

STUDENT'S HANDOUT



Background Information

In the world right now, thousands of children are working in horrible conditions. Located mainly in Africa, Latin-America and Asia, they live a daily misery. China is presently going through a phase of economic expansion, and its rapidly growing industries benefit from a very large pool of unskilled workers willing to accept extremely low salaries.



Instructions

Read the following story and answer the questions.



Is this Really a Fairy Tale?

- 1- “A few hours more and the day will finally be over!”, thinks Fiona, who just spent her thirteenth birthday working in order to earn her daily income. Today also marks the end of her first year in the working world. Fiona, like so many of her friends, works making clothes in a factory in China. Her salary isn't big enough, but it's the only way for her to have enough to buy food and help her family a little. The day she was officially hired, the employer told her that she had fairy fingers. Little girls' hands are very agile and precise. Many employers therefore prefer hiring them over older women, ignoring the fact that such young girls should not be working yet. Fiona's mother had been “tipped” by a friend so as to allow Fiona to obtain the job: “How lucky!”, often thinks Fiona, unconvinced, but resigned to work more than twelve hours a day.
- 2- What Fiona loves above all is her shirt with Mickey Mouse's friend on the front. She doesn't know the character's name since she never was able to follow the show on TV. What she does know, however, is that her shirt is one of the B-31 models which her factory used to fabricate, a long time ago. At night, when she feels lonely, she watches the joyfully grinning mouse on her shirt; she imagines that the mouse can see her too, and that she can tell her about anything.
- 3- Here, at the factory, the women aren't very talkative because they have to work non-stop. But even with very few words, Fiona feels that the women are very worried about their safety in case of an emergency such as a fire. Truthfully, Fiona would have a lot to say on the subject: her mother died last year while at work. She worked in a toy factory and a fire broke out as several women were working. Some emergency exits were obstructed by containers, and others were locked, but very few led to the outside. Fiona's mom was one of the hundred and fifty victims of this particular fire, but other fires had occurred under similar circumstances.
- 4- Fiona must work in abusive and dangerous conditions in order to survive, just like thousands of children in Asia, Africa, South America, and even some in developed countries. She doesn't have time to play, and going to school is completely impossible for her. Fiona knows very well she isn't working for Santa Claus. She is working for a greedy and rich employer. She heard that there were great amounts of people throughout the world who were scandalized by the fact that children had to work twelve hours a day to bring food to their family. Surely these people could have an impact. But until then, Fiona will be going to work every day, hoping these people's anger will one day, soon, turn into real protests. She surely hopes the situation, her situation, can change soon.

Student's Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____

Reading Comprehension Evaluation: Is this Really a Rairy Tale?

- 1- How old was Fiona when she was hired at the factory? _____
- 2- In the text, which paragraph most refers to the main character's feelings? _____
- 3- Find two words to describe each character in the table. Support each answer with a short quote from the text.

Character:	Employer	Fiona	Mickey Mouse's friend
1st word:			
Quote:			
2nd word:			
Quote:			

4- Keeping Fiona's precarious economic situation in mind, what could be a reason why she is unable to watch cartoons on television.

5- In what way are Fiona's working conditions (and those of many other female workers) inhumane? In other words, what allows us to conclude that the working conditions at Fiona's factory are inappropriate?

6- What explains the fact that Fiona's co-workers are not very talkative?

7- Could the death of Fiona's mother have been avoided? If so, how?

AN INITIATIVE OF THE
In-Terre-Actif Network of the Comité de Solidarité/Trois-Rivières



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