Best Practice: Assembly Line

by: Jordan Rankin

When introducing a unit on the Industrial Revolution, this Assembly Line activity serves as a great way to get students involved in a ‘hands on’ approach to history.

Procedures:

Stage 1: Cottage Workshop

-without any mention of starting a new history unit, tell your students a variation of “These classroom walls are too bland. They need some color so we will draw flowers.”

-The initial goal of this first drawing activity is artificially create a cottage workshopthat was the most common mode of manufacturing prior to the Industrial Revolution.

-This relaxed working atmosphere can be achieved by playing soft music as the students ‘work’ without time limits and with encouragement through language/praise outlined in the chart below

Stage 2: The Shift – A Factory Boss

After the class has finished drawing their individual flowers; the classroom then shifts to a factory assembly line with each student completing a small part of each flower and passing it off to another student. The teacher must shift roles and become a ‘factory boss’ who needs a high rate of production from his ‘workers.’ The teacher must take on a more aggressive role that would resemble how a strict 19th century factory boss would treat his workers.

Points to Consider:

- While this lesson could be used as a (10-15 minute) lesson ‘hook,’ I found it most effective when it comprised the majority of the (55 minute) class.

- I found the most difficult part of this activity was balancing a believable persona with teacher professionalism. While I caught myself discussing the students concerns democratically, I also needed to remember that an authentic early 19th century factory boss would have responded to worker concerns with harsh criticism.

- A further improvement (to closer resemble the breakdown of labour into unskilled tasks) could include illustrating (on the board) how the drawing of a flower should be broken down, with each specific job assigned to a specific student.

Phrases Used:

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| Cottage Workshop | Factory |
| -Now that’s craftsmanship  -Take your time  -Impressive quality | -Faster!  -This production is unacceptable!  -If you can’t increase your production, I’ll have to find another class who can! |