



## Jute Mill Song

### Learning Outcome:

To use a traditional mill song to understand more about the working conditions in a Dundee Jute Mill.

### Curriculum for Excellence links:

I have listened to a range of music and can respond by discussing my thoughts and feelings. I can give and accept constructive comment on my own and others' work.

**EXA 1-19a / EXA 2-19a**

I can:

- discuss structure, characterisation and/or setting
- recognise the relevance of the writer's theme and how this relates to my own and others' experiences
- discuss the writer's style and other features appropriate to genre **ENG 2-19a**

As I listen or watch, I can identify and discuss the purpose, main ideas and supporting detail contained within the text, and use this information for different purposes **LIT 2-04a**

I can show my understanding of what I listen to or watch by responding to literal, inferential, evaluative and other types of questions, and by asking different kinds of questions of my own **LIT 2-07a**

I have developed confidence and skills in creating and presenting drama which explores real and imaginary situations, using improvisation and script **EXA 1-14a**

Inspired by a range of stimuli, I can express and communicate my ideas, thoughts and feelings through drama **EXA 0-13a / EXA 1-13a / EXA 2-13a**

## What to do:

Class listen to The Jute Mill Song  
– available on YouTube, followed  
by a class/group discussion.

*Question: What do you think this song is about?*

Mary Brooksbank (1897-1978) was a “mill lassie” all her life, working in the Dundee jute mills from the age of twelve. The song tells her hard life working in the mills.

*Question: What do you notice about the language used? What words or phrases don't you understand?*

- Affen: Off of
- Cled: Clothe
- Pass: passage between machines in the factory
- Warp: threads on loom through which the crossthreads are passed
- Weft: the crossthreads of a web of material
- Shifters: the workers who removed the full bobbins from the spinning frames and replaced them with empty ones
- Piecers: the workers who had to join the ends of broken threads
- Ten and nine: refers to the weekly wage women received working in the mills (ten shillings and nine pence)

**Questions: How can you tell that working in the jute mills was hard? What words or phrases in the song convey this message?**

- Repetition of “Oh, dear me”
- ” pour wee shifters canna get their rest”
- “wish the day was done”
- “them that work the hardest”
- “dark days”
- “nae much pleasure

## Activity Idea

1. Let children write down the following list of words: pleasure, wee, ten and nine, bobbins, hardest, dark days, **yarn**, twine, up and doon, dear
2. These are nine words that are found in the song and one that isn't.
3. Play the song and let children cross off the words when they hear them.
4. What word is left at the end? **Yarn.**

## Activity Idea

Give each child a post it note and let them write down three words or phrases from the song that show how hard working in the jute mills was.

Collect all post it notes on a large poster and discuss as a class.

## Acting Out the Jute Mill Song

1. Split children into groups of three or four.
2. Number each group 'one', 'two' or 'three'.
3. Give each group the corresponding lyrics that can be found in the boxes below.
4. Allow the children to come up with a way of representing these lines by acting them out in their groups.
5. Get one group of each number to come up and perform their actions to the song playing in the background or to the remaining class singing it.

### Group 1

Oh, dear me, the mill's gaen fast the pour wee shifters canna get their rest shiftin' bobbins, coorse or fine they fairly mak' ye work for your ten and nine.

### Group 2

Oh, dear me, I wish the day was done rinnin' up and doon the pass is no nae fun shiftin', piecin', spinnin', wrap weft and twine tae feed and cled my bairnie affen ten and nine.

### Group 3

Oh, dear me, the warld's ill divided them that work the hardest are aye wi' least provided but I main bide contented, dark days and fine there's nae much pleasure living affen ten and nine.

# Oh Dear Me (The Jute Mill Song)

Mary Brooksbank (1897 – 1978)

Chorus:

***Oh dear me, the muhlls gaen fest  
The puir wee shuften cannae get a rest  
Shuftin boabbins coorse and fine  
They fairly mak ye work for yer ten an nine.***

Oh dear me, I wish the day wis done  
Rinnin up an doon the pass isnae ony fun  
Shuftin, piecin, spinnin, warp, weft and twine  
Tae feed and cled ma bairnie affen ten and nine.

Oh dear me, the world's ill divided  
Them that works the hardest are aye wi least provided  
But I maun bide contented, dark days or fine  
But there's no much pleasure livin affen ten an nine.