

# Arkwright: King Cotton or spin doctor?

## Objectives:

- to acquaint pupils with contrasting interpretations of Arkwright from websites, books and TV programmes
- to give pupils opportunities to arrive at their own judgements, having first selected and weighed up the most telling evidence
- to equip pupils with the knowledge and confidence to evaluate misleading accounts
- to encourage peer assessment
- to prepare pupils with the necessary background prior to undertaking a discursive piece of writing.

## Step 1: slides 2-4

By way of initial *hook* to engage all pupils' attention and interest show, the download from an American website (Resource Sheet 1) which had selected Arkwright as one of the 100 greatest people who ever lived. Given the names of the others on the list, are pupils surprised that Arkwright features? Have they even heard of him? Why does the BBC website think that he was significant (show slide 4).

## Step 2 slides 5&6

Now pose the challenge, was Arkwright worthy of the titles that have been given to him – 'King Cotton', 'Father of Factory system'? Did he changed the way things were made or the way things were made? Was he really that important or did he simply take other peoples' ideas and make them work? To help pupils to conceptualise the difference, ask the pupils to think of the name that comes to mind when the following are mentioned:

- A Airline, railway network
- B Revolutionary new vacuum cleaner

Spend time teasing out from pupils the difference between an innovative designer (Dyson) and an entrepreneur (Richard Branson) This clarified, the pupils can now begin the investigation.

### **Step 3 Slide 7-10**

Rather than simply give children sources to read and investigate for themselves, sketch in a brief narrative of Arkwright's life (using slides 7-10) dropping in a few clues but not making too many judgements. Leave the timeline of his life displayed as a point of reference (Resource sheet 2).

### **Step 4 slide 11**

Now challenge the pupils to select the evidence they would use to prove that Arkwright was a great figure. Issue Activity Sheet 1 which contains a series of statements supporting the view of Arkwright as 'King Cotton'. These are drawn from textbooks and recent research in *History Today* articles etc. Pupils, working in pairs, mark these on a scale of 1 – 5 (with 5 being most important), thereby ascribing relative significance to each statement. On completion they should be able to separate the most telling evidence from items that are irrelevant, or of marginal use. There is an extra challenge to think about the criteria for significance and going deeper questions to help them form their conclusions (see slide 11).

**15 mins**

### **Step 5**

Draw together the different verdicts and discuss them. What conclusions can be drawn? To develop pupil's speaking and listening skills, try using a three-pronged question technique - one pupil is asked for their idea, another is asked to explain whether they agree or not and why, a third is then invited to pass judgement. Who was right and why? This avoids ill-considered answers and means the pupils are assessing each other's ideas, rather than the teacher doing it for them.

### **Step 6 – Slide 12**

Repeat the procedure examining the reasons why Arkwright might NOT be considered a great pioneer, using Activity sheet 2 on slide 12 which again adds the extra challenge of colour coding, this time the type of insignificance and going deeper questions that help them think further about whether his significance has been over exaggerated. This should be completed more quickly as pupils will have the hang of it by now. The three-pronged feedback should also be more straightforward.

### **Step 7**

Show a brief clip of video from the BBC schools programme - just the concluding 5 minutes or a clip from History Chanel's *Industrial Revolutions*. Ask pupils to evaluate the judgement made in the programme. Was it too one-sided? Had anything been exaggerated or overlooked? If you don't have these videos there are a few videos on YouTube on Arkwright which give a useful summary or the Cromford Mills site has a very good secondary source pack on their website that give different opinions about Arkwright they can challenge. Use the colour coded King Cotton or Spin Doctor on slide 15 for the students to traffic light and explain their overall judgement.

### **Step 8 – Plenary slides 13 and 14 (differentiated)**

Show the class a very short summary of Arkwright's achievements as it appeared recently on a website (Resource Sheet 3). Is it a fair judgement? Ask pupils to consider how it could be improved. Issue paper copies which they are to annotate with their improvements/deletions/additions. This could be a homework task.

### **Follow-up slides 15 and 16 (differentiated version)**

The two grids and their annotated website copies, provide pupils with enough information to create their own written assessment of Arkwright's place in history. Can they produce a word-processed piece in answer to the original question – *Arkwright: King Cotton or spin doctor?* The best could be posted on the school's website, as superior versions of the download from the website they had seen earlier. Alternatively they can write to Comford Mill site to explain how and why it should be improved and their overall assessment of the historical significance of Arkwright according to the 3 Rs criteria and how the site should change the summary as on slides 15-16..

This lesson was based on a lesson seen at Hamble school and updated by R.Mcfahn and S.Herrity.



**SUMMARY OF ARKWRIGHT'S LIFE AND CAREER****1750s**

Worked as a wigmaker, barber and publican.

**1768**

Lived in Nottingham where he collaborated with John Kay on the production of a spinning machine. In June he applied for a patent for this machine which he received in the following year.

**1769-71**

Made further developments to the spinning machine with the help of Jedediah Strutt of Derby - a silk factory owner.

**1771**

Arkwright built a mill at Cromford Derbyshire using water power to operate the machinery. This led to his 'invention' the water-frame.

**1774**

Arkwright persuaded Parliament to end heavy tax on the sale of his cloth of 6d a yard. Arkwright's business prospers.

**1775**

He obtains a patent to control spinning.

**1776-80**

Builds new mills at Belper, Chorley and Cromford.

**1781-85**

Unsuccessfully defends his patents in court where it is proved that John Kay and Thomas Highs had substantially invented the machines to which he laid claim.

## Resource Sheet 3

# Sir Richard Arkwright



Summary from the Secondary page of the **Cromford Mill website**:

<https://www.cromfordmills.org.uk/secondary-school>

**SUMMARY**

- Arkwright's water frame invention, mill design and factory production model was so successful that other mills across Europe and in the USA were built using his plans and designs
- Arkwright successfully made the spinning water frame work by the effective spacing and weighting the rollers to maintain an even yarn.
- Unlike Hargreaves spinning jenny it could be operated by unskilled workers
- Arkwright's factory model brought all processes together in one place, preparing, weaving, spinning

**Picture**

Portrait of Arkwright by Mather Brown - The Athenaeum: Home - info - pic, Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=10595857>

| <b>Evidence FOR Arkwright deserving the title 'King Cotton'</b>                                  |               |   |   |                |   |
|--|---------------|---|---|----------------|---|
| Give each piece of evidence a rating by circling a number. 5 = very important, 1 = not important |               |   |   |                |   |
| Evidence   | Not important |   |   | Very important |   |
| 1. He had as many as 5000 people working for him and organised them well.                        | 1             | 2 | 3 | 4              | 5 |
| 2. He kept up with technological advances e.g. using water power, then steam power.              | 1             | 2 | 3 | 4              | 5 |
| 3. He was made a knight, 'Sir Richard', by King George III.                                      | 1             | 2 | 3 | 4              | 5 |
| 4. He wore silk waistcoats.  | 1             | 2 | 3 | 4              | 5 |
| 5. He was prepared to take risks.  | 1             | 2 | 3 | 4              | 5 |
| 6. He built himself a really big house, Willersley Castle.                                       | 1             | 2 | 3 | 4              | 5 |
| 7. His funeral cortege was watched by 2000 people.   | 1             | 2 | 3 | 4              | 5 |
| 8. He kept going when others would have given up, working 16 hours a day.                        | 1             | 2 | 3 | 4              | 5 |
| 9. He was able to adapt other people's ideas.  | 1             | 2 | 3 | 4              | 5 |
| 10. He knew how important it was to obtain financial support.                                    | 1             | 2 | 3 | 4              | 5 |
| 11. When he died, his personal fortune was £½ million.   | 1             | 2 | 3 | 4              | 5 |
| 12. He knew how important it was to have his inventions patented.                                | 1             | 2 | 3 | 4              | 5 |
| 13. He saw that factories were needed and built the first cotton mill in 1771 at Cranford Mill.  | 1             | 2 | 3 | 4              | 5 |

### Evidence AGAINST Arkwright deserving the title 'King Cotton'

Give each piece of evidence a rating by circling a number. 5 = very important, 1 = not important

| Evidence   | Not<br>important | Very<br>important |   |   |   |
|--|------------------|-------------------|---|---|---|
| 1. He was only a barber/wigmaker by trade.   | 1                | 2                 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. He had no real knowledge or training in the cotton industry so he must have got his ideas from other people.                            | 1                | 2                 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. He was not the only person to build factories.  | 1                | 2                 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. He stole other people's ideas, especially John Kaye's, the clockmaker.  | 1                | 2                 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. He didn't care about other people, as long as he made money.  | 1                | 2                 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. In 1785 he lost the rights to his patents because it was proved in court that others had developed similar machines earlier.            | 1                | 2                 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. He only became rich because his workers worked such long hours.   | 1                | 2                 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. He persuaded other people to tell him their secrets which he then used to make his fortune.   | 1                | 2                 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. Some people thought he charged too much for use of his patents and he took people to court if they used his designs without paying him. | 1                | 2                 | 3 | 4 | 5 |