All About

The Lancashire Cotton Industry
Lancashire is a county in the north-west of England. It has two cities, Preston and Lancaster. The popular holiday destination of Blackpool is in Lancashire.

People from Lancashire are called Lancastrians.

During the 18\textsuperscript{th} and 19\textsuperscript{th} centuries, Lancashire was a major producer of cotton goods. This was known as the Lancashire cotton industry.

Did You Know?
The Duke of Lancaster is usually known by a different name: Queen Elizabeth II!
Cotton is a white fluffy fibre. This fibre is a case, called a boll, that grows on a cotton plant as protection for the seeds. Cotton taken from the plant is woven and spun into fabric which is then used for lots of different things, such as denim (for jeans), t-shirts, socks, tents, coffee filters, nappies and cotton buds.
Before the 18th century, turning cotton into cloth was done by hand in workers' own houses as part of what was known as the cottage industries. Whole families (including children) would be involved in the process.

Across Lancashire, many people were part of the cotton cottage industry. Cotton was turned into cloth using a handloom.
It was a time of inventions, such as the steam engine. Britain became known as ‘the workshop of the world’.

From around 1760, Britain experienced a huge change, known as the Industrial Revolution. Many British people went from living in small villages, working on the land, to living in large cities, working in factories.

Talk about it

How do you think life changed for people who moved from the countryside to large cities? Once you have discussed how life might have changed write a diary entry as a child moving from the countryside to a large city – how would you feel?
One of the inventions during the Industrial Revolution was the cotton gin. This machine made it much quicker to separate the cotton fibre from the seeds (previously it had been done by hand). Another invention that increased cotton production was the spinning jenny, a machine that could spin more thread at one time.

In the 1790s, cotton goods made up over 15% of Britain's exports (goods that are sold abroad) and within ten years, this had grown to over 42%. Cotton factory owners became very rich. A saying was invented ‘cotton is king’. The cotton industry grew throughout the 19th century and by 1860, there were over 2000 cotton mills in the Lancashire region, with nearly 500 000 people working in them.

In Lancashire and the surrounding areas, lots of cotton factories (sometimes called mills) were built. These factories turned raw cotton (the white fluffy fibre) into material that could be used to make clothes and other things.
Life in a Cotton Mill

Although cotton factory owners became wealthy, life for the workers was difficult. Working days were long, with most workers starting at 6 a.m. and usually working for 13 hours. Despite these long hours, pay was poor.

There were very few safety measures in place and many workers suffered serious injuries while operating machinery.

Talk about it
What time do you get up in the morning? How long do you spend working?
Children from poor families in the 18th century didn't have the option of choosing a career. To support their families, children started working in cotton mills when they were as young as 7 years old. Children usually worked the same 13 hour days as adults. They had few chances to get fresh air and received no education.

Because they were small, children were often given the job of 'picker'. This involved crawling under machines while they were still on to tie off thread and collect the wrong material. This was extremely dangerous; their hair and hands could get caught in the machines, resulting in serious injuries or even death.

Talk about it
What do you want to do for a job when you are an adult?
This banned the employment of children in factories under 10 years old.

These laws were difficult to enforce and not every factory owner stuck to them. Life for factory workers remained hard.
Cotton doesn't grow in the UK and had to be imported from abroad. The main source of cotton during the 18th century was the United States of America. Cotton was picked by enslaved people who had been kidnapped from their homes in Africa and sold into slavery in America. Enslaved people suffered dreadfully, working in terrible conditions and had no rights.

The Lancashire Cotton Famine

With less cotton being imported to Britain, many mill workers lost their jobs. In the time before unemployment benefits, many families faced starvation and ended up in the workhouse.
Despite their suffering, the mill workers of Lancashire felt slavery was wrong and supported Abraham Lincoln and the fight to end slavery. At a meeting on New Year's Eve 1862, mill workers voted to send a message to Lincoln encouraging him to continue the war.

Abraham Lincoln wrote a letter to the workers which said the message was “an instance of sublime Christian heroism which has not been surpassed in any age or in any country.”

He also said “Whatever misfortune may befall your country or my own, the peace and friendship which now exists between the two nations will be, as it shall be my desire to make them, perpetual.”

**Perpetual** – This means permanent or never-ending.
The Decline of the Lancashire Cotton Industry

In 1912, Britain produced over 7 billion metres of cotton cloth.

The decline of the cotton industry started during the First World War (1914 – 1918). At this time, British cloth couldn’t be sold overseas so many countries built their own cotton factories. By the 1960s, around one Lancashire cotton mill closed each week. The 1980s saw the end of the Lancashire cotton industry.