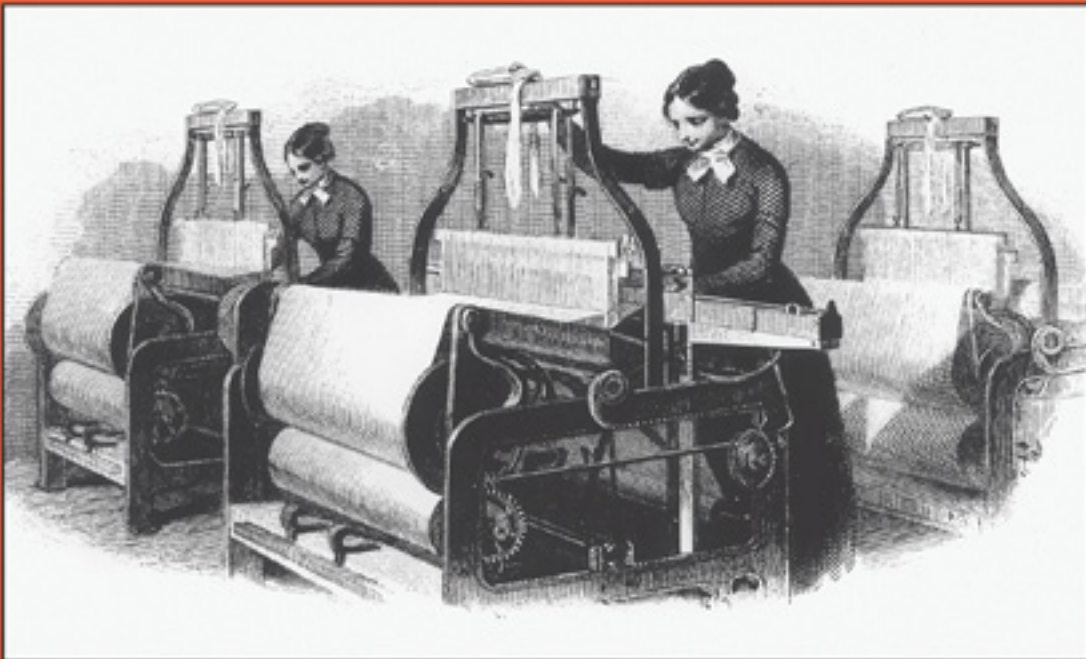


*History*  
UNFOLDING

# LOWELL

## THE FACTORY COMES TO AMERICA



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**MindSparks**  
CHALLENGING STUDENTS TO THINK HISTORICALLY

# Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	.....	2
<b>Lesson 1</b>	Factories and Textiles.....	4
<b>Lesson 2</b>	The Factories of Lowell .....	8
<b>Lesson 3</b>	Lowell: The Ideal.....	12
<b>Lesson 4</b>	Lowell: The Changing Reality.....	16
<b>Appendix</b>	Image Close-ups .....	21

# Introduction

## The Lowell Experiment

The Industrial Revolution began in England and the wealth and power it conferred on that nation soon became apparent to the rest of the world. But so, too, did the less attractive features of industrialism. In England's new factory towns, entire families—men, women and children—worked long hours to support themselves (barely) in cramped, rat-infested slum quarters. It's possible that the rural conditions they had left behind were as bad as, or worse than, what they encountered in their factories and slums. Nevertheless, industrialism clearly meant new forms of abject poverty as well as a general rise in national wealth and comfort.

In America, Lowell's founders hoped to design a city that would avoid the negative features of industrialism. The model industrial community they established was to be based on the labor of eager New Englanders, mainly female, hoping to supplement the incomes of their rural families through stints of one or more years in the mills of Lowell. For a time, the ideal seemed close to the reality. But within two or three decades, the dream faded. Soon, a more typical factory town took its place. Still, for a time, Lowell combined state-of-the-art technology with social planning to become a major center of the early Industrial Revolution in America.

The twelve visual displays in this booklet focus on some of the key aspects of the Lowell experiment. The images are presented in four lessons. Each lesson uses three visual displays to explore one broad topic in the overall story. Briefly, the four lessons are as follows:

### **Factories and Textiles**

The illustrations here focus on the partial mechanization of the American textile industry in the years before Lowell was founded, and they touch on the key role of textiles in the early stages of the Industrial Revolution.

### **The Factories of Lowell**

Inspired by Francis Cabot Lowell, the Boston Associates established an entire system of mills, canals, waterwheels, turbines, and other machinery to bring all key phases of textile production under one roof. The images here focus on central elements of the technology of this system.

### **Lowell: The Ideal**

Lowell was to be a model community, attending to the minds and souls of its workers, along with their physical well-being. The images for this lesson illustrate the idea of a factory community fully harmonized with a largely rural and politically free republican society.

### **Lowell: The Changing Reality**

The ideal of Lowell did not survive for long. Labor strife appeared as early as the 1830s. By the 1840s, stiff competition pushed mill owners to lower wages and accelerate production. This, in turn, convinced many of the Yankee female workers to leave. French Canadian, Irish, Greek and other immigrant groups took their places as Lowell changed into a more typical 19th century factory town.

## Using Photos, Cartoons, and Other Visuals to Teach History

Many textbooks are full of colorful visuals. However, all too often these visuals function primarily as window dressing. They make the text more entertaining, or at least more palatable. Only occasionally do the visuals in textbooks do more than offer simple pictorial reinforcement of ideas already presented in the text. In many cases, they pander to the visual orientation of the young while doing little to help young people master the challenges of the visual media that dominate their lives.

By way of contrast, our approach to using visual materials emphasizes their unique strengths as historical documents. The lessons in this booklet focus students on the visual symbols and metaphors in editorial cartoons, the dramatic qualities of certain photographs, the potential of many images to make abstract ideas more specific and concrete, the implicit biases and stereotypes in certain images, their emotional power, and their ability to invoke the spirit of a time and place. In the process, we make every effort to strengthen students' visual literacy skills in general, as well as their ability to think critically and engage in spirited but disciplined discussions.

## How to Use This Booklet

The booklet is divided into four lessons, with three illustrations per lesson. Each lesson consists of the following:

**A BACKGROUND INFORMATION SHEET** This page provides brief summaries explaining the three illustrations on which the lesson is based and their relevance to the lesson's objectives.

**DIGITAL IMAGES** The booklet's PDF allows you to project the images for use in your class discussions.

### **DISCUSSION-ACTIVITY SHEETS**

Each sheet displays one illustration. It includes a sequence of questions to help you plan an all-class discussion while using the projected images. The questions take students step by step through an analysis of the illustration. If you wish, you may reproduce these pages and hand them out. In addition to the discussion questions on the illustration itself, one or two follow-up activities are suggested. Some of these can be made into individual assignments. Others will work best as small-group or all-class activities.

*Lowell: The Factory Comes to America***OBJECTIVES**

1. Students will deepen their understanding of the impact of industrial change on America in the 1800s.
2. Students will better understand conditions in the textile industry in America just before the Lowell factories were built in the 1820s.

# Factories and Textiles

*Use the background information on this page to help your students better understand the three illustrations making up this lesson. Use the questions and activities presented in the rest of the lesson to help students clarify meanings and debate important issues.*

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION****Illustration 1**

As one historian put it, “Whoever says Industrial Revolution says cotton.” And it is true that by the late 1700s, a fully mechanized British cotton textile industry was a central driving force in the industrial transformation of Great Britain. But the British kept their industrial secrets to themselves, and only slowly did this knowledge slip from their control. In 1789, however, Samuel Slater arrived in America in disguise after memorizing the details needed to construct a spinning frame. By 1793, he had started the first permanent American cotton textile mill in Pawtucket, Rhode Island. His mill, shown here, was limited to spinning yarn. Weaving was still done mainly in private homes, often by farm families seeking extra income. Textile manufacturers would supply domestic weavers with yarn and later return to pick up finished cloth. As the top illustration suggests, these domestic workers used simple tools and worked without direct supervision by the owner.

**Illustration 2**

Slater’s mill was one early example of industrial development. This illustration captures the full range of the technological changes that altered America in the early 1800s. Steamboats, trains, and improved roads are all shown. Together, they made it easier to deliver raw materials to factories, such as those in the drawing. This encouraged the use of expensive power-driven machinery by giving businesses access to distant markets that could buy their rapidly increasing output. The factories shown here were located in Wheeling, West Virginia, where the Ohio River connected to rail lines from the East. Cities began to grow rapidly in similar locations.

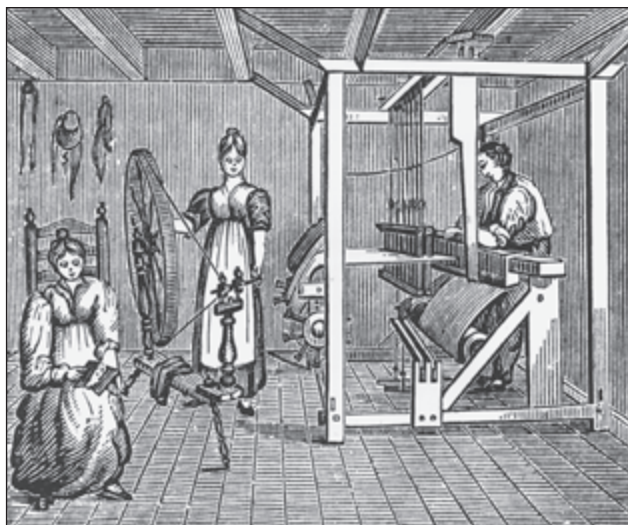
**Illustration 3**

In the past, Americans had produced much of their clothing at home. Factory production made huge amounts of textiles available at much lower prices. As a result, a growing number of Americans found it easier and cheaper to buy clothing in stores. By the middle of the 1800s, the nation was linked by roads, rails and canals, and factories such as the Lowell mills could sell their goods all across the country. In this new nationwide market, a business often had to advertise to become known in any given area. Thus, as a middle class with money to spend grew, so too did the economics of fashion and advertising.



## Lesson 1—Factories and Textiles

## Illustration 1



American Textile History Museum, Lowell, MA



American Textile History Museum, Lowell, MA

**Discussing the Illustrations**

1. Until the 1790s, all phases of textile production were done in the home or in very small shops. The top drawing here, for example, shows the processes of carding, spinning, and weaving being done in a single domestic workshop. Can you explain briefly each of these phases of textile manufacture?
2. The lower illustration is a textile mill built in the 1790s. It was the first in America to make use of Samuel Slater's new spinning machinery. Slater had memorized the design for this machinery in another country and then left in disguise. Can you explain what that country was and why Slater had to leave it in disguise?
3. Small, rural mills like Slater's spread rapidly in the first two decades of the 19th century. But the weaving of the yarn still had to be done mainly by workers in their rural homes near the mill. Which type of work—in the mill or in the home—would you have preferred? Why?

**Follow-up Activities**

1. Read more about the life and times of Samuel Slater. Find out as much as you can about the spinning frame he recreated in America. Create a diagram of your own showing this machine in as much detail as you think you will be able to explain. Prepare a brief talk to the class on Slater. Use your diagram to help explain the impact he had on American history.
2. **Small-group activity:** One member of your group should play the part of the owner who supplies raw materials to domestic workers and later picks up their finished cloth. Have the other group members portray the workers or other family members. Create a play around the theme of the supplier announcing plans to move the entire production of his cloth into a single factory. Imagine what the owner might say to his workers, how they might react to him and what they might say to one another. Act out your brief play in front of the class.

## Lowell: The Changing Reality

# Illustration 3



American Textile History Museum, Lowell, MA