

Directions: Analyze the document and answer the questions.

Background: In 1814, the first textile mills were built in Lowell, Massachusetts, based upon a management system developed by Francis Lowell. For the first time in America, all aspects of production occurred under one roof—the United States entered the Industrial Revolution. The mills hired single, young farm women to work in the mills that eventually comprised three-quarters of the labor. Women worked for different reasons but usually it was to contribute money to the family, learn a skill, or just to get off the farm. Conditions were generally good and wages decent for the time period. However, by the mid-1830s, economic problems led to wage cuts and eventually cheap immigrant labor from Ireland began replacing women from local farms.

Lowell, June 1844

Dear Mary: In my last I told you I would write again, and say more of my life here; and this I will now attempt to do.

I went into the mill to work a few days after I wrote to you. It looked very pleasant at first, the rooms were so light, spacious, and clean, the girls so pretty and neatly dressed, and the machinery so brightly polished or nicely painted. The plants in the windows, or on the overseer's bench or desk, gave a pleasant aspect to things. You will wish to know what work I am doing. I will tell you of the different kinds of work. . . .

Well, I went into the mill, and was put to learn with a very patient girl—a clever old maid. I should be willing to be one myself if I could be as good as she is. You cannot think how odd every thing seemed to me. I wanted to laugh at every thing, but did not know what to make sport of first. They set me to threading shuttles, and tying weaver's knots, and such things, and now I have improved so that I can take care of one loom. I could take care of two if I only had eyes in the back part of my head, but I have not got used to "looking two ways of a Sunday" yet. . . .

It makes my feet ache and swell to stand so much, but I

suppose I shall get accustomed to that too. The girls generally wear old shoes about their work, and you know nothing is easier; but they almost all say that when they have worked here a year or two they have to procure shoes a size or two larger than before they came. The right hand, which is the one used in stopping and starting the loom, becomes larger than the left; but in other respects the factory is not det-rimental to a young girl's appearance. . . .

You wish to know minutely of our hours of labor. We go in at five o'clock; at seven we come out to breakfast; at half-past seven we return to our work, and stay until half-past twelve. At one, or quarter-past one four months in the year, we return to our work, and stay until seven at night. Then the evening is all our own, which is more than some laboring girls can say, who think nothing is more tedious than a factory life.

You ask if the work is not disagreeable. Not when one is accustomed to it. It tried my patience sadly at first, and does now when it does not run well; but, in general, I like it very much. It is easy to do, and does not require very violent exertion, as much of our farm work does. . . .

Yours as ever, Susan

Central Ideas. A central idea is the overall topic of the entire piece. Main ideas are important topics that support the central idea.

1. What is the central idea of Susan's letter to Mary?
 - E. Susan describes life working in the mills.
 - H. Susan enjoys most of the work that she does.
 - O. The mills provide a better environment than working on a farm.
 - Y. All the mill girls get their evenings off.

2. What is the main idea of paragraph 3?
- E. Susan wishes she had eyes in the back of her head.
 - H. Susan is learning how to work at the mill.
 - O. Susan is impressed with the cleanliness of the mill.
 - Y. Susan noticed that her right hand is now larger than her left hand.

Words in Context. Define words based upon how they are used in the writing.

“We go in at five o'clock; at seven we come out to breakfast; at half-past seven we return to our work, and stay until half-past twelve.”

3. What do the terms “half-past seven” and “half-past twelve” mean as used in the quote above?
- E. labels to indicate the evening shift of work.
 - H. 7:30 AM and 12:30 PM
 - O. another way of saying 7:15 and 12:15
 - Y. 7:30 AM and 12:30 AM

Facts vs. Opinions.

Fact: A conclusion that can be proven true and/or is absolutely accurate to all people involved.

Opinion: Belief or preference about something that cannot be proven or accepted by all people.

Factory life is good once a person gets used to it.

4. Identify the statement above as fact or opinion.
- A. fact
 - N. opinion

Textual Evidence. Find evidence from the document and circle all that apply.

5. What are some positive examples the author gives about working at the mill?
- E. The work is not as difficult as farm work.
 - H. The rooms were spacious and clean.
 - O. Women are taught how to read and write.
 - Y. The girls get the evenings off to do as they wish.