

Gasp! The Benefits of Child Labor In The Developing World

Posted by Lindsay Melnick

Child labor is a sensitive subject with a negative connotation in our society. While the topic of this article appears provocative, that is not my intention. I initially set forth to write an anti-child labor piece to promote awareness of the government mandated child labor issue in Uzbekistan. That country is the second-largest cotton exporter in the world and half of the country's cotton harvest is said to come from child labor.



Why did this article take such a drastic turn? Because I found the reasoning behind the existence of child labor in modern day society a much more compelling and less touched upon topic that I believe needs to be acknowledged. As an apparel industry insider, I have experienced my fair share of factory travel. With each visit, the morality of the (behind the scenes) utilization of children in these factories has weighed heavily on my conscience.

If asked, most people in our society will tell you that they are dead set against the concept of child labor. They look disapprovingly at developing countries where young children perform manual labor for long hours when they should be in school learning. Yes, children should be in school. Yes, they should be out playing with friends and enjoying their childhood.

However, we do not live in a perfect world. Child labor is pervasive for the simple reason that impoverished households who cannot meet their basic needs may depend on the income of their children for survival. In many cases, these families are so poor that every member of their family needs to work. It is likely that these families cannot afford the cost of education for their children. Even when schooling is ostensibly 'free' studies have shown that parents incur other direct costs such as activity fees, uniforms, paper and pens, text books, transport, lunches and others which often result in the exclusion of poor children from school. I am stating the obvious to say

that child labor creates a trade-off between labor and education. However, if their choice is either starving or going to school, isn't survival the obvious choice?

The evils of child labor are as indisputable, as is its economic necessity. I believe that child labor has a place in the world economy.

Work where child-laborers can still get an education is the answer.

NGO's should use their resources to provide schools in factories, so that for a few hours a day, the children can stop working and learn basic skills. In a daunting situation this would be a commendable solution, as it is after all tackling the real issue by being pragmatic and empathetic to why these children are working in the first place.

These children deserve the opportunity to pull themselves out of poverty and education is a vehicle for achieving this objective.

Elementary Note-Taking Guide: Supporting Students in Accessing Complex Texts

Analysis of Open-ended, Text-Dependent Questions

| Question | Open-ended AND text-dependent? | Rationale |
|---|--------------------------------|-----------|
| 1. What is the writer’s opinion on child labor? How do you know? | | |
| 2. What reasons are most effective in supporting the author’s argument? Explain what makes them effective. | | |
| 3. Thinking about the author’s argument, how does child labor affect your life? | | |
| 4. Which reason for child labor do you find the most convincing? Why? Use evidence to support your response. | | |
| 5. List all of the author’s reasons for the benefits of child labor. | | |
| 6. What methods does the author use to build and support her argument? How does each method work? | | |
| 7. What specifically does the author do that makes her opinion piece effective? (Focus on introductions and conclusions, linking opinions with reasons, use of evidence and other details.) | | |
| 8. How does each author anticipate readers’ possible disagreement with their opinion? How do they respond to these possible disagreements? | | |
| Revisions to “Non-Examples”: | | |
| | | |

Reflection Questions

- How can the *Patterned Way of Reading, Writing and Talking* be used to support students in accessing complex texts and meeting the expectations of the Common Core?
- How do the concepts of multiple close readings and open-ended, text-dependent questions influence the way you think about your practice?

Activity #1: Analyzing Open-Ended, Text-Dependent Questions

| Question | Open-ended? <i>AND</i> Text-dependent? | Rationale |
|---|--|---|
| 1. What is the writer’s opinion on child labor? How do you know? | Yes | Students must answer this open-ended question by identifying the author’s opinion and supporting their response with evidence from the text. |
| 2. What reasons are most effective in supporting the author’s argument? Explain what makes them effective. | Yes | Students must use evidence from the text to support their response; student responses can vary. |
| 3. Thinking about the author’s argument, how does child labor affect your life? | No | Students do not have to root their answer in the text to answer this open-ended question. It is text-based not text-dependent. |
| 4. Which reason for child labor do you find the most convincing? Why? Use evidence to support your response. | Yes | Students must provide evidence to justify their response to the open-ended question. |
| 5. List all of the author’s reasons for the benefits of child labor. | No | There are specific answers the student must give that do not require them to use the text as a resource. |
| 6. What methods does the author use to build and support her argument? How does each method work? | Yes | The student may identify any methods they have seen in the text and use them as specific examples to prove their argument. |
| 7. What specifically does the author do that makes her opinion piece effective? (Focus on introductions and conclusions, linking opinions with reasons, use of evidence and other details.) | Yes | The student must use specific parts of the text to explain their response to the open-ended question. |
| 8. How does the author anticipate readers’ possible disagreement with their opinion? How does the author respond to these possible disagreements? | Yes | These questions require the student to look back at the text in order to pick out the author’s specific responses to possible disagreements with her opinion. |