



## Global Voices Information Sheet

### Child labour in Canada



In Canada, many young people work in restaurants.

#### **Background Info**

- Child labour is generally defined as work that is done by children under the age of 15 that restricts or damages a child's physical, emotional, intellectual, social and/or spiritual growth. In poorer countries, cases of child labour tend to be more extreme. Children work very long hours in very poor conditions, often with dangerous instruments or machinery.
- Even in developed countries like Canada, this article suggests it is sometimes difficult to determine when young workers could be considered child labourers (such as in cases where young children work illegally or are unaware of their rights).
- Employment codes in each Canadian jurisdiction are different. The debate about working age is perhaps most pronounced in Quebec, which scrapped its minimum age of 16 in 1979, in favour of 'worker rights,' so that young people could gain work experience.
- Those in favour of lower working ages say that young people should learn responsibility and work ethic, and that the government shouldn't intervene. Those against young people being allowed to work say the government should intervene to protect children, who are vulnerable, just like laws prevent young people from drinking alcohol or dropping out of school.
- There are international standards for child labour laws, like the International Labor Organization's (ILO) Convention 138, which would set a global baseline working age of 15. Canada is not one of the countries that has signed this convention. But, even if Canada did sign, ILO conventions are not laws, they are more like symbolic contracts.
- The issue of child labour and child worker rights in Canada is very complex.

#### **Key terms**

- **Jurisdiction**—the right and power to interpret and apply the law; the territorial range of authority or control (i.e. a province or territory in Canada that makes laws).
- **Arbitrary**—determined by chance or based on individual judgment or preference.
- **Lobbyist**—someone who is employed to convince lawmakers to change or make laws that would benefit their employer.

## Global Voices Secondary Educator Resources

### Note to Educators:

The following activities are designed to stimulate a current events discussion. Generative in nature, these questions can be a launching point for additional assignments or research projects. Teachers are encouraged to adapt these activities to meet the contextual needs of their classroom.

In some cases, reading the article with students may be appropriate, coupled with reviewing the information sheet to further explore the concepts and contexts being discussed. From here, teachers can select from the questions provided below. Activities are structured to introduce students to the issues, then allow them to explore and apply their learnings. Extension and conclusion activities are included to challenge students and finally, encourage them to reflect on the issues at hand.

Since these activities are designed as discussions rather than formal lessons, assessment strategies are not included.

### Themes and Course Connections

- Themes: child labour, children's rights, worker's rights, health and safety, employment.
- Course Connections: Business Studies, Canadian and World Studies, English, Health and Physical Education, Social Sciences and Humanities.

### Materials

- Chart paper or blackboard
- Computers and internet
- Newspapers
- Global Voices column

### Specific Expectations and Learning Goals

Students will:

- Develop and express responses to issues and problems.
- Reassess their responses to issues on the basis of new information.
- Participate in active group work and class discussions.
- Communicate effectively in written and spoken language or other forms of expression.
- Demonstrate the ability to think critically.
- Develop, express, and defend a position on an issue and explain how to put the ideas into action.

### Reading Comprehension

1. Reading Comprehension: Global Voices Column (estimated time: 15 minutes)
  - a. Pre reading steps:
    - i. Introduce the topic and encourage students to discuss what they already know about the topic, making predictions around what the column is about.
  - b. Reading steps:
    - i. Read: students must read the text independently, highlighting important points throughout the column.
    - ii. Ask: students must ask themselves what the story is about, recording five questions they are unsure of after reading the column.

- iii. Paraphrase: encourage students to write point form notes in their own words around what the column is about.
- c. Post reading discussion:
  - i. What are the main points of the column?
  - ii. What emotions did this column evoke in you?
  - iii. What problem is identified in the column?
  - iv. What questions do you have about the column?

## Knowledge and Understanding

1. Discussing the Global Voices Column (estimated time: 10 minutes)
  - a. Ask students the following suggested questions about the column, encourage them to use evidence from the Global Voices column to support their answers:
    - i. What is the message in this column?
    - ii. What perspectives are presented in this column? Which ones are left out?
    - iii. What problem is presented in this column?
    - iv. What events are discussed in this column?
    - v. What does it mean to be employed?
    - vi. How old do you have to be before you can work where you live?
    - vii. Why is there a minimum age requirement on employment? What are the dangers of allowing children to work?
    - viii. What is child labour?
    - ix. Do you think child labour happens in Canada?

## Thinking

1. Children's Rights (estimated time: 30 minutes)
  - a. Explain to students that children are protected under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). In this convention, things like child labour are prohibited.
  - b. Explain to students that child labour refers to the employment of children at regular and sustained labour, a practice that is considered exploitive.
  - c. Ask students to explain why child labour is prohibited, listing the dangers on the board.
  - d. Under the UNCRC is the following article:
    - i. Article 32 (child labour): All children should be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that interferes with the child's education, or is harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development.
  - e. Ask students to respond to this article in a written reflection, stating the reasons why they believe child labour is exploitive.
  - f. Completed reflections will be handed in for grading.

## Communication

1. Health and Safety (estimated time: 45 minutes)
  - a. Tell students that as they near working age, it's important that they understand their worker's rights.
  - b. Explain to students that workers have three main rights:
    - i. The **right to know** and be informed about workplace hazards and how to deal with them.
    - ii. The **right to participate** in health and safety activities in the workplace (e.g.: become a member of the occupational health committee, report unsafe conditions and equipment to the supervisor and participate in the identification of hazards).
    - iii. The **right to refuse** work that the worker believes to be unusually dangerous.

- c. As a class discuss these rights together, addressing why they are important and why it is important for workers to be aware of them.
- d. Divide the class into partners.
- e. In their partners, ask students to explore one of the following websites based on your country of residence:
  - i. Canada – Work Rights <http://www.workrights.ca/content.php?doc=209>
  - ii. The United States – The US Department of Labour - <http://www.dol.gov/>
- f. Ask students to search for any information they can find on child labour and health and safety. Tell students to present this information in a small report to be handed in for grading.

## Application

1. Child Labour in North America (estimated time: 45 minutes)
  - a. Ask students if they have heard of any instances of child labour in North America. If so, ask them to explain what they have heard.
  - b. Provide the class with the following scenarios:
    - i. Maxime Degray, 13, was working in a cornfield in western Quebec, late in August 2005 when he fell off of a slow-moving trailer loaded with 400 kilograms of corn cobs. Caught between the tractor and the trailer, he was crushed to death by the trailer's wheels.
    - ii. Andrew James, 15, was offloading materials for a paving company in Stony Mountain, Manitoba in July 2008. He was buried alive beneath a mound of hot asphalt.
  - c. Ask the class to answer the following questions about the scenarios:
    - i. What was wrong with these scenarios?
    - ii. Could these accidents have been avoided? How?
    - iii. Why is it important to ensure you are following safe practices on the job site?
    - iv. Why are there minimum age requirements for employment?
    - v. Are children able to do the same type of work as adults?
    - vi. Are children able to assess the safety of a job site and understand their worker's rights the same as adults?
  - d. When this discussion is complete, ask students to search newspaper archives for other examples of child labour in North America.
  - e. When they have found another example, ask students to answer the following questions about their findings:
    - i. How old are the children in this scenario?
    - ii. What is the legal working age where they live?
    - iii. What are the various dangers in the scenario?
    - iv. Is/are the children in this scenario aware of their rights?
    - v. What actions need to be taken/could have been taken to prevent tragedy?
  - f. When they have completed the above questions, ask students to share their case with the class.

## Additional Resources

In addition to the above lesson plans, you may want to share some additional resources with your students. Listed below are some links to useful online resources:

Free The Children – [www.freethechildren.com](http://www.freethechildren.com)  
We Day Teach - <http://www.weday.com/teach>  
Work Rights - <http://www.workrights.ca/>  
The US Department of Labour - <http://www.dol.gov/>