

Sadie Frowne (1905)

Background: Sadie Frowne was typical of this new wave of immigration. She was thirteen when she arrived in America with her mother. They had left their native Poland after the death of Sadie's father and the failure of the small grocery store that provided them a living. The two made their way to America with the help of Sadie's Aunt Fanny who lived in New York City.

Sadie told her story to a journalist just three years after her arrival in America. It was first published as a newspaper article and later with other autobiographies as a book.

We begin Sadie's story as she and her mother enter New York Harbor at the end of a twelve-day journey in **steerage** aboard a steamship:

"We came by steerage on a steamship in a very dark place that smelt dreadfully. There were hundreds of other people packed in with us, men, women and children, and almost all of them were sick. It took us twelve days to cross the sea, and we thought we should die, but at last the voyage was over, and we came up and saw the beautiful bay and the big woman with the spikes on her head and the lamp that is lighted at night in her hand."

Sadie's mother died shortly after their arrival in New York. Sadie had been able to save a little money from her first job as a full time housekeeper/nanny. She claims to have made around \$9.00 a month. After paying for her mother's funeral, she was broke and needed to begin all over again. She eventually changed jobs and found work as a seamstress in a dress factory. Here she describes her typical day:

"I get up at half-past five o'clock every morning and make myself a cup of coffee on the oil stove. I eat a bit of bread and perhaps some fruit and then go to work. Often I get there soon after six o'clock so as to be in good time, though the factory does not open till seven. I have heard that there is a sort of clock that calls you at the very time you want to get up, but I can't believe that because I don't see how the clock would know.

At seven o'clock we all sit down to our machines and the boss brings to each one the pile of work that he or she is to finish during the day, what they call in English their 'stint.' This pile is put down beside the machine and as soon as a skirt is done it is laid on the other side of the machine. Sometimes the work is not all finished by six o'clock and then the one who is behind must work overtime. Sometimes one is finished ahead of time and gets away at four or five o'clock, but generally we are not done till six o'clock.

*The machines go like mad all day, because the faster you work the more money you get. Sometimes in my **haste** I get my finger caught and the needle goes right through it. It goes so quick, though, that it does not hurt much. I **bind** the finger up with a piece of cotton and go on working. We all have accidents like that. Where the needle goes through the nail it makes a sore finger, or where it splinters a bone it does much harm. Sometimes a finger has to come off. Generally, though, one can be cured by a **salve**.*

All the time we are working the boss walks about examining the finished garments and making us do them over again if they are not just right. So we have to be careful as well as swift. But I am getting so good at the work that within a year I will be making \$7 a week, and then I can save at least \$3.50 a week. I have over \$200 saved now."

Adapted from the following source:

"Working in a Sweatshop, 1905," EyeWitness to History, www.eyewitnesstohistory.com (2005).

Vocabulary

Steerage: the cheapest passenger accommodations on a ship

Haste: great speed, especially in situations where time is limited

Bind: to wind a bandage firmly around something to protect it or hold it together

Salve: an ointment for soothing or healing wounds or sores

Use the information from the reading in addition to your knowledge about immigration and sweatshops in the late 1800's to answer the following questions. Use complete sentences. Some of the questions are basic factual recall, while others will require you to make inferences about the information. Whenever possible *be sure to refer to specific examples in the text.*

Where was Sadie from originally? Explain the **exact** reason she and her mother decided to move to America. What kinds of things can you assume about Sadie's situation based upon this knowledge?

Who or what is Sadie referring to in the last sentence of paragraph four?

What time does Sadie wake up each morning? She makes a comment at the end of paragraph six that lets us know that she does not have the conveniences that we do today. What is she missing? How might the lack of that modern convenience have a negative effect on her sleep? What might we conclude about the quality of her sleep? How might that have a negative effect on her workday?

What kind of language does Sadie use to describe her occasional injuries (does she use descriptive words, or neutral and bland words)? What logical conclusions could we draw about workplace injuries based on her description?