in Music

- 1. Singing.** Students will sing alone and with others a varied repertoire of music.
- 2. Reading and Notation.** Students will read music written in standard notation.
- 3. Playing Instruments.** Students will play instruments, alone and with others, to perform a varied repertoire of music.
- 4. Improvisation and Composition.** Students will improvise, compose, and arrange music.
- 5. Critical Response.** Students will describe and analyze their own music and the music of others using appropriate music vocabulary. When appropriate, students will connect their analysis to interpretation and evaluation.

The PreK–12 Standards for the Arts in Visual Art

- 1. Methods, Materials, and Techniques.** Students will demonstrate knowledge of the methods, materials, and techniques unique to the visual arts.
- 2. Elements and Principles of Design.** Students will demonstrate knowledge of the elements and principles of design.
- 3. Observation, Abstraction, Invention, and Expression.** Students will demonstrate their powers of observation, abstraction, invention, and expression in a variety of media, materials, and techniques.
- 4. Drafting, Revising, and Exhibiting.** Students will demonstrate knowledge of the processes of creating and exhibiting their own artwork: drafts, critique, self-assessment, refinement, and exhibit preparation.
- 5. Critical Response.** Students will describe and analyze their own work and the work of others using appropriate visual arts vocabulary. When appropriate, students will connect their analysis to interpretation and evaluation.

The PreK–12 Standards for the Arts Connections Strand

- 6. Purposes and Meanings in the Arts.** Students will describe the purposes for which works of dance, music, theatre, visual arts, and architecture were and are created, and, when appropriate, interpret their meanings.
- 7. Roles of Artists in Communities.** Students will describe the roles of artists, patrons, cultural organizations, and arts institutions in societies of the past and present.
- 10. Interdisciplinary Connections.** Students will apply their knowledge of the arts to the study of English language arts, foreign languages, health, history and social science, mathematics, and science and technology/engineering.

History & Social Sciences

World History Standards

Industrial Revolution and Social and Political Change in Europe, 1800-1914

WHII.5 Identify the causes of the Industrial Revolution. (H, E)

- A. the rise in agricultural productivity
- B. transportation improvements such as canals and railroads

- C. the influence of the ideas of Adam Smith
- D. new sources of energy such as coal and technological innovations such as the steam engine

WHII.6 Summarize the social and economic impact of the Industrial Revolution. (H, E)

- A. the vast increases in productivity and wealth
- B. population and urban growth
- C. the growth of a middle class
- D. problems caused by urbanization and harsh working conditions

WHII.7 Describe the rise of unions and socialism, including the ideas and influence of Robert Owen and Karl Marx. (H, E)

WHII.8 Describe the rise and significance of antislavery sentiment in Britain, including the abolition of the slave trade by the British Parliament in 1807, the abolition of slavery within the British Empire in 1833, and the role of various antislavery societies. (H)

WHII.9 Explain the impact of various social and political reforms and reform movements in Europe. (H, C, E)

- A. liberalism
- B. child labor laws, and social legislation such as old age pensions and health and unemployment insurance
- C. the expansion of voting rights

United States History I Standards

USI.28 Explain the emergence and impact of the textile industry in New England and industrial growth generally throughout antebellum America. (H, E)

- A. the technological improvements and inventions that contributed to industrial growth
- B. the causes and impact of the wave of immigration from Northern Europe to America in the 1840s and 1850s
- C. the rise of a business class of merchants and manufacturers
- D. the roles of women in New England textile factories

United States History II Standards

USII.5 Explain the formation and goals of unions as well as the rise of radical political parties during the Industrial era. (H, E)

- A. the Knights of Labor
- B. the American Federation of Labor headed by Samuel Gompers
- C. the Populist Party
- D. the Socialist Party headed by Eugene Debs

***COUNTING ON GRACE* excerpts**

**by Elizabeth Winthrop, First Yearling Paperback Edition, August, 2007.
Reprinted with the author's permission.**

Excerpt 1: pages 35-38, 46

I'll never fall asleep, I think, but the next thing I know Delia is pinning up my braids when I'm only half-awake.

She drops her old mill smock over my head.

"Remember today-right for waste," she says putting that hand in the empty pocket. She tucks a kerchief in my left hand and shoves it into the other one. "Left for lint. That's to remind you to clear the cotton from your nose and throat. Don't mix them up or you'll be sorry."

She leans down to look into my face. "Grace, every second. Pay attention."

I've been in the mill lots of times.

Summers ever since I was nine, I've been cooking the hot meal for Mamère and Papa and Delia and taking in the dinner pails in the middle of the day. Delia let me push her bobbin dolly. I played mumblety-peg or roll the bobbin with Dougie and Bridget and Felix when he was a summer sweeper boy in the spinning room. And grease skating. That's the best. Thomas invented that game. Too bad he can't play it no more with his twisted foot.

With all the oil dripping off the machines, bare feet slide around easy. The boys draw a line at the end of one alley between the frames where French Johnny can't see us, and we run and set our legs into a long slide. I'm skinny for my age and I've got big feet, but I can go the farthest 'cause I know how to keep myself low to the floor. Sometimes you slip and fall. That's the chance you take.

But now I'm here to work, not play.

The air in the mills is stuffy and linty and sweaty at the same time 'cause all day long water sprays down on the frames from the little hoses on the ceiling. Wet keeps the threads from breaking. The windows are shut tight even in the summer. You don't get to breathe too deep for fear of what you might be sucking down your throat.

People complain about the noise, but it's not so bad in the spinning room. The belts above our heads slap and the big roll drives turn and bobbins spin like a thousand bees buzzing. You get used to it so you almost miss it when you step outside. The world seems too quiet all of a sudden.

The weaving room is the worst. In there you get a pounding sound every time a beam slaps into place. And there are a hundred beams slapping at once and the whole floor shakes and jumps. Most of the people who work at the weaving go deaf early on. That's why I say Delia should stay in the spinning room even if she won't make as much money.

You're not supposed to work in the mill until you're fourteen, but visiting is fine. French Johnny likes us kids going in and out all the time. He says, that way we get used to the work.

The only people you have to worry about are the state inspectors. When French Johnny blows the whistle, all the kids in the mill, even the ones just visiting, know to run as fast as we can so he can hide us in the elevator that carries the cotton between the floors. The inspector always stops in at the front office and dawdles around there for a while so us kids have time to hide. Seems to me he don't really want to fin us. We skitter across the room like those big cockroaches that come up through the floorboards in the summertime. Our mothers make a wall out of themselves to hide us.

It gets hot in that old elevator and the inspector can take hours to look through the mill top to bottom. A couple of kids fainted last August and French Johnny had to throw cold water on them when he slid open the metal doors.

I didn't feel so good myself, but I didn't say a word.

"You look kind of green," Pierre Gagnon said to me when we filed out.

"Green Grace, green Grace," Felix shouted and everybody called me that for a while. When nobody was looking I smacked Felix hard on the top of his head. By the time he turned around I was gone. I've got fast feet, fast hands and fast fingers.

Now I'm really going to need them.

By midday break my entire body is vibrating from trying to learn everything at once. The women gather in one corner of the spinning room to eat with us doffers passing in and out of their circle.

It feels like I've got to clear the lint out of my throat before my dinner can make its way down so I stand to the side, hawking and spitting into the handkerchief. Soon my mouth burns raw from working so hard.

"Don't bother," Dougie's older sister Bridget tells me. "Your food will taste like cotton no matter what you do."

I settle myself near Arthur. I can't tell which is shaking harder, my body or the floor we're sitting on. In the weave room above our heads, the seven hundred looms with their slapping shuttles march along in regular time just like an army on the move. Up there, they take their break in shifts so the looms never shut down.

Excerpt 2: pages 69-73

Miss Lesley nods to Arthur and he pulls out the paper and smooths the wrinkles he made when he crunched it up.

“Read it to her,” Miss Lesley says.

“Are you practicing your writing?” I ask.

“Grace, hush for once in your life and listen.”

It’s a letter. Arthur’s doing the writing. It goes this way.

*To Miss Anna Putnam, National Child Labor Committee, Vermont Chapter,
Bennington, Vermont.*

Dear Madam,

*This is to inform you that there are underage children working in the
cotton mill in the town of North Pownal, Vermont. These children range in
age from eight to thirteen. They are employed in the following dangerous
tasks.*

It stops there.

“That’s as far as we got,” Arthur says. “Before you barged in.”

“So now you can help us, Grace.”

My brain is whirling around. My feet start shifting under the desk.

“What is that child labor comm---thing?”

“They investigate places where children are not supposed to be working because they are too young. Believe it or not, there are laws against child labor. They’re just not enforced,” Miss Lesley says.

“But we need to work. For the money.” I can hear Mamère’s voice speaking right through my lips.

“Yes, Grace. But you also need your education. Then when you get older, you’ll have a job that makes much more money than you’ll ever get working in the mill.”

“Stop arguing,” Arthur says to me. “You wanna leave?”

I don’t. This is more interesting than reading *La Justice* to Pépé for the third time this week. Or doing laundry with Mamère. Or weeding.

I’ll help them write their dumb old letter. What difference does it make? When that inspector comes, we’ll just hide in the elevator the way we always do until he leaves the premises. That’s a fancy word Mr. Wilson uses for the mill.

“So back to the letter. What jobs do children do in the mill?”

“Doffing,” I say.

“Besides doffing,” Says Miss Lesley.

“Sweeping,” says Arthur. “And carrying the bobbin boxes. They’re heavy.”

“Good. Write that down. What else, Grace?”

I’m thinking hard. This is like a test and I want to do well on it. “Some of the boys are in the warping room.”

Arthur writes.

“And what about Thomas?” Miss Lesley asks.

“He was fooling around at the time,” I tell her. “He was standing too close to that gearbox.”

“More accidents happen because of the number of children working in the mill. But Thomas was legally old enough to be working so we’ll forget him for now. What else?”

“We clean the machines on Saturdays. And some other times if the roving gets too bunched up. Delia’s got scars on her fingers from the cleaning hook.”

“Perfect,” says Miss Lesley, and I smile. I’m passing the test. “Arthur, put down machine maintenance.” Then she writes out that big word for him so he can copy it.

“Why aren’t you writing the letter to the committee place?” I ask Miss Lesley.

“She’ll get fired if they find out it’s coming from her,” Arthur says, and rolls his eyes at me as if everybody is supposed to know that. “You better not tell.”

“Who will fire her?”

“The mill owners,” Arthur spits. “They own the mill school.”

“Hush, Arthur,” says Miss Lesley. “Nobody’s going to be firing me as long as we keep this quiet. Now sign it this way.” She writes out another big word for him to copy. It says *Anonymous*.

“What does that mean?” I ask.

“It means the person writing the letter don’t wish to be known,” Arthur says. He acts like that’s something he knew all along, but I bet Miss Lesley told him that.

“Doesn’t wish to be known,” says Miss Lesley. She’s always correcting our ways of speaking, but we don’t remember from one time to the next.

She reads the letter over, folds it into an envelope and puts a stamp on it. “I’ll mail this next week when I take the trolley down to Massachusetts to see my sister. That way nobody in this town will see it going out. Especially Mr. Dupree, the postmaster. He’s the nosiest person in town.”

“Except for Madame Boucher,” I say.

We sit awhile like we got nowhere to go.

“Arthur is staying for a lesson, Grace. You’re welcome too if you want.”

I do. We read a story in *Appleton’s Reader* ‘cause Arthur still has the soldier book. Miss Lesley directs me to read a poem called “The Brown Thrush” by Lucy Larcom.

When I start walking around so’s I can read better, Miss Lesley opens her mouth to say something, but she shuts it again. Maybe ‘cause this ain’t real school she decides for once that it don’t matter what my feet are doing.

When I’m done she says, “Do you know who Miss Larcom was, Grace?”

I shake my head.

“She worked in the spinning room in the mill in Lowell, Massachusetts, when she was your age. Fifty years ago. She ended up writing books. You can do that too. As long as you have an education.”

Excerpt 3: pages 111- 118

Chapter 17

The Flash

The man starts to unpack his equipment. He must be stronger than he looks to be lugging all this stuff on and off trains and up three flights of stairs to the spinning room. He slides a leather pouch off his shoulder and lowers it to the ground ever so slowly as if it's got some kind of treasure inside. Then he unpacks a wooden box with a tube that points straight out of the middle. I can read the name on it and it has the same first letters as mine. Graflex, it says. He props Mr. Graflex up on top of a spindly-looking set of legs splayed out in three directions like a dog trying to stop itself on a hill. Then he comes over to me.

"My name is Lewis Hine," he says, and sticks out his hand. The ends of his fingers are stained all brown-yellow the way my P  p  's were from his cigarettes. I drop into a curtsy. The mill is a strange place to be curtsying, but I've got two new cuts on the top of my right hand and one on the inside and I don't need to stir them up.

His hat tilted to the side, he leans over close, but I pull away quick. He's a strange one. It turns out he is just asking my name. Imagine that. A grown man wanting to know my name.

"Grace," I say, my voice pitched proper so he can hear it through the buzzing in the room.

"How old are you?"

This is a trick question and I know the answer just fine. "Fourteen," I say without a blink.

"Really? You don't look that old. You must be about forty-eight inches tall."

"How do you know?" He talks to me easy the way Arthur does so it don't feel strange to be asking him questions, I can see Arthur out of the corner of my eye watching us the whole time and I like that, for once, Arthur don't know what's going on and I do.

"I measure you against my vest buttons. You come up to number three. That makes you four feet tall."

Now why would this man care how tall I am? Maybe the head office wants to know the size of the workers. I hope that's not some new way of figuring out how old we are.

"What are you going to do to me?" I ask.

"Take your picture, that's all. Have you ever had your picture taken?"

"Will it hurt?"

"No, Grace. There will be a flash for a second, which will make your eyes sparkle because the room will be a thousand times brighter than it's ever been before. Don't blink if you can help it. Now I need you to stand here," he says, and sets me up in front of Marie.

I lean against her and rest my arm on her thread board. When I look up, a handle's popped up out of the top of Mr. Graflex and Mr. Hine is peering down inside like he's looking for something. The tube sticking out has a big old eye at the end of it and that's sliding out toward me and then moving away again. I stick out my tongue at it and when he looks up again he's chuckling to himself. So he must have seen me, even though he

was staring down into Mr. Graflex's innards. He goes around to the front of the camera and flips a little lever no bigger than a lapette right on the edge of the eye.

I walk over to watch.

"Grace, I meant you to stay by the frame," he says. "Now I'll have to focus again."

I reach out and touch the black folds that push the eye back and forth, "My father's accordion looks like this."

"Those are the bellows," he says. "Now, when you go back to the machine don't stand so close. I don't want you to hurt yourself."

I laugh. "Marie won't hurt me," I tell him. "She's my good girl."

He looks confused.

"My frame. You've got Monsieur Graflex and I've got Mademoiselle Marie."

"You don't miss much, do you, Mademoiselle Grace," he says, and he's smiling again.

"No, I don't," I say. I wish my mother would tell me something like that. "What's in your pocket?"

He glances around nervously.

"Don't worry. French Johnny ain't paying no attention," I tell him. "He's working on Delia's clearing boards. She's my sister and she's got two of the worst frames in the room. What's in your pocket?" I ask again.

He slides out the most perfect little notebook I've ever seen and a pencil. "I'm taking notes."

"About me?"

"Yes. Your name and height and the age you say you are."

"You can take notes in your pocket?"

"It's a trick I learned a long time ago. I keep the pencil pressed against the paper pressed against my leg bone. Most times I can read what I've written. Can you read?"

"Sure. I can count and spell too. Give me the little book and I'll show you." He pulls it out and hands it to me. I squat down to write my name with his nubby pencil, but just like he said, it's there already. Miss Lesley would tell him his writing is nothing but a messy scribble, but I can make it out. *Grace, 48 inches, says she's 14.* He's been doing these notes the whole time we've been talking with his hand hidden in his pocket.

"How many sides do you doff?" he asks. He's pulling a black square thing out of his shoulder pouch.

"Twelve."

"That's a lot."

"My mother is top spinner and she's got six frames. Six times two makes twelve sides. One hundred and thirty-six bobbins to a side times twelve makes one thousand six hundred and thirty-two."

He looks surprised by how high I can count. "How many of you kids work in the mill?"

"About twenty or so."

"Put down their names and ages for me," he says. He's already figured out how to make his voice cross under the noise in the room.

Now he's opening the back of the camera, sliding in the metal square from his pouch, and I can tell his hands know what they're doing. He's as fast with his picture-taking machine as Mamère is with her frames.

Arthur, I write. *12, Dougie. 10.* He just started last week. Henry told us it put Miss Lesley in one of her bad moods when French Johnny come for him. *Briget. 13.* Her name looks funny but I keep going. The little pencil keeps digging into the cut on the inside of my hand, but I pay no mind. My letters are slanting the way Miss Lesley likes but each one takes such a long time. If Arthur was the one doing the writing, he'd be finished by now.

"You go to school?" Mr. Hines asks.

"Not no more. But Miss Lesley gives me and Arthur lessons on Sundays." Now I'm the one checking to see who's listening to us. "I won't tell about your pocket notes if you don't tell about my schooling."

"Deal," he says. "I'd like to meet this Miss Lesley." Now he's shaking some white powder like flour onto a flat box on the floor.

"The school's up the hill," I tell him. I tuck the notebook deep into the folds of my skirt because I can feel Mamère poking her head around ever time she gets to the end of a row. Edwin is down ready to be doffed and Thérèse is going to be right behind. Looks like I'll be working through the break. But I don't care right now. I love the little notebook so much I want to steal it.

"Grace, do you know a boarding house in town where I can spend the night?"

"We take boarders," I say, and my mind is racing ahead. This man with his tie and his suit, he looks richer than the other ones who stay in Pépé's bed. "But it's one dollar," I shout louder than I mean to. He don't seem to blink at the price, but the light is reflecting off his glasses so I can't really see his eyes. "And you have to pay before you eat."

"That'll be fine. Where do you live?"

"Up on French Hill. The Forcier place. Everybody in town knows where it is." I want to turn somersaults. Won't Mamère be pleased when she finds out. A whole dollar coming into the house 'cause of me.

"Time to give it back," he says with his hand out. He means the notebook.

"I haven't written all the names yet."

"I can get the rest of them later." He's talking fast now, his voice close to my ear. "Grace, I want to take a picture of all the kids in the mill. Can you get them to meet me after work?"

"Where?" He talks to me as if we are both workers and we have a job to do. Together.

"Outside the mill gates. Can you do that?"

"Sure," I say with a shrug, but I'm not sure. We all scatter like bugs when the mill bell rings. I'll make Arthur help me.

French Johnny is starting down the row toward us.

"Give the notebook back now."

"I wish I had one of these," I say, but I hand him the little book and it disappears quick into his pocket. He sets me back up in the same place, leaning against Marie.

French Johnny and Mamère almost crash into each other at the end of the row and now they're both headed our way.

“Three of my frames are waiting on Grace,” Mamère says loudly. “You’re taking too much time, mister. “

Mr. Hine ain’t looking at me. He’s staring back down into the hood at the top of the camera and making that eye scoot forward and back again. Finally it stops. We stare at each other. I can see a little tiny me in the eye at the end of the tube and for a second, this scared feeling fills up my throat.

“Stand away, all of you,” he says to the others, and his chin is tucked so far down that his voice sounds like it’s coming from under a rock.

Mamère and French Johnny pull off to the side as if the three-legged dog with its funny box head might bite them. I’m glad I’m resting against Marie. She makes me feel safe.

“Hold very still, Grace.” Mr. Hine pulls a black square thing straight up from the back of the camera just as he calls to me in a sharp voice, “Keep your eyes open as long as you can.”

“Don’t you hurt her---“ I hear my mother say, and the eye of the camera opens wide suddenly as if it means to gobble me up. Then everything happens at once. With one hand he throws a match onto the powder while he squeezes a black bulb at the end of a cord with the other. There’s a flash and everything goes white like something has blown up right in the middle of my eyeballs. Smoke tickles my nose. Inside my closed eyes, I can see circles floating out wider and wider from the middle black dot. That’s the way an echo would look if you could draw it, I think.

“What the devil was that?” roars French Johnny.

“Grace, open your eyes,” My mother shouts in my ear, shaking me all the while. “She’s blind, she can’t see.”

“She’s fine,” says Mr. Hine, his voice near now, and I feel his hand come to rest on the top of my head. “Don’t worry, Mrs. Forcier.”

I like them all squabbling over me for that moment, but I know I can’t wait no longer so I open my eyes. First I see something that looks like the ghost of Mr. Hine hunched over his camera just at the moment when he squeezed that bulb and the light flashed. But he’s not there no more. He’s right beside me talking over my head to French Johnny. The ghost picture fades and next, I make out Arthur, who’s standing by his frame for real. He’s mouthing some words at me over and over again, and pointing at Mr. Hine’s back.

“He’s the one,” Arthur’s saying.

And suddenly I know what he means.

Mr. Hine is the answer to our letter.

Excerpt 4: pages 119-124

Chapter 18 The Group Picture

Mamère cuffs me on the head when she finds I didn't go blind. I barely feel it, but there is no reason to hit me. I was just doing what French Johnny and Mr. Hine told me to do.

When Mr. Hine says he only has a couple more pictures to take, French Johnny tells him to pack up his equipment and move on out. It was the flash and the smoke that scared French Johnny the most. Fire can gobble up a mill in no time 'caus there's so much to burn. All that cotton dust in the air and the threads whirling around just waiting for some little spark to light on them.

And suddenly, like things clicking into place in the back of my brain, I remember Mr. Wilson getting on the train that morning. So French Johnny was in charge and he's the one who let in Mr. Hine. And if the mill had burned down when Mr. Wilson was away then fat French Johnny was going to be in a big barrel of trouble.

"That man is *fou, complètement fou*," mutters Mamère.

I stop in my tracks to tell her the good news.

"Mr. Hine is boarding with us tonight. He knows he's got to pay before he eats."

"Well, that'll make up some of the money he stole from our paycheck fooling with you," she says.

Here is the big surprise. "It'll make up more than you think, Mamère," I say. "I told him he had to pay a dollar and he said fine. He'd be there."

She stares at me with a little look that says, Well, Grace, sometimes maybe I *can* count on you. She don't say it out loud, but her face says it. At least that's what I decide to think.

When Arthur passes me in the row, he says, "I was right, wasn't I? He's the one."

"He wants to get all the kids together after work. To take a picture. You tell them?"

"Where?"

I have to think fast. "Around the front side between the big door and the little hill." The mill owners are the only ones who ever use that front door.

Arthur nods and moves away quick when his mother waves to him.

It ain't till later when I am catching up with my doffing that I think of something terrible. If Arthur is right about Mr. Hine being the answer to the letter, then that committee might shut down the mill and we won't have jobs no more. And this Mr. Hine is spending the night in our house, in Pèpé's bed. What if he tells Mamère what he's trying to do?

He won't tell Mamère. He'll just make secret notes in his little book.

Yes, he will. He'll tell her and she'll order him out of the house.

So what? Long as we got his dollar who cares about Mr. Hine?

But I like him. I want to talk to him more. I want to see if he'll give me a notebook to write in. And what if he tells Mamère about the letter?

Who cares about the letter? It was signed with that long word. Miss Lesley said nobody would ever guess who wrote it.

Mamère will know. She knows Miss Lesley wants to keep us kids out of the mill. And she hates her. If she gets Miss Lesley fired, than I can't go to school no more.

All this thinking is what my bad brain does. It makes me forget where I am, so sure enough Edwin's clearing board fills up and ten ends in a row go down. I yell to Mamère, who throws the shipper handle with such a look and shoves me aside the way she does when she wants to piece up fast as possible.

Mr. Hine's dollar is getting used up before it even hits our kitchen table. After that, I shut my brain down. I don't let myself think about anything but counting bobbins. Even so there is no way to make up all the time lost on Mamère's hank clock and there is nobody to blame for that but me.

When the closing bell goes, I scoot over to Arthur and we race doen the stairs before anybody can stop us.

Mr. Hine is waiting around the corner of the mill when Arthur and I lead the pack of kids past the gate and down a little path.

"Where are you all going?" the guard yells after us.

"To play a game," I yell back, and he don't pay us no mind after that.

"Grace," Mr. Lewis Hine says first thing. "I need you to help me." Just like we are old friends and I've been helping him for years. The others stare at me in surprise. This man needs Grace, the bumbling left-handed doffer, who's always in trouble? they're thinking.

"Yes, Mr. Hine," I say smartly.

"Is everybody here?"

I look around and count. Seventeen. "Just about. As many as Arthur and I can get." Delia's not here, but that's fine with me. She'll be helping take Mamère's mind off me.

"I'll do the boys first. It settles them down," he says in a low voice as he unpacks Mr. Gravlax from his carrying box. He has a hurrying nature to him and I know why. If he gets caught with that camera again anywhere near the mill, he'll probably get arrested. "Arrange them against the brick wall between that door and the window, shortest in the front. I'll want their names and ages before they leave."

The only reason the boys pay me any mind is 'cause they aren't sure about this man and they are specially careful around the camera. But they do keep horsing around and falling over one another and shifting places. Their hats are all skewed funny. Hubert and Pierre Gagnon lounge about with their arms around each other's shoulders and their chins stuck out, pretending this picture-taking happens every day. Felix stands in front with his arms crossed and his legs spread, looking like *he* owns the mill. Arthur sets himself up in back, acting as if he's the only person in the world, just the way he does when he's got a book in his hand. He stands straight up at attention and waits with a frown on his face like a soldier boy about to be shot.

When Mr. Hine comes up behind me, he uses his voice to still them. Maybe he was a teacher before he started the picture-taking business 'cause a bunch of kids don't seem to bother him one bit.

"I'm going to count backwards from three," he explains to the boys. "Once I've focused the lens, you all must stay absolutely still. You'll see me pull a black shade out

of the side of the camera. That's the dark slide. At that moment, the negative is ready to be exposed. Once I squeeze the little black bulb with my right hand, you'll see me push that shade back in. Then you can relax."

They nod, serious now, as if they understand one word he's saying.

"Are you all ready?"

They take up their positions. He rearranges Julien to stand in back of Dougie and this time they stay put.

"It's not going to hurt them, is it?" Bridget asks me, her hands up shielding her eyes.

"Nah," I say like I know all about it. "He's not even using the flash this time the way he did with me."

Just as he said, he pulls the slide out and slams it back in so quick that nobody knows he's all done and they stay frozen.

"Done, boys," he says with his notebook out now. "Starting in the back row." He points at Arthur. "I want your name, or age, your job and how long you've worked in the mill."

"Is this for the head office?" Hubert asks.

Mr. Hine don't answer the question 'cause he's too busy scribbling down *Arthur Trotter, age 12, doffer, 3 months.*