The Jungle

*During the Industrial Revolution, the rise of factories and the use of the assembly line created a system where workers were constantly pushed to worker harder and longer to keep up with production. Industrialization brought about progress by mass producing affordable goods and leading to new inventions and technologies; however, it did lead to negative effects for workers. In the early 1900s, it was common for industrial workers to work 12-16 hours a day, 6 days a week for low pay. Reformers who believed that true ‘progress’ meant that reforms were needed to address these negative effects became known as ‘Progressives.’ The excerpt below is from the novel The Jungle which was written by Progressive reformer Upton Sinclair in 1906 which attempted to expose the harsh working conditions in Chicago slaughterhouse, the rampant political corruption in inner-city politics, as well as the abuse of immigrants for economic gain.*

**Directions:** As you read the excerpts below, highlight any negative conditions in the Chicago slaughterhouses that need to be reformed.

Jurgis talked lightly about work, because he was young. They told him stories about the breaking down of men, there in the stockyards of Chicago, and of what had happened to them afterward--stories to make your flesh creep, but Jurgis would only laugh. He had only been there four months, and he was young, and a giant besides. There was too much health in him. He could not even imagine how it would feel to be beaten.



…Your hands are slippery, and your knife is slippery, and you are toiling like mad, when somebody happens to speak to you, or you strike a bone. Then your hands slips up on the blade, and there is a fearful gash. And that would not be so bad, only for the deadly contagion. The cut may heal, but you can never tell. Twice now, within the last three years, Mikolas has been lying at home with blood-poisoning – once for three months and once for nearly seven. The last time too, he lost his job, and that meant six weeks more of standing at the doors of packing houses, at six o’clock on bitter winter mornings, with a foot of snow on the ground and more in the air.

It seemed that he was working in the room where the men prepared the beef for canning, and the beef had lain in vats full of chemicals, and men with great forks speared it out and dumped it into trucks, to be taken to the cooking room. When they had speared out all they could reach, they emptied the vat on the floor, and then with shovels scraped up the balance and dumped it into the truck. This floor was filthy, yet they set Antanas with his mop slopping the "pickle" into a hole that connected with a sink, where it was caught and used over again forever; and if that were not enough, there was a trap in the pipe, where all the scraps of meat and odds and ends of refuse were caught, and every few days it was the old man's task to clean these out, and shovel their contents into one of the trucks with the rest of the meat!

There were the men in the pickle rooms, for instance, where old Antanas had gotten his death; scarce a one of these that had not some spot of horror on his person. Let a man so much as scrape his finger pushing a truck in the pickle rooms, and he might have a sore that would put him out of the world; all the joints in his fingers might be eaten by the acid, one by one. Of the butchers and floorsmen, the beef-boners and trimmers, and all those who used knives, you could scarcely find a person who had the use of his thumb; time and time again the base of it had been slashed, till it was a mere lump of flesh against which the man pressed the knife to hold it. The hands of these men would be criss-crossed with cuts, until you could no longer pretend to count them or to trace them. They would have no nails,--they had worn them off pulling hides; their knuckles were swollen so that their fingers spread out like a fan.

There were men who worked in the cooking rooms, in the midst of steam and sickening odors, by artificial light; in these rooms the germs of tuberculosis might live for two years, but the supply was renewed every hour…

There were the wool-pluckers, whose hands went to pieces even sooner than the hands of the pickle men; for the pelts of the sheep had to be painted with acid to loosen the wool, and then the pluckers had to pull out this wool with their bare hands, till the acid had eaten their fingers off. There were those who made the tins for the canned meat; and their hands, too, were a maze of cuts, and each cut represented a chance for blood poisoning. Some worked at the stamping machines, and it was very seldom that one could work long there at the pace that was set, and not give out and forget himself and have a part of his hand chopped off. Worst of any, however, were the fertilizer men, and those who served in the cooking rooms. These people could not be shown to the visitor,--for the odor of a fertilizer man would scare any ordinary visitor at a hundred yards, and as for the other men, who worked in tank rooms full of steam, and in some of which there were open vats near the level of the floor, their peculiar trouble was that they fell into the vats; and when they were fished out, there was never enough of them left to be worth exhibiting,--sometimes they would be overlooked for days, till all but the bones of them had gone out to the world as Durham's Pure Leaf Lard!

There was never the least attention paid to what was cut up for sausage; there would come all the way back from Europe old sausage that had been rejected, and that was moldy and white--it would be dosed with borax and glycerine, and dumped into the hoppers, and made over again for home consumption. There would be meat that had tumbled out on the floor, in the dirt and sawdust, where the workers had tramped and spit uncounted billions of consumption germs. There would be meat stored in great piles in rooms; and the water from leaky roofs would drip over it, and thousands of rats would race about on it. It was too dark in these storage places to see well, but a man could run his hand over these piles of meat and sweep off handfuls of the dried dung of rats. These rats were nuisances, and the packers would put poisoned bread out for them; they would die, and then rats, bread, and meat would go into the hoppers together. This is no fairy story and no joke; the meat would be shoveled into carts, and the man who did the shoveling would not trouble to lift out a rat even when he saw one-- there were things that went into the sausage in comparison with which a poisoned rat was a tidbit.

As Progressive reformers, you and your partner are appalled by these terrible conditions. You need to now propose specific reforms that would address problems.

List the negative effects of industrialization on the slaughter industry.