

NAME: _____

“The Sweatshop” by Morris Rosenfeld
[excerpt]

Analysis: Look for symbolism, simile, and personification.

The machines are so wildly noisy in the shop
That I often forget who I am.
I get lost in the frightful tumult —
My self is destroyed, I become a machine.
I work and work and work endlessly —
I create and create and create
Why? For whom? I don't know and I don't ask.
What business has a machine thinking?

I have no feelings, no thoughts, no understanding.
The bitter, bloody work suppresses
The noblest, most beautiful, best, richest,
Deepest, and highest things that life possesses.
Seconds, minutes, and hours go by — the days and nights sail past quickly.
I run the machine as if I wanted to overtake them —
I race mindlessly, endlessly.

The clock in the shop never rests —
It shows everything, strikes constantly, wakes us constantly.
Someone once explained it to me:
“In its showing and waking lies understanding.”
But I seem to remember something, as if from a dream:
The clock awakens life and understanding in me,
And something else — I forget what. Don't ask!
I don't know, I don't know! I'm a machine!



Morris Rosenfeld was a Russian Jewish immigrant who wrote poems in Yiddish about the conditions in New York's tailoring workshops.

1. How did Rosenfeld feel about his work?
2. In preparation for an interview, write two questions to ask Mr. Rosenfeld.
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3. What light does the poem shed on the experiences of American workers?