

BRADFORD MADE
Heritage Brought to Life
Stories from Bradford's Communities

KS 3/4 (AGE 11-16)
Activity Pack

LOST MILLS

Working Lives in Bradford and Keighley's Textile Mills



LOCAL STORIES

FOR LEARNERS



BRADFORD 2025
UK City of Culture

PACK AT A GLANCE

Explore the voices and experiences of Bradford and Keighley's textile workers in the 1970s and 80s through oral histories, archive film, and creative classroom activities.

Lost Mills and Ghost Mansions is an oral history project created by Bradford-based 509 Arts, capturing the unheard voices of textile mill workers from the 1970s onwards. This education pack draws on stories from the Lost Mills Learning Zone to explore the working lives of textile workers Kim Sharp and Abid Hussain. Learners gain insight into daily life in Bradford district's textile industry in the late twentieth century and uncover their own connections to this local history.

At the heart of this resource is **UNSPUN Stories** – a powerful multimedia film created in collaboration with The Colour Foundry. This imaginative piece weaves together oral histories, rare footage from the Yorkshire Film Archive, and specially composed music to celebrate the heritage of Bradford and Keighley's textile industry.

Through this pack, learners engage deeply with this local history, using drama, discussion, and ICT-based activities to explore themes of work, community, and cultural change. This resource invites students to step into the stories of Bradford and Keighley's mill workers and reflect on how their voices shape the identity of the region today.

Recommended for: Ages 11-16 (Key Stage 3 and 4 Learners)

Includes: Discussion / Writing prompts,
Drama activities, ICT activities

Links to: History / English / Drama / Media /
Music / SMSC / ICT / Local learning

ABID HUSSAIN: STRIKES, SHIFTS, AND MILL LIFE IN BRADFORD



Abid Hussain

A Teenager in Bradford's Mills

Abid Hussain was born in Pakistan and moved to England with his family at the age of 16 in June 1969. Bradford became his new home and, just a few weeks after moving, he began work in one of the many local textile mills, Dalton Mill.

At just 16, he was employed as a labourer and trained by a fellow Pakistani worker. The noisy and intimidating textile machinery ran day and night and soon became his new norm. The mills at that time were bustling, with a diverse mix of workers. He befriended some of the Italian women who explained the textile process and patiently taught him how to operate the machines.

His pay as a labourer was a basic wage, so Abid worked overtime on Saturdays to top it up. Even working a six-day week, his take-home pay was just £6.75 a week (around £67 in today's money). He looked forward to Friday the most, when he would be handed over his wage in a treasured small brown envelope.

Some workers had long and tiring commutes to work, but Abid felt grateful to live just a 5-minute walk from Dalton Mill. The Mill needed more machine workers, so as the months went by, Abid set about learning all of the different roles. When Abid approached the overlooker (also known as a foreman or manager), he was shocked by Abid's new skills! He tested Abid and then promoted him to the position of machine operator. The promotion meant an increase of £3-4 per week, which in the 1970s was a lot of money!

Abid's father and friends also worked at the Mill. They operated the same machinery but earned more by working the night shift. When Abid turned 25, he took up his own night shift at Low Mill near Keighley railway station. The shifts were 13 hours long, and the foreman checked on the machine workers continuously between 6pm and 7am. It was hard work, but Abid worked tirelessly so he could save to buy a house in Keighley, as well as support his family back in Pakistan.

Initially, Abid struggled with working night shifts and sleeping during the day. He primarily worked in spinning and twisting, but as time went on, he learned new skills from his friends.

Hayfield Mill and the Night Shift Strike

Abid moved to Hayfield Mill, which he remembers as “a busy and tough mill”, with fewer workers and a manager who didn’t get along with the night shift workers.

Every department had an overlooker, who was responsible for both the machines and workers. In Hayfields, the overlooker was incredibly strict and unfriendly, walking around every 15 minutes of the night shift to make sure everyone was working continuously. While the machines were running, Abid liked to read the newspaper. One day, the manager took it away, saying, “No, you’ve come to work...you don’t need to read.” The next shift, Abid was threatened with losing his job for reading by the management, even though his machines were running steadily.

Abid and his fellow night shift workers, mainly from Pakistan and Bangladesh, also noticed their wages were often cut by £1-2 each week for no reason, when they should have been paid bonuses for extra work. Management treated the day shift workers, who were mostly White British, better.

After many issues with this particular manager and the ongoing discrimination of Asian workers, around 60 night shift workers went on strike. They met at Abid’s mosque and agreed not to return to work until their demands were met. The mill was very busy, and management didn’t want to lose the work. They even tried visiting the workers at home to persuade them to return, but nobody did. The strike lasted for two weeks, resulting in the mill losing thousands of pounds of work.

The management finally agreed to hold a meeting in the mill’s canteen that Abid remembers clearly. The strikers complained about poor hand-washing facilities and the aggressive manager who was underpaying them despite their hard work. Management agreed to fire the manager, and the night shift workers happily returned to work. The strike was one of many in the 1980s and 1990s, reaching national newspapers and leading to a significant change in workers’ rights, while also highlighting ongoing racial discrimination within working mills.

“Why do you think some workers were treated differently?”

Star Worker

Abid had his most positive experience working at Robert Clough’s in Keighley, also known as Myrtle Grove Mill. The managers were friendly, and the Mill was clean and tidy, and Abid worked there for over fifteen years. He could turn his hand to any job, except weaving, becoming a star worker. If colleagues were absent, his manager would ask, “Mr. Hussain, could you go on that machine?” and for his adaptability, Abid received an extra £10 per week! Later, Abid moved to John Haggas, a well-regarded mill that was open seven days a week, taking two days off midweek and working weekends.



Lunch and Tea Breaks!

Abid loved the tea breaks at work, with one at 9:30am and one at 3pm. Tea ladies would walk through the mill with a trolley and a bell, shouting "teatime!". Everyone stopped their machines to enjoy a sandwich, biscuits, and tea for just 5p! At 12:30pm, it was lunchtime, and workers had a thirty-minute break. Despite the long hours, Abid enjoyed working in textile mills because of the friendly atmosphere and camaraderie amongst the staff.

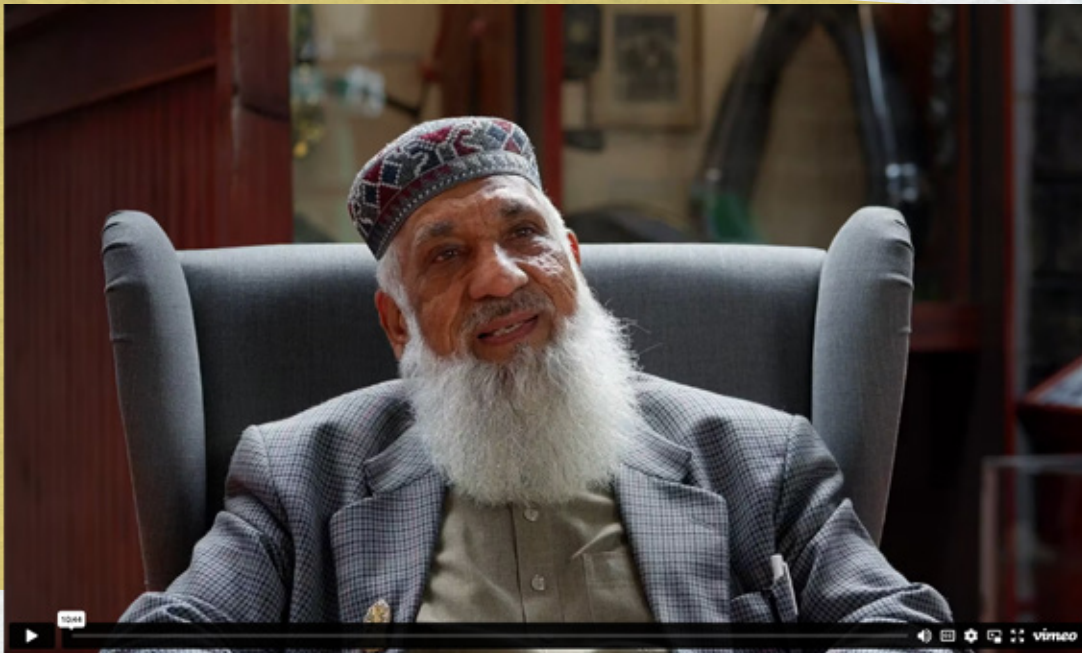
A Lifetime of Service

Beyond the mills, Abid's proudest moment came in 1981 when, at 30 years old, he became a father. Family life and work in textiles went hand in hand for the next 25 years. Recently, he visited the Bradford Industrial Museum to see the same machines he worked on decades ago, and he still remembered how to operate them. Most of Abid's friendships were formed through mill communities, and they often chat about their shared experiences and memories of Bradford in the late 20th century.

Abid still meets former colleagues from John Haggas in Keighley, and they remember each other well. Abid was sad to see Dalton Mill in the news when it burned down in March 2022. He couldn't understand why such a big, beautiful building was destroyed. When he walks past the old mill site with his family, especially his grandchildren, Abid shares his memories of his first textile job and moving to Bradford.

"It was a very good time, a very friendly time."

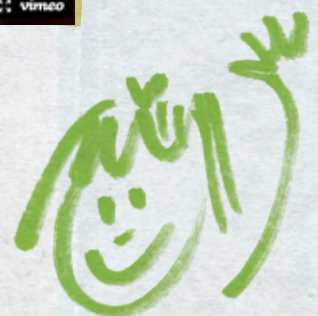
Abid Hussain



Abid Hussain's full video interview:

10:44 via Vimeo

Continue for Kim's story: →



KIM SHARP: LIFE ON THE LOOMS OF BRADFORD

Kim Sharp was brought up in Ravenscliffe, Bradford, by her hardworking mum, who juggled three jobs to support them and their younger sister. Childhood was spent playing outside with friends on the estate, helping at home, and learning skills like baking, crocheting, and even dancing the Charleston with their great-grandma. Kim started working in Bradford's textile mills once she left school, aged 16 in 1978. Her first job was at W&J Whiteheads in Laisterdyke, where her grandfather was an overlooker in the combing department. Her aunt also worked at the same mill and was an extraordinary woman. Her aunt was a spinning department cleaner and worked full-time from 1935 until she retired in 1980. She was later diagnosed with cerebral palsy, which caused her muscle weakness and pain throughout her whole life, but wasn't medically understood in the early 1900s.



Kim Sharp

Training

Kim quickly learned how to use the gill box, a machine that prepares fibres for spinning by aligning and blending them. 'Jobber lads', as they were known, brought raw wool in small packages to pass through three gill boxes in a row. Kim cut open the bales and then made sure the wool moved through the machines correctly. Sometimes, there were crickets compressed within the wool that would jump out and scuttle under the machines!

Roving

Once the wool had gone through the gill boxes and was narrowed down, it was ready for roving. Roving is when fibres are prepared for spinning by stretching and slightly twisting to form a yarn. Kim was trained on roving by a lady named Rita and learned how to manage three large German roving machines, each holding 64 bobbins. One machine had khaki yarn for military uniforms, which threw out green fibres everywhere. Another machine was for an expensive, pure white Damart product, and even a speck of dust would ruin it. Kim had a few arguments with her overlooker, Ernest, because keeping fibres clear of contamination was impossible!

Managers

In the 1970s, all the overlookers and managers were men because society didn't think women should do any serious heavy lifting. However, women had to lift heavy bobbins when doffing machines! Kim saw the mill as a women's industry because women did all the heavy work while the men in her mill just gave orders.

Uniform

Kim wore a tabard to work, which fastened at the sides and had pockets. She carried a Stanley knife to cut the threads wrapped around the machine. Kim also wore a plastic wire around her neck to attach the thread to a bobbin. If any threads broke, the machine stopped automatically, and the thread needed to be reattached.

Shifts

Kim caught two buses each way from Ravenscliffe to Laisterdyke for work. Her shift was Monday-Friday, 2pm-9:30pm, with one 30-minute unpaid dinner break. After getting two buses back and walking from the bus stop in the dark, Kim would get home at 10:15pm, where her mother always had her tea ready. Kim loved the late shifts because she didn't have to get up early for work! Sometimes, Whiteheads asked people to work on Saturday mornings, but Kim never volunteered, saying, "Monday-Friday is enough!"

To keep entertained on her long commute, Kim carried a cassette recorder and often listened to the War of the Worlds soundtrack, which still reminds her of working in the mills today.

In the heavy winter of 1978, buses were cancelled because of snow and Whiteheads Mill let everyone leave at 6pm. Kim remembers having to walk from Laisterdyke to Ravenscliffe in the freezing conditions, keeping to the main road for safety. It took her 4 hours to walk home alone!

Canteen and Wages

Kim worked in the New Mill of Whiteheads, which had a small canteen with machines for sandwiches and drinks. Sometimes, she went to the Old Mill across the road for a hot meal from their larger canteen. Kim enjoyed the community and social side of working in the textile mills and the interesting women she worked with. She can remember all of their names to this day. She worked 37 hours a week and earned £32 in cash, which felt like a lot of money in the 1970s, especially at age 16!



Dangers

Kim's job was dangerous; she had to learn how to stay safe quickly. Although safety features had improved since the Victorian era, they were not as robust in the 1970s as you might see in a mill today. The flyers around the bobbins were made of lead and concrete. If one broke, it could cause serious harm. Safety gates were installed, but Kim was careful, never standing directly in front of the machines as an extra precaution. One day, when connecting the threads to the machine, Kim felt her hair pull as it was caught in the wool fibres! Luckily, Kim was able to hit the stop button on the machine just in time and had a lucky escape. When the machine stopped suddenly, the threads went slack and broke, so Kim had to tie up sixty bobbins to continue.

Moving Mills

After five years working at Whiteheads', Kim moved to Fisher's mill in Idle, where she worked on roving in the loft space. The machinery in this mill was very old and was all made in Britain. The machines didn't have any warning lights or automation to stop when something went wrong, so the threads would continue to wrap themselves incorrectly around the machine. The only way Kim knew there was a fault was when she smelt burning, so these machines were a huge fire hazard! As a result, Kim didn't stay long and actually returned to her original manager at Whiteheads (the one she had argued with about the contaminating fibres), who remembered her hard work and offered her another job to start the following week.

Leaving Textiles

In 1983, Kim left Bradford's textile industry because her income couldn't cover her rent and bills. She found a higher-paying job in a Bradford warehouse. Decades later, visiting Bradford's Industrial Museum, the unique smell and the noise from the machinery brought back distinct memories of her time working in the mills.

"There was a good camaraderie there. It was noisy. It was stinky. But there were good people there as well."

Kim Sharp



Kim Sharp's full video interview:

16:11 via Vimeo

**Continue to get inspired,
dig deeper, learn and create:** →



INVESTIGATE



[You could play Abid's Interview Extract](#) (90 seconds via Vimeo) to hear more about his first day in the mill.

- How would it feel emigrating to a new country as a teenager?
- What would the challenges be making Bradford your new home? (Learning the language, finding a job, new place to live, different culture, making friends etc).
- What do you think Abid's main feelings would have been on his first day at the mill?



- How would you describe Kim?
- What were her skills?
- What were her interests or hobbies?
- What did you find interesting about Kim's story?
- What words could you use to describe working in textile mills after finishing school?
- Compare Kim's experience of Bradford in the 1970s to Bradford today. What has changed and what has stayed the same?



- [Listen to an extract of the interview with Kim here](#): and hear how she talks about the differences between men and women in the workplace.
- How do you think men and women might have been treated differently? Has that changed in workplaces today?
- What are the main similarities in Kim and Abid's stories? What experiences did they share?

GET INSPIRED



Here is a link to the whole 20-minute multimedia film UNSPUN Stories - a collaboration between 509 Arts and The Colour Foundry. The film is best watched on as big a screen as possible, with the best quality audio in your setting:

Unspun Stories - Full Film →

If you don't have time in your session to engage with the whole film, here is a link to the UNSPUN Stories 'playlist' - clips from the film that are 3-4 minutes long:

Unspun Stories Tracks - YouTube →

- Did anything surprise you about the way the film represented the history of mill work?
- What did you like about the film? (e.g. bright colours, layering images, catchy music, etc.)
- What did you learn from the film about Bradford, textiles, and the 1970s?
- What different groups of people are represented in the film?
- What different elements are used to tell the story? (e.g. music, soundbites, lyrics, archive footage, animation, photographs, text)
- Who else would enjoy watching the film and why?



LEARN AND CREATE

Drama Workshop Plan:

Ideally, the workshop takes place after the learners are familiarised with Kim and Abid's stories through the reading and discussion plan detailed above.

- [Watch Kim's Interview Extract](#) and [Abid's Interview Extract](#).
- Groups to each have 1x A2 paper and pens to jot down key themes or words that come to mind when reading their stories
 - Similarities?
 - Differences? (to each other, to today compared to 1970s etc...)
 - Emotions related to their stories
 - Key places or characters (e.g. managers, canteens, bus stops, mosques etc.)

Scaling activity (10-15 minutes)

- Draw an invisible line on the floor. This is a visual scale for the students to stand on depending on how they feel.
- Examples of scales:
 - Low stakes > high stakes
 - Calm > stress
 - No choice > power
 - Safe > danger
- Read different statements from the stories aloud (e.g. "I moved to Bradford at sixteen", "I spoke no English", "My hair got caught in the machine", "I ate in the canteen", "I work with my hands" etc.)
- Students stand where they feel best represents how they would feel
- Encourage reflection on how these experiences would feel

Tableaux activity (10-15 minutes)


Tableau: a freeze frame dramatically depicting a scene (it can also be fun to make it a 'moving picture' with repetitive actions for machinery, etc!)

- Different words called by the educator (could be technical terms or quotes from the stories, e.g., Abid's tea break or Kim's bus journey home)
- Each group has 30 seconds to create a tableau depicting this scene (they could use physical theatre to become a roving machine, or sit together in the canteen)
- Encourage imagination, thinking outside the box, and working together to make this piece!
- Physical theatre encourages learners to embody characters, environments or machinery using their own bodies. It allows them to think beyond words by expressing meaning through movements and shapes. Simple props such as fabric or clothing can also be used to enhance the piece.
- After 30 seconds, groups must hold their tableau for the facilitator to see and can explain their piece (as they are usually quite abstract!).

Combined Arts (10-20 minutes)

- Learners could now embellish their tableau by considering the sounds unique to their scene.
- Consider words or sounds associated with the mills (using Kim and Abid's interviews, Unspun Stories, and their own notes from earlier).
- How do these noises make you feel? How would these noises affect concentration, communication, and safety in a mill?
- The goal is to create an artistic interpretation of the mills based on Kim and Abid's stories: using movement, sound, physical theatre, etc.
- Imagine Pitch Perfect's A Capella with a beautifully choreographed dance depicting machinery, community, the creation of fabric, etc.
- Ask each group to share their pieces.
- Encourage reflection on the interpretation of each piece, creative choices, and the process of devising these short scenes.

Other options include – hot seating Kim and Abid, creating an improvised scene or a script around one or more of Kim or Abid's experiences in the mill.



Oral History Activity Plan

The [Do It Yourself](#) page on the [Lost Mills Learning Zone](#) is a great resource for anyone wanting to create their own oral history project. It includes a step-by-step guide for conducting interviews, including preparation, safety, interview etiquette, and editing of recordings.

Start with an open discussion on people and stories. Questions to ask the group:

- What makes a story interesting?
- How do we tell stories? (e.g., word of mouth, diaries and blogs, biographies and autobiographies, broadcasts, photographs, art, music, film, poetry, etc).
- Why is storytelling important? (e.g., preserving and understanding history, opening minds through new perspectives, human connection and empathy, diverse voices and cultures, educating, entertainment, creating community, promoting self-worth, evaluation and reflection, etc).
- What are the first things you'd want to know about someone to get to know them better? How would you ask for this information conversationally?

Discuss how to ask a good question, using techniques like:

- **Open questions** (e.g., "What are your hobbies?" instead of "Do you like football?")
- **Active listening.** Referring back to a word or phrase previously said as a way to ask a follow up question (e.g. "You said your workplace is noisy, could you describe it for us?" or even using body language as a cue, like "You're smiling as you talk about ____, what do you enjoy about it?")
- **Genuine interest and curiosity.** People are more likely to openly share their thoughts and experiences when they feel the listener values what they have to say. This is achieved with good eye contact, a friendly, casual interview style, and letting the interviewee lead the conversation.
- **Letting go of the script.** Interviews are not interrogations! Respond to the information shared by the interviewee rather than rushing in with the next planned question. It's good to go in prepared with questions, but trust that you can connect with this person and have a naturally flowing conversation. You can't predict where the conversation will go; otherwise, you'll miss a golden nugget of information you didn't expect to hear!
- **Love to learn.** It's okay, and sometimes beneficial, to go into an interview or conversation without extensive knowledge on the subject matter. This encourages you to ask basic questions and gain a better understanding, making the interview appeal to more people. Give context around technical terms and definitions, outlining the purpose, and the interviewee's links to the subject (e.g., a geography teacher talking about earthquakes). This means even complete beginners in that subject can enjoy the interview, learn something new, and not feel out of their depth. It's also an easy way for the interviewee to share basic facts to begin with.

It's also good to consider what information would be helpful to know before the interview takes place (e.g., how to address them, their pronouns, how they link to the subject, where this interview will be shared, and gain any consent, etc).

Discuss necessary items and location for a good interview:

- Audio recorder (phones are fine!)
- Notebook and pen (to have notes written in ahead of the interview and make notes throughout if needed).
- Water for both parties.
- Quiet, undisturbed environment.

Now, the group can either split into pairs to interview each other, or source someone external to interview (e.g. a teacher or relative).

- A theme could be decided ahead of time. Simple themes could include their favourite hobby or food or sharing a memory of their favourite holiday. More complex or advanced themes could be learning about an industry or job from a new perspective, thoughts on a local or national news event, or even how different demographics consume media.
- Using the ideas shared in the discussion, learners can make an interview plan for their chosen interviewee and subject matter.
- Learners could interview independently or work together in pairs/small groups, depending on group size and preference. If doing so, create individual roles and responsibilities so that everyone brings value to the interview (e.g., researcher, interviewer, producer, cinematographer/recorder, editor, etc.).

An extension to this activity session is the learners exploring how to edit their interviews using guidance from the [Do It Yourself](#) page. [Audacity](#) has free and high-quality editing software.

Consider:

- Cutting silence or 'dead air' for a concise interview.
- Editing out coughs or distracting noises if possible.
- Choosing one 'golden nugget' soundbite that captures the essence of the interview (our Learning Zone is full of these for inspiration!). Editing and saving this as a separate, smaller file to share with the group.
- Transcribe the interview, then manually check it's accurate.

Share examples of the interviews once regrouped with reflections on the experience. Suggested questions:

- How did it feel getting to know someone in this way? (e.g., scary, fun, formal, challenging, interesting).
- How has your perspective on the subject matter changed? (e.g., better understanding, more interested in researching further, the topic is more complex than first thought, etc).
- What worked well in the interviews? (e.g., clear questions, not interrupting, etc).
- Who would find this story interesting? (e.g., family and friends, community groups linked to the subject, local people, the council, local news, etc).
- What would you do next to preserve or use this information? (e.g., interview more people on the same topic, research further, ask for consent to share this story on social media, etc).



DIG DEEPER

[Lost Mills Learning Zone](#)

A free, interactive online learning resource exploring Bradford's textile history from the 1970s onwards, created by 509 Arts. Includes original source material, soundbites, photographs and video from over 80 contributors, categorised by theme for accessible learning.

[Lost Mills and Ghost Mansions Google Map](#)

A free, interactive map of Bradford's textile mills and mansions referenced in the Lost Mills and Ghost Mansions interviews. Provides geographical location, additional information, photographs and current usage of each building. Created by 509 Arts.

[Abid Hussain's full video interview](#)

10:44 via Vimeo (also embedded on the [Media Wall](#))

[Kim Sharp's full video interview](#)

16:11 via Vimeo (also embedded on the [Media Wall](#))

[Unspun Stories Music Playlist](#)

MP3 files via SoundCloud

[John Haggas Industrial Dispute on BBC Look North](#)

2:30 via Vimeo (also embedded on [Rights and Wrongs](#)).

Good context when exploring changes in social rights and discrimination in Bradford).

[Do It Yourself: Oral History Guide](#)

A page within the Lost Mills Learning Zone with more information on conducting oral history projects, regardless of the subject matter.

[Glossary and Project Context](#)

Providing technical explanations for textile processes and equipment as well as background context for Bradford's textile history.



NOTES FOR EDUCATORS

The Lost Mills Learning Zone is a large and expertly curated oral history archive preserving the memories of people who worked in Bradford's textile industry from the 1970s onwards.

The archive has many potential uses for education beyond the activities in this pack, and we hope educators will be inspired to develop their own ideas from the source material.

The interviews in the wider archive cover issues including migration, family separation, workplace injury, workplace bullying, and other sensitive topics. Some learners may find these challenging. Please check the source material is appropriate for your specific group before use.

For more detailed advice and ideas from Bradford Schools of Sanctuary about talking about migration in the classroom see: [Teaching about Forced Migration – A Guide for Bradford Educators](#)

MAKING THE MOST OF THE LEARNING ZONE

The Learning Zone can be used to introduce learners to the archive in an accessible, engaging way. Below are some suggestions for using it in your teaching:

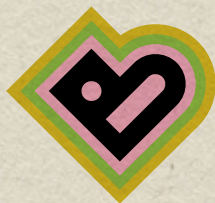
Getting started

- Ensure students have access to computers or tablets and headphones.
- Begin by reading the context page on the Learning Zone homepage together.
- Give students a set amount of time to explore the site independently (pages can be navigated via the top-right menu or previewed at the bottom of each page).

Setting missions

To help structure exploration, you may wish to set learners specific “missions.” These encourage independent enquiry while keeping the focus purposeful. Examples include:

- What happens in a shoddy factory? (Answer found under Recycling on [Working Life](#))
- List as many different items made in textile mills as you can (Answers include: Islamic funeral gloves, clothing, curtains, royal garments, military uniforms, carpets, fabric for upholstery, yarn for tampons, etc.)
- Make a fact file for either Kim or Abid. What are they good at? How long did they work at each mill? Which roles suit them best and why?
- Research key global events that contributed to Bradford’s multiculturalism (e.g., WWII for Polish and Italian communities, the Voucher Migration program for Bangladeshi communities, civil wars, etc.)
- Discover Abdul Ghafoor’s adventurous hobby funded by his textile job (Answer: motorbike rallying! Found around 12:00 into his full interview or associated transcript, or by finding his entry on the [Interview Analysis](#) spreadsheet - all under the [Archive](#)).
- Write a recipe blog post or restaurant menu for the mill canteens using testimony on the [Time Off](#) page. Watch [Kim’s full interview](#), and [Abid’s full interview](#), to decide the food options, cooking methods, and serving times. Be creative by including customer reviews and seasonal options!
- Write a diary entry or blog post as a mill worker on your last day of work due to the mill closing. Using photographs and soundbites on [Changing Ways](#), see how a once thriving mills is now left derelict. Describe the experience of standing in your workplace for the last time. Consider the different sensory reactions (sight, smell, hearing, touch, taste).
- Make a Venn diagram showing the similarities and differences in Bradford’s textile industry today compared to the 1970s. [Textiles Today](#) is a great reference.



BRADFORD 2025

UK City of Culture



This resource was co-created by Izzie Smith & Alan Dix (509 Arts) and the Bradford 2025 UK City of Culture Cultural Learning Team.

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509 Arts



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