

## ***Genius John in a Brave New World – Then and Now***

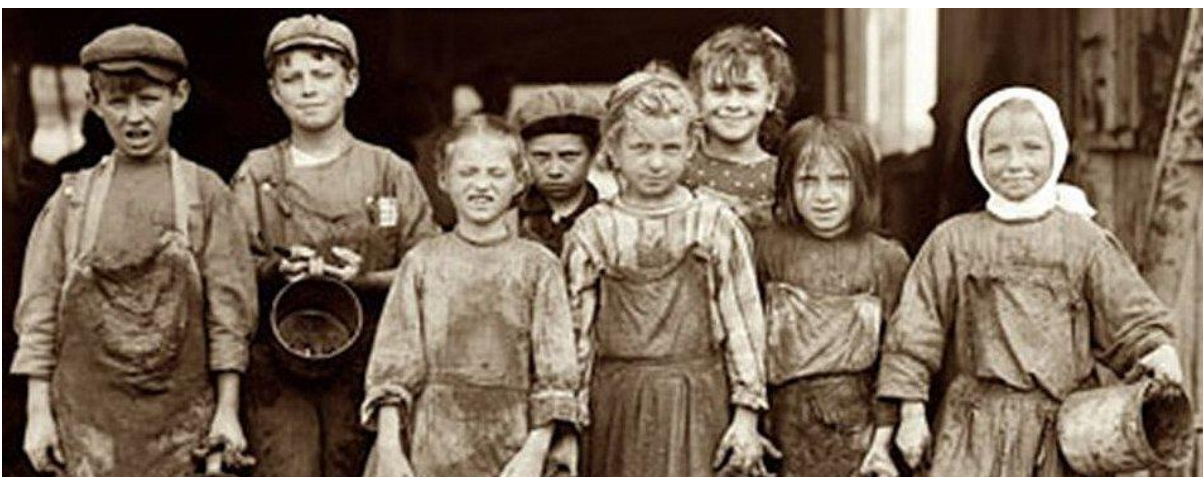


When John Muir turned twelve his father said he was ‘old enough to work like a man’. So he spent his days building a home and a farm in the wilderness, which meant ‘back-breaking work, every day, every hour of daylight...’

The aim of this activity is to explore how things were in the past (during the Victorian era) compared to how they are today. What would life have been like for you, if you had been alive when John Muir was alive?

Before you begin look through the John Muir graphic novel and read the section that describes how John had to help his father dig a well.

Then read the following information which explains what it was like to be a child in Victorian times.



Photographic illustration provided by the national archives  
[www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/victorianbritain/](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/victorianbritain/)

**John Muir, Earth-Planet, Universe: Pupil Activity Support Notes**

‘If you were a child from a poor family during Victorian times (as John Muir was) you worked and worked and worked! Children could not refuse to work because their families needed their help to earn enough money to buy food, clothes and put a roof over their heads.

This meant that a lot of children had unhappy childhoods. Days were long for them: eight or twelve hours a day. Six days a week.

Children were small so they could go into narrow spaces but this often meant working in very dangerous conditions such as down mines or sweeping chimneys. They wore no protective clothing and during these times there was no insurance and when children had accidents or were ill they didn't have any help. It was not just children though, many adults worked under the same conditions too.’

Now answer the following questions:

- a. Were John Muir’s first few years in America like this? How was it the same and how was it different?

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Look at the picture which shows the clothes children wore in Victorian times to go to work.

- a. Why is this picture black and white?

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b. Describe what the children had to wear to go to work.

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c. If you were working today what clothes would you wear?

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Nowadays, in poor countries, many children often work to help their parents but the conditions of employment may be better than the working conditions for children in Victorian times.

Discuss the following with the person next to you:

a. Why do you think conditions for children have improved in Scotland and America?

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b. What do you think about children working in other parts of the world, do you think the conditions are better?

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