

## Lesson 4 Coal Miners

### A. Warm up activity

- Look at the pictures. Can you tell what are they doing?
- Do you think they are being forced to do this work?



Photo: Internet

### B. Read the passages below and complete the tasks that follow:

Sharing the Earth is a collection of justice-oriented environmental writings. In this lesson, we will read an excerpt from the speech of Lord Ashley which he delivered in 1842. We will read three testimonies collected by Lord Ashley's commission that investigated a serious accident at Huskar Colliery, Yorkshire in 1838. During his investigation, he interviewed a large number of people working in Britain's factories and mines. Through the interviews, inhuman working conditions in the collieries, severe exploitations, and a worrying number of child labourers were revealed. The working conditions of these children were inhumane. Lord Ashley found very young children working as long as eighteen hours a day in mines and collieries, some attached by chains to heavy carts that they had to drag.

Three testimonies gathered by Ashley's Mines Commission are given below:

#### **Sarah Goodler, Age: 8 years.**

“I'm a trapper\* in the Gawber pit. It does not tire me, but I have a trap without a light and I'm scared. I go at four and sometimes half past three in the morning, and I come out at five and half past. I never go to sleep. Sometimes I sing when I've light, but not in the dark; I dare not sing then. I don't like being in the pit. I am very sleepy when I go sometimes in the morning.”

“I go to Sunday schools and read Reading made Easy.” She knows her letters, and can read little words. They teach me to pray. She repeated the Lord's Prayer, not very perfectly, and ran on with the following addition: “God bless my father and mother, and sister and brother, uncles and aunts and cousins, and everybody else, and God bless me and make me a good servant. Amen.” “I have heard tell of Jesus many a time. I don't know why he came on earth, I'm sure, and I don't know why he died, but he had stones for his head to rest on. I would like to be at school far better than in the pit.”

[\*Trapper: The trapper in the coal mine was often the youngest member of the family working underground. Their job was to open and close the wooden doors (trap doors) that allowed fresh air to flow through the mine. They would usually sit in total darkness for up to twelve hours at a time, waiting to let the coal tub through the door.]

**Isabella Read, Age: 12 years.**

I am wrought with sister and brother, it is very sore work; cannot say how many rakes or journeys I make from pit's bottom to wall face and back, it may about 30 or 25 on average; the distance varies from 100 to 250 fathom ( 1fathom = 1.8 meters).

I carry about 1cwt. (equivalent of 50kg) and a quarter on my back; have to stoop much and creep through water, which is frequently up to the calves of my legs. Once I get down, I frequently fall asleep while waiting for coal from heat and fatigue. I do not like the work, nor do the lassies, but they are made to like it. When the weather is warm there is difficulty in breathing, and frequently the lights go out.

**Mary Barrett, Age: 14 years.**

I have worked down in pit for five years; my father works in the next pit; I have 12 brothers and sisters-all of them but one live at home; they weave, and wind, and hurry, one of them can read, none of the rest can, or write; they never went to the day-school, but three of them go to Sunday-school; I come down in the pit at seven in the morning; I do not like working in the pit, but I am obliged to get a living; I work always without stockings, or shoes, or trousers; I wear nothing but my chemise; I have to go up and work with the men. They are all naked there; I have got well used to that, and don't care much about it now; I was afraid at first, and did not like it; but they never behave rudely to me.



Source: [*Sharing the Earth*, edited by Elizabeth Ammons and Modhumita Roy, [https://spartacus-educational.com/Mines\\_Collieries\\_Act.htm](https://spartacus-educational.com/Mines_Collieries_Act.htm) ]

**C. Make a list of the works that Sarah, Isabella and Mary had to do:**

Sarah Goodler	Isabella Read	Mary Barrett

**D. Answer the following questions:**

- What is your impression about these three children's education?
- Why were they afraid?
- What was their working condition like?
- How do you feel about their living situation?

**E. Read the testimonies again. What form of speech is used here – direct or indirect?**

**F. Now, convert each of their testimony into indirect speech. Follow the example below.**

**Sarah Goodler:**

Sarah Goodler was an eight-year-old child, working in the Gawber pit. She was a trapper. She had a trap without a light and she was scared. She went there at four in the morning. Sometimes she went there at half past three in the morning...

**G. What do you think about child labourers in our country? Write an essay on your opinion on child labourers in Bangladesh.**