

Victorian Pit-Children

In this context the students take on the mantle of a team of pit inspectors commissioned by the government to investigate conditions for children working in the mining industry in 1840. It draws parallels to the real-life inquiry that followed the Huskar Mining Disaster of 1838 where twenty-six children were drowned after an explosion. Up until that time much of what was happening to children in the mines (where some were as young as seven, worked twelve hour shifts, often in complete darkness) was almost entirely unknown except to those who were directly involved.

Although children died regularly in mining accidents, the number of very young children killed in the Huskar disaster was particularly shocking. When it was subsequently reported in *The Times*, the story was greeted by a mixture of public disbelief and anger. The cause of pit-children was taken up by the politician Earl of Shaftesbury who called for a Royal Commission. The subsequent report, published in 1842, became a bestseller and eventually forced a change in the law.

There is a great deal of online information and a number of good topic books available for this subject, you can find a list at the end of the planning.

Overview

Curriculum: Social Reformers of Victorian Britain

Expert Team: A Pit Investigation Team

Client: Earl of Shaftesbury

Commission: To carry out a full inspection of the mines, discover the working conditions of the children working there, and to report back to Parliament with their findings.

This unit could be used to teach one of two studies from the History curriculum:

- A study of British history beyond 1066
- An in depth local history study from a period of British history which can go beyond 1066

Resources:

1. A3 sheet of paper
2. A stack of A4 paper
3. Topic books
4. Pictures of children working in the mines (see Slideshow)
5. List of mining accidents (see Slideshow)
6. Mining Vocabulary List - see PDF resource
7. Study documents (see resources list)

Note: The following sequence of steps are meant only a suggested guide. They are not a prescriptive recipe to be followed slavishly, but more a recommended route. This is particularly true of timings. It is possible to run through this whole sequence in a day (if you go very quickly), but it probably makes more sense to spread the sessions out over a number of days, giving enough time for the children to explore the subject thoroughly and develop a deeper knowledge and understanding.

Step 1: Introducing the study

In this first step you will introduce the students to the area of study by using a slideshow of contemporary images depicting children working in mines in the 1830s and 40s. The purpose of the slideshow is to give the students some idea of the working conditions at the time and some background knowledge of the context. Start by giving them enough time to stare at the images, ask them what they notice, but don't interrogate them and don't lecture them. Let them make some meaning for themselves, take in what the pictures are telling them, there will be time later to provide them with the facts. If they don't notice it themselves, draw their attention to the clothes the children are wearing, the lack of

shoes in many of the pictures, and the absence of any safety equipment. If the students ask questions, then answer them, but don't take up all the time, encourage them to think and make deductions.

[I] Show the class the slideshow presentation [Resource 4], end with engraving from 1842 inquiry showing a trapper sat in the dark.

- As you show the slides to the students, ask:

- "What do you notice?"

- Give them time to think and answer. Don't worry if there are periods of silence, some of the images are quite shocking. Repeat the question for each slide and follow up with some supplementary questions such as, "Did you notice the children had nothing on their feet?"

- Don't be afraid to express an opinion. "These pictures tell a horrible story, it must have been awful working in those conditions, don't you think?"

You might want to draw in any tacit knowledge the children have:

- "What have you heard about working conditions for children at this time?"

[II] When you get to the slide with the Trapper, read out the text below the image. Explain it comes from a report into mining conditions for children in 1842. Give time for the students to ask questions and talk about what they have seen and heard.

[III] When the time seems right show the students slides 7 and 8 - "Extract from the Report of the Children's Employment Commission, 1842". Show them first the original in slide 7 for a moment or two, then the smaller extract in slide 8.

[IV] Give them time to process the information and share their thoughts. Point out one or two of the details, such as:

- "These accidents are happening quite regularly, but not all from

the same mine.”

- “It says here, ‘Deceased not very sharp.’ I wonder what that means?”

After this discussion, you might want to supply the following list of additional information to the students on a printed sheet.

[V] Further Historical Information:

- Children as young as 5 years old were used in the mines. They worked for up to 12 hours a day.
- Trappers were children who operated the air doors providing ventilation for the miners. By keeping the fresh air flowing they prevented the build up of dangerous gases.
- Drawers pulled heavy carts of cut coal to the pit surface with heavy chains around their waists.
- Dangers: (information from www.dmm.org.uk)
 - A trapper, only 10 years old killed in an explosion.
 - A horse driver aged 11. Crushed by horse.
 - A driver, aged 14 fell off ladders and was crushed between the tubs and a door.
 - A token keeper aged 14. Crushed by surface wagons on branches.
 - A screenboy aged 12. Crushed by surface wagons.
 - A trapper aged 12. Crushed by tubs.
 - A driver aged 12. Horse fell on him.
 - A bank boy aged 11. Caught by cage.
 - A driver aged 12. Head crushed between tub top and a plank while riding on ladders.
 - A trapper aged 13. Head crushed between cage and bunton while riding to bank.
 - Tub Cleaner, aged 13. Fell down the shaft off a pumping engine.
 - Boy aged 14, drowned.

- Boy, aged 7. Killed in an explosion.
- Trapper , aged 9. Killed in an explosion.
- Driver, aged 14. Crushed against wall by a horse.
- Screen Boy, aged 15. Head crushed between a tub and screen legs ; too little room.

Step 2: Talking to the Owner of the Mine

In this step the students have the chance to meet the owner of the mine, represented by an adult in role. The purpose of this activity is to give the students the opportunity to ask questions and to learn more about the owner's values and attitudes to child labour. It is important that the class understand the owner is a man of wealth and standing in the community, who is used to being listened to and treated with respect. Some of the students might be angry after reading the list of accidents and seeing the pictures and assume the encounter with the mine owner is an opportunity to tell him off or get into an argument. You need to make sure this does not happen. Don't hesitate to stop the encounter by 'signing out' the adult in role, this can be done by simply touching their shoulder. The adult in role will immediately stop talking and interacting with the class. This will give you the opportunity to talk to the students directly and remind them that the owner is an important man, who will not tolerate being shouted at or argued with.

[I] Establishing the Owner:

It is important to work with the students to set the scene before they start interacting directly with the adult in role.

- Start by explaining to the class what is about to happen: "Mr Green has kindly agreed to represent the owner of the mine. This will give us the opportunity to ask him some questions about what we have seen and heard about the working conditions of children."

- Place a chair in front of the class, who are gathered together in a

horse-shoe: "Mr Green would you mind sitting on this chair. Could you show us the owner of the mine, sitting at his desk, opening a letter. Thank you."

- Adult in role (AIR) sits on the chair and opens an imaginary letter.

At this point the students are outside the fiction watching the AIR inside.

- Hold this situation for a few moments and take the opportunity to develop the scene: "What kind of desk do you think the Owner has?"

- "Could you show me the thickness of the legs?"

- "Is it carved or decorated in any way?"

- "What about his chair?"

- "Is there anything hanging on the walls of his office?"

Carry on in this way for two or three minutes, establishing in the minds of the students the idea of a person of wealth and power. This is a literary activity, you might take the opportunity to talk to the students about 'showing not telling'. Try modelling what they have invented as if it were in a book:

"The Owner of the mine sat behind his large oak desk opening letters with a knife. The desk's thick wooden legs were carved in ornate patterns, the surface covered in green leather, embossed at the edge. Hanging on the wall behind his comfortable office chair, was a recently painted portrait of the man himself, sat with his favourite dogs on the roots of a tree, a double-barrelled shotgun resting on his legs. In the distance smoke could be seen rising from chimneys beside stacks of black coal." (Obviously you will need to adapt this to include the student's suggestions).

Ask them what they think the reader of this passage would make of the Owner.

Note: Using drama can create many opportunities for teaching the conventions and skills of writing. Do not be afraid to stop the drama and make these teaching points explicit. This is one of the strengths of Mantle of the Expert, it allows the teacher to move the class in and out of the fiction to make observations, reflect, and teach directly when necessary. For this reason it would be a mistake to rush into talking to the Owner without first establishing his place of work and exploring how this might be described in writing. This is the main purpose of drama for learning in the classroom, not to create a piece of theatre or a 'ripping yarn', but to generate engaging and meaningful opportunities for students to acquire and develop new curriculum learning.

[II] Talking to the Owner:

While the scene is being established the AIR should remain in "Full Role". This means the AIR is in the fiction the whole time, he has not been activated to hear or interact at this point, so he must ignore everything that is happening in the room. This can sometimes be difficult, however, it is an important function and will help the students to measure the seriousness of the situation. There is no need for the AIR to be busy 'acting' at this point, the students do not need to be distracted, and a neutral sitting position, possibly head bowed, works best.

One way to think of an AIR is as a resource, like a piece of text, a picture, or a section of film. The advantage of an AIR over these other resources is that an AIR can interact with the students, answer questions, clarify meaning, and provide more information. It is, therefore, important to prepare the AIR before the session, so both the teacher/mediator and the AIR/resource are both clear on what the AIR is being asked to do. With a role like the Owner, it will be important for the AIR to be knowledgeable about mining conditions for children, Victorian values, and social organisation. However, they do not need to be an encyclopaedia and

it is one of the teacher's functions to step in if the AIR can't adequately answer a question or provide sound information.

One of the best books on the use of adult in role and teacher in role is, "Teaching Drama: A mind of many wonders" by Norah Morgan and Juliana Saxton.

The Function of the Owner:

- High status: The Owner is someone with high status and high authority, he is used to being listened to, comfortable giving orders, and expects others to do as they are told. He will not tolerate being interrogated.

- Purpose: The Owner will give the students another point of view: one who does not understand our modern ideas of childhood; one who sees poverty as a social inevitability (people are born to their station); one who pays the children to work and does not see it as his responsibility to keep them safe (they can always leave); and one who believes he serves an important role in the community (providing jobs, housing, and some level of security).

- It is important to emphasize the Owner is a Christian man, with Christian values and beliefs. Be careful not to turn him into a caricature, a sort of evil Victorian industrialist with no sympathy or compunction. He is not heartless, rather, a man of his times. The local community are not slaves, he advertises for jobs and they apply. Some are suitable for small people, but he does not send the children down his mines - their parents do that.

Some students will find the Owner a difficult person to like and may find it a challenge to understand his point of view. The idea, behind this activity, is not to change the student's minds, but to offer them a contemporary attitude, they can make of it as they will. Looking back on the past it is easy to make judgements or to jump to easy conclusions

about people's motivations and values. But history is rarely straightforward and people seldom do things motivated by evil intent. The Owner is not sending children down the mine because he wants to cause them harm, his intention is not to maim and kill them, but to maximise his profits. To the benefit (he believes) of all. Drama can be an effective classroom strategy for exploring these complex, and sometimes confusing, attitudes and events. It is worth remembering, we teach students about the past not so they can judge it, but so they can better understand it.

Drama, and the use of strategies such as AIR, can create opportunities for students to encounter alternate point of view that might contrast with their own or challenge them to think more deeply about themselves and the subject under study. It is not an instrument for imbuing them with a specific set of values or way of seeing the world.

[III] Begin by talking to the Owner (this will activate him to speak and respond): "Excuse me, we know you are a very busy man. I wonder if we could ask you a few questions?"

Once the interview begins there is no obligation to stand back and let it develop on its own. Do not feel unable to step in and stop the conversation, if you think it is necessary, to allow thinking time or to steer the interview along a different path: "I'm just going to stop the interview for a moment [teacher touches the AIR on the shoulder, AIR stops interacting with the students and looks down]. I'm wondering if he is telling us the truth, entirely. What do you think?" [There follows a short conversation]. "So what do you think we should ask him to get to the truth?" [The students make some suggestions]. "Um, that might work. Let's bring him back and see what happens when we ask him that question." [Teacher touches the AIR on the shoulder, who looks up and once more starts interacting with the class].

Once you feel the students have gleaned enough information from the

Owner, then you can finish this part of the drama: "Well I think we have taken up enough of your time this morning. Thank you once again for talking to us and answering all of our questions." [AIR stands and returns to their seat among the students].

Step 3: The Trapper

The purpose of this step is to explore the point of view of the young Trapper and his/her biographical background. The text created will operate as a model writing frame for the students to use in Step 4.

There are four mini-steps:

1. The class look again at the picture of the Trapper from the slide-show display and hear the accompanying text.
2. One of the students represents the Trapper as if they were the child in the engraving.
3. The class work together to invent the 'biography' of the Trapper, using a writing frame introduced by the teacher.
4. A second student reads the biography in the voice of the Trapper.

[I] Show the class once again the picture of the Trapper from the slide-show display. Read the text under the engraving and allow a little time for the students to ask questions.

[II] "Can I ask if anyone would be prepared to represent the Trapper from this engraving? They would have to be someone who can sit still for a quite a long time, but they won't need to do any acting or talking."

- [Choose a student].

- "Can you please sit here. Make yourself as comfortable as you can while looking like the Trapper in the picture."

- [Give the student time to get in position and then ask the rest of the class] “What do you think? Is there anything you might suggest changing?”

- [If the class suggest changes ask the student in role (SIR) if they want to adopt them].

- “It looks like we are ready to start.”

- [Remind the SIR] “If you feel uncomfortable by all means take a stretch, but we would ask you to return as quick as possible back into position.”

Note: You might suggest to the SIR that they cast their eyes down. Being in-role can often make students feel very self-conscious. It can help if they don't look into the eyes of their classmates.

[III] While the Trapper stays in position, take a large sheet of paper and ask the remaining students (one at a time) to answer the following questions:

- What is the Trapper's name (choose a Victorian name, boy or girl)?
- Their age?
- Their job in the mine?
- Do they have a mother and father?
- Are the mother and father still alive?
- Have they any siblings?
- Have any of them been involved in an accident?
- Has the Trapper ever been involved in an accident?
- Does the mine owner pay them enough?

As the students answer the questions write down their answers using the following format:

- I am ...[John]
- I am ... [8] years old.
- I am a Trapper.
- I have.... [a mother, but no father]

- My mother ... [is at home], my father...[died in an explosion]
- I have... [2] Sisters and ...[3] brothers.
- They have been...[involved in several accidents. One of my elder brothers walks with a limp since a coal-cart ran over his ankle]
- I have been...[involved in many accidents. My finger was crushed by a heavy lump of coal and I have hurt my head bashing into the walls of the mine while moving around in the dark]
- The mine owner does not pay me enough.

[IV] Once the writing is complete read it back to the class, then ask if one of the students could read the biography on behalf of the Trapper.

- Ask the volunteer to come and sit slightly behind the Trapper and then read the words with the appropriate solemnity.
- Review the activity with the class, asking for feedback, and revising if necessary.
- Repeat with different students representing the Trapper and reading the text.

Step 4: Working on the pit-children's biographies

In this step the students work in groups to create multiple biographies for the pit-children. Each group need to decide who is going to represent the pit-children and who is going to do the reading. Allow the students to organise themselves, but make it clear everyone needs a role.

[I] "The Trapper's story is only one biography. In the mine there will be many. Each of the children working there will have their own stories. In a moment we're going to create those other biographies working in groups. You can decide how big your group is going to be, but everyone will need a role, either as a child working in the mine or as someone reading the biography. Please remember to follow the writing format we

used for the Trapper. You can change the details, but remember to follow the format and please always end with the line: "The mine owner does not pay me enough."

[II] "Not everyone has to be a Trapper, there were other jobs in the mine."

Show the class this list of jobs:

Getter - Getters were the oldest and strongest, almost always grown men or strong youths. Their job was to work at the coal face cutting the coal from the seam with a pickaxe. Getters were the only people working in the mines who would work continually with a candle or safety lamp - as they needed the light to see the coal face.

Hurrier and the Thruster - older children and women were employed as hurriers, pulling and pushing tubs full of coal along roadways from the coal face to the pit-bottom. The younger children worked in pairs, one as a hurrier, the other as a thruster. Older children and women worked alone.

Drawers - pulled heavy carts of cut coal to the pit surface with heavy chains around their waists.

[Ref. <http://www.mylearning.org/coal-mining-and-the-victorians/p-2070/>]

[III] Support those groups that need help.

Step 5: Sharing the biographies

In this step the students share the biographies of the pit-children, but rather than follow the format of Step 3, where the Trapper and the reader came out in front of the class, this time the format is more consciously dramatic, with the 'audience' and 'actors' sitting in the same space.

[I] While the students are working on the biographies move the

classroom chairs into two rows, leaving a narrow (three or four foot) gap between the lines. Once everyone is ready ask them to sit on the chairs.

[II] Explain:

- Each group will work one at a time
- While a group is working everyone else will need to listen quietly
- Each group will need to represent a child or children working in the mine (as depicted in an engraving).
- Each pit-child will have a reader reading their biography (as modelled earlier).
- There may be more than one of the pit-children being represented at the same time.
- We will attempt to go through every group without stopping and with the minimum amount of teacher direction.
- Please remain silent during the change over between one group and another.

[III] Give the groups a short time to discuss what they have just heard and how they are going to work.

Note: This activity represents quite a high demand on the students. Some groups might need more help and support than others. Remind the students that quality is very important: this is drama, not play, and they are trying to do it 'as if' it were real. Don't worry about repeating some of the group's attempts if need be.

[IV] Conduct a review once every group has completed the activity:

- "What did you make of that?"
- "Were any of the biographies particularly striking?"
- "Do you think they were 'realistic': the sort of thing that really happened?"
- "What would you say to someone about conditions for children working in the mines?"

- “What do you think people living in the city, who put the coal on their fires and know nothing about this, should be told — specifically?”

Step 6: Introducing the Inspection Team

In this step the students are asked to think of themselves as an inspection team, commissioned by the Government to visit the children working in the mines and to report back with their findings.

In this step the students take on the responsibility of an expert team and are introduced to the client and the commission.

[I] Start by bring the classroom chairs into rows in front of the whiteboard and showing the class the information for the Huskar Mining Disaster 1838 - See Resources:

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http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/history/making_history/makhist10_prog8a.shtml

- <http://www.dmm.org.uk/pitwork/html/daz.htm>

[II] Answer questions, then tell them: “This event deeply shocked people when they read about it in the Newspapers. The Government thought it was time to act and so they set up a commission to investigate working conditions for children in the mines. This was led by a team of investigators who were instructed to visit the mines and report back to the Government. Many of the engravings we saw earlier were made as part of that investigation.”

[III] “I would image the mine owners where less than pleased. I wonder what the investigators took with them that made it impossible for the owners to refuse them entry?”

Note: This is an open question. A letter of authorisation is the most likely answer, although the students might have other suggestions, it doesn't matter what they create, what is important is that it is something the owners can't deny and will gain them access to the pit.

[IV] You will need to step into the fiction now to represent the Government minister. There is no need to introduce yourself, just start by holding the letter of authorisation and talking (Don't worry if the children look confused, just stop and explain who you are and start again).

- "Thank you all for coming this morning. The working conditions for children in our country's mines has become a topic of much conversation recently. I am sure you are all well aware of the terrible loss of life in the recent Husker pit tragedy. As a result of these terrible events and following pressure from my master, Earl of Shaftesbury, Her Majesty's Government have commissioned a full inspection of all our country's coal mines and a report on the conditions found there. With that purpose in mind, I have asked you here today. Your Team come highly recommended. You understand the work will involve you visiting the pits, gaining immediate access, descending underground, and discovering all you can. You are bound to meet with opposition from the mine owners, but with this letter of assent no one can prevent you access."

- "Are there any questions?" [Answer the team's questions]

- "Good, well we would like a preliminary report of your initial findings within three months. Do you think that would be possible?"

- "Fine, I look forward to reading it. Good afternoon."

Step 7: The students represent the Inspection Team

In this step we bring back the owner they met in Step 2.

Function of the role:

- High status again, however, this time the students represent people with even higher status.
- He will be reluctant, even intransigent (he has a lot to hide), but in the end he will have to grant the team access.
- The purpose of his role is to give the students an opportunity to use the knowledge they have learnt and to make a convincing case, they will have to stand up to him and insist he grant them immediate access.
- The owner will be awkward, but in the end he will have to acknowledge the authority of the inspectors and let them into his pit.

[I] “We’re going to bring back the owner of the mine. I wonder what the Inspection Team will say to him? I’m guessing he is going to be difficult to deal with.”

[II] AIR (adult in role): “Why are you here? I’m a busy man, I have a pit to run...”

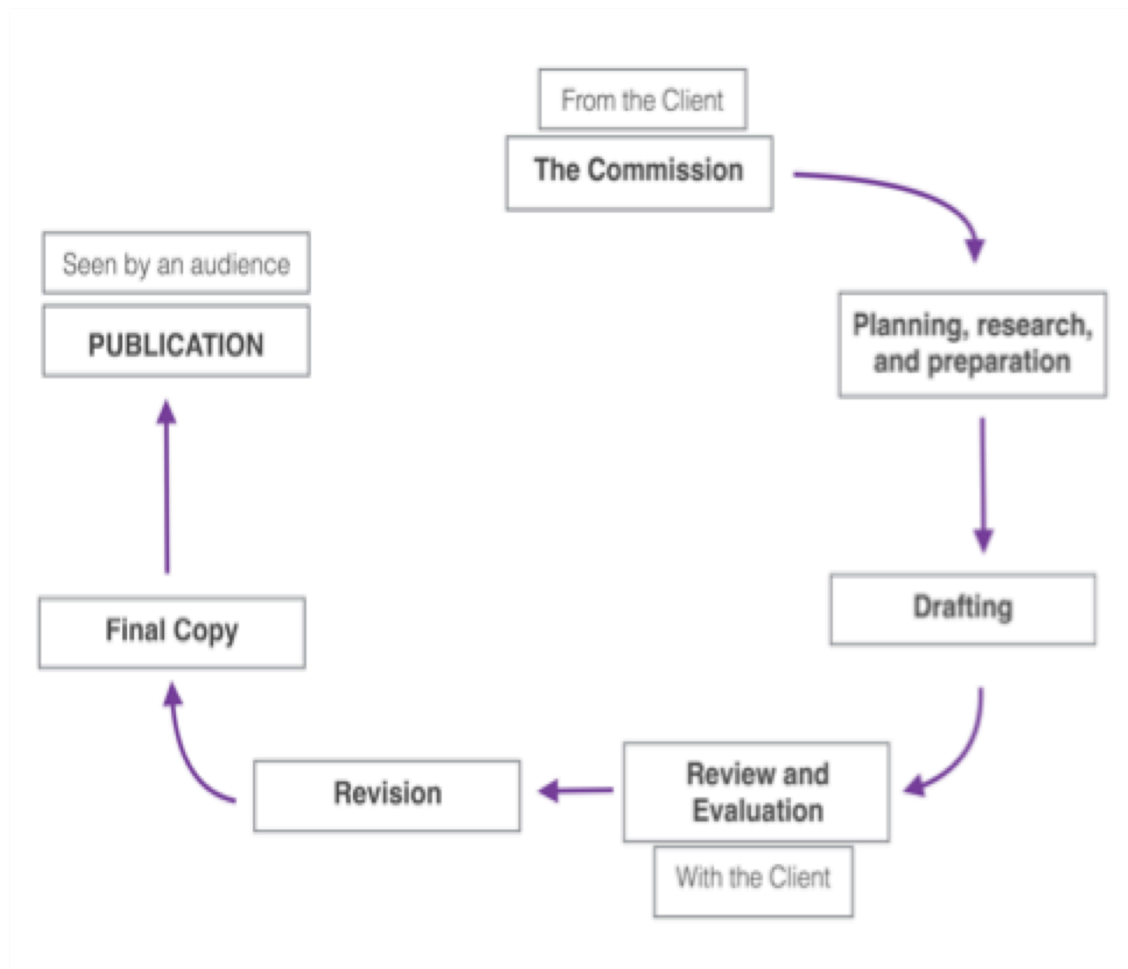
Remember to support the students if they get stuck, the idea is for them to win, however difficult the owner is, but they need to win by force of argument and authority, not by shouting at him and getting into a fight. If this starts to happen, then stop the story and give the students the chance to try again.

Step 8: Preparing to write the report

In this step you work with the students preparing them to write the inspection team’s report. This will involve:

[I] Introducing the Author Cycle: Share the Author Cycle with the

Students, discuss the different steps.



[II] Introducing the ‘six dimensions of dramatic imagination:

- Sound and Silence
- Movement and Stillness
- Light and Darkness

- “Look at the writing under the engraving of the Trapper from 1842, can you spot any of the six forms? Remember they might only be implied...”

- Read out the caption under the engraving and discuss the use of the six forms with the students.

- Task:

- “Let’s do a first draft extract from your own report. You can choose any part you like, it might be as you descend into the mine, it might be crawling through a tunnel, it might be watching one of the children at work.”

- The students write for ten minutes.

- Remind them to use Sound and Silence; Movement and Stillness; Light and Darkness

- Once the ten minutes are up, invite the students to share their writing. As they do ask the rest of the class to give them feedback and constructive suggestions. Pay particular attention to the six forms.

[III] Provide more information about possible accidents and working conditions: Hand out the information sheet about accidents and working conditions. Give the children chance to read the information. Discuss and answer any questions. [See the list in Step 1]

Step 9: Writing the report

Using the Author Cycle and other resources the students should be ready to write their own reports. Remind them they are still at the first draft stage and support any students that need help.

Step 10: Meeting the Minister

In this step the class use their (draft) reports and other information in a meeting with an adult-in-role who represents the government minister

they met in Step 6.

You may find the children are very keen to make the meeting as formal. They might like to rearrange the classroom - putting the tables in rows - as well using the language of a formal meeting.

(AIR): "Thank you for attending this morning. I understand your report is still at the draft stage, but I am very eager to hear how things are going so far. Who would like to make a start?"

Function of the Role:

- High status: can ask questions and interrogate the team's answers
- Formal relationship, requiring the students to use formal and courteous language
- Requires the team to provide further information and justify their findings

Note: You may find your students need extra support during this meeting.

Step 11: Redraft and present the report in a formal meeting to the select committee

Once the report is finished, it is ready for publication.

This is the final step in the sequence.

Information and Links:

- <http://resources.woodlands-junior.kent.sch.uk/homework/victorians/children/working2.html>
- Durham Mining Museum www.dmm.org.uk
- BBC - http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/primaryhistory/victorian_britain/children_in_coal_mines/
- My Learning - <http://www.mylearning.org/coal-mining-and-the-victorians/p-2070/>
- Vocabulary sheet: <http://www.mylearning.org/learning/coal-mining-and-the-victorians/Mining%20Vocabulary.pdf>
- Earl of Shaftesbury & Lord Ashley's 1842 Report: <http://history.parkfieldict.co.uk/victorians/lord-shaftesbury>
- National Archive: <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/education/children-in-the-mines-pack.pdf>
- Extracts from Lord Ashley's Report in the National Archive: <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/victorianbritain/industrial/source4.htm>
- Victorian child labour: <http://www.victorianchildren.org/victorian-child-labor/>
- A web of English History: <http://www.historyhome.co.uk/peel/factmine/childmin.htm>
- Huskar Pit Disaster: <http://www.healeyhero.co.uk/rescue/pits/Huskar/Huskar1.htm>
- Children of the Dark: Life and Death Underground in Victoria's England: http://www.amazon.co.uk/Children-Dark-Underground-Victorias-England/dp/0750930942/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1379754155&sr=1-1&keywords=children+of+the+dar
- The Historical Association: http://www.history.org.uk/resources/resource_3769.html