Read the passages “The Spirit of Discontent” and "The Mill Girls," listen to the audio clip “The Spirit of Discontent,” and then answer Numbers 1 through 7.

Passage 1: The Spirit of Discontent

The following story is from an issue of the Lowell Offering, a monthly magazine of letters, stories, and poetry written by women working in the textile mills in Lowell, Massachusetts, in the mid-1800s.

1. “I will not stay in Lowell any longer; I am determined to give my notice this very day,” said Ellen Collins, as the earliest bell was tolling to remind us of the hour for labor.

2. “Why, what is the matter, Ellen? It seems to me you have dreamed out a new idea! Where do you think of going? and what for?”

3. “I am going home, where I shall not be obliged to rise so early in the morning, nor be dragged about by the ringing of the bell, nor confined in a close noisy room from morning till night. I will not stay here; I am determined to go home in a fortnight.”

4. Such was our brief morning’s conversation.

5. In the evening, as I sat alone, reading, my companions having gone out to public lectures or social meetings, Ellen entered. I saw that she still wore the same gloomy expression of countenance, which had been manifested in the morning; and I was disposed to remove from her mind the evil influence, by a plain common-sense conversation.

6. “And so, Ellen,” said I, “you think it unpleasant to rise so early in the morning, and be confined in the noisy mill so many hours in the day. And I think so, too. All this, and much more, is very annoying, no doubt. But we must not forget that there are advantages, as well as disadvantages, in this employment, as in every other. If we expect to find all sun-shine and flowers in any station in life, we shall most surely be disappointed. We are very busily engaged during the day; but then we have the evening to ourselves, with no one to dictate to or control us. I have frequently heard you say that you would not be confined to house-hold duties and that you disliked the millinery business altogether, because you could not have your evenings for leisure. You know that in Lowell we have schools, lectures, and meetings of every description, for moral and intellectual improvement.”

1fortnight: two weeks
“All that is very true,” replied Ellen, “but if we were to attend every public institution, and every evening school which offers itself for our improvement, we might spend every farthing of our earnings, and even more. Then if sickness should overtake us, what are the probable consequences? Here we are, far from kindred and home; and if we have an empty purse, we shall be destitute of friends also.” . . .

“You are fully aware, Ellen, that a country life does not exclude people from labor—. . . that people have often to go a distance to meetings of any kind—that books cannot be so easily obtained as they can here—that you cannot always have just such society as you wish—that you”—

She interrupted me, by saying, “We have no bell, with its everlasting ding-dong.”

“What difference does it make,” said I, “whether you shall be awaked [sic] by a bell, or the noisy bustle of a farm-house? For, you know, farmers are generally up as early in the morning as we are obliged to rise.”

“But then,” said Ellen, “country people have none of the clattering of machinery constantly dinning in their ears.”

“True,” I replied, “but they have what is worse—and that is, a dull, lifeless silence all around them. The hens may cackle sometimes, and the geese gabble, and the pigs squeal”—

Ellen’s hearty laugh interrupted my description—and presently we proceeded, very pleasantly, to compare a country life with a factory life in Lowell. Her scowl of discontent had departed, and she was prepared to consider the subject candidly. We agreed, that since we must work for a living, the mill, all things considered, is the most pleasant, and best calculated to promote our welfare; that we will work diligently during the hours of labor; improve our leisure to the best advantage, in the cultivation of the mind, —hoping thereby not only to increase our own pleasure, but also to add to the happiness of those around us.

“The Spirit of Discontent” fiction from the Lowell Offering. In the public domain.
Passage 2: The Mill Girls

Choices and Changes

To find workers for their mills in early Lowell, the textile corporations recruited women from New England farms and villages. These “daughters of Yankee farmers” had few economic opportunities, and many were enticed by the prospect of monthly cash wages and room and board in a comfortable boardinghouse. Beginning in 1823, with the opening of Lowell’s first factory, large numbers of young women moved to the growing city. In the mills, female workers faced long hours of toil and often grueling working conditions. Yet many female textile workers saved money and gained a measure of economic independence. In addition, the city’s shops and religious institutions, along with its educational and recreational activities, offered an exciting social life that most women from small villages had never experienced.

Leaving Home

Most of the women who came to Lowell were from farms and small villages. Some had labored in small textile mills. Others had produced cotton or woolen goods or shoes for merchants who employed men and women in their homes and paid them by the pieces they produced.

On many farms the father was the property owner and head of household. Family members shared daily and seasonal tasks. In addition to strenuous chores outdoors, mothers and daughters toiled in the home, cooking, cleaning, and making clothes. This hardscrabble life proved increasingly difficult for young women, and by the early 1800s a growing number of Yankee farm families faced severe economic difficulties. For many young, rural women, the decision to leave home for a city like Lowell was often born of necessity.

Life in a Boardinghouse

The majority of mill girls in Lowell lived in boardinghouses. These large, corporation-owned buildings were often run by a female keeper.

1Yankee: a person from the northeast region of the United States
or a husband and wife. A typical boardinghouse consisted of eight units, with 20 to 40 women living in each unit.

For most young women, life in the boardinghouse was dramatically different from life on the farm. Usually they shared a room with three other women, sleeping two to a bed. A fireplace in each room provided warmth in the colder seasons. The keeper prepared three meals a day, and the women dined together in a common room. Women formed many new friendships with other female boarders. The bonds created through daily social intercourse helped new workers adjust to the demands of factory life.


Passage 3 Audio Clip: The Spirit of Discontent

Raise your hand so your test administrator can provide you access to this audio passage.

Listen to this audio clip from "The Spirit of Discontent."

"The Spirit of Discontent" recorded for educational purposes.

1. Select two sentences from Passage 1 that show that Ellen is willing to consider another person’s point of view.

A. “I saw that she still wore the same gloomy expression of countenance, which had been manifested in the morning; and I was disposed to remove from her mind the evil influence, by a plain common-sense conversation.” (paragraph 5)

B. “I have frequently heard you say that you would not be confined to house-hold duties and that you disliked the millinery business altogether, because you could not have your evenings for leisure.” (paragraph 6)

C. “‘What difference does it make,’ said I, ‘whether you shall be awaked [sic] by a bell, or the noisy bustle of a farm-house?’” (paragraph 10)

D. “Ellen’s hearty laugh interrupted my description—and presently we proceeded, very pleasantly, to compare a country life with a factory life in Lowell.” (paragraph 13)

E. “Her scowl of discontent had departed, and she was prepared to consider the subject candidly.” (paragraph 13)
2. This question has two parts. First, answer Part A. Then, answer Part B.

**Part A**

Which sentence states a theme of Passage 1?

- Hard work pays off in the end.
- Country life is better than city life.
- Employers must treat workers with respect.
- It is important to consider both sides of an argument.

**Part B**

Fill in the circles **before two** sentences that support the answer in Part A.

6  

“A... To rise so early in the morning, and be confined in the noisy mill...”

“... And I think so, too. ...”

“All this, and much more, is very annoying, no doubt. ...”

“But we must not forget that there are advantages, as well as disadvantages, in this employment, as in every other. ...”

“If we expect to find all sun-shine and flowers in any station in life, we shall most surely be disappointed. ...”

“We are very busily engaged during the day; but then we have the evening to ourselves, with no one to dictate to or control us. ...”

“I have frequently heard you say that you would not be confined to house-hold duties and that you disliked the millinery business altogether, because you could not have your evenings for leisure. ...”

“You know that in Lowell we have schools, lectures, and meetings of every description, for moral and intellectual improvement.”
3. How do the repeated references to the ringing bell affect the dialogue between the narrator and Ellen throughout Passage 1?

A. They show what the narrator has done to improve her life.
B. They add to the tension of the choice Ellen is trying to make.
C. They provide a contrast for the work the women do in the mill.
D. They help readers understand why Ellen wants to stay in the city.
4. What does the phrase *destitute of friends* suggest in paragraph 7?

A. that Ellen considers friends unimportant
B. that the women may lose their friendships
C. that the friendships the women make are strong
D. that Ellen is concerned about her friends’ well-being
5. This question has two parts. First, answer Part A. Then, answer Part B.

**Part A**

How is the narrator’s point of view different from Ellen’s?

- A The narrator thinks that the work the women do in the mill is easy.
- B The narrator recognizes the benefits of living and working in Lowell.
- C The narrator enjoys the sounds of mechanical equipment heard in the city.
- D The narrator acknowledges that there is not enough time for leisure in Lowell.

**Part B**

Select the sentence from Passage 1 that supports the answer in Part A.

- A “And so, Ellen,’ said I, ‘you think it unpleasant to rise so early in the morning, and be confined in the noisy mill so many hours in the day.’” (paragraph 6)
- B “But we must not forget that there are advantages, as well as disadvantages, in this employment, as in every other.” (paragraph 6)
- C “All that is very true,’ replied Ellen, ‘but if we were to attend every public institution, and every evening school which offers itself for our improvement, we might spend every farthing of our earnings, and even more.’” (paragraph 7)
- D “But then,’ said Ellen, ‘country people have none of the clattering of machinery constantly dinning in their ears.’” (paragraph 11)
6. Passage 1 and Passage 3 present the same story in different formats. Which element of the story is emphasized by listening to the audio clip in Passage 3?

- Ellen’s thoughts about living and working on a farm
- the narrator’s experiences working in the mill
- Ellen’s attitude toward living in the mill town
- the narrator’s ideas about life in the country

7. Select **two** facts from Passage 2 that play a role in the story presented in Passage 1.

- The boardinghouses were usually run by a female keeper.
- Women working in Lowell mills mostly came from farms and small towns.
- Some women worked in small textile mills in the country before coming to the city.
- Women who lived in Lowell boardinghouses often shared a bedroom with other women.
- The cities provided mill workers with many social opportunities they did not have in small towns.