

# Knocker-Uppers: A Job from the Past

Reading Worksheet — Level C | [tahricteaches.com](http://tahricteaches.com)



Long ago, before **alarm clocks** were cheap and easy to buy, people had a problem. They needed to wake up very early for work, but they had no way to make sure they got up on time. Factory workers, miners, and dock workers all started work very early. If they were late or missed work, they could lose their jobs or not get paid.

This problem led to a special job called a "knocker-upper." Knocker-uppers were people who walked through the streets very early in the morning to wake people up. They carried a long **bamboo** stick or used a pea-shooter with dried peas. They would tap on bedroom windows or shoot peas at the windows to wake their **customers**.

The knocker-uppers had to remember which house to visit and what time each person needed to wake up. Some people needed to get up at 4 AM, others at 5 AM. Each customer paid a few **pence** every week for this service. The knocker-uppers had to work in all kinds of weather - rain, snow, or cold winter mornings.

Most knocker-uppers were older people or **women** who could not work in the factories. It was hard work, but it gave them a way to make money. Some knocker-uppers even had their own knocker-upper to make sure they woke up first! This job was very important from the 1830s to the 1940s in Britain and Ireland.

The job of knocker-upper slowly **disappeared** when alarm clocks became cheap to buy. After World War II, many people could afford electric clocks and radio alarm clocks. The last known knocker-upper stopped working in the 1970s. Today, we use smartphone alarms, or hotels give us wake-up calls, but the knocker-upper job is gone forever.

## A. Vocabulary

---

- |                        |   |
|------------------------|---|
| 1. knocker-upper _____ | a. i. Buildings where things are made             |
| 2. bamboo _____        | b. h. Clocks that ring to wake people up          |
| 3. pea-shooter _____   | c. f. People who work loading and unloading ships |
| 4. customers _____     | d. b. Went away completely                        |
| 5. factories _____     | e. c. A person who woke people up for work        |
| 6. miners _____        | f. g. A strong, tall grass used to make sticks    |
| 7. dock workers _____  | g. e. A tool that shoots small objects like peas  |
| 8. pence _____         | h. j. People who pay for a service                |
| 9. alarm clocks _____  | i. a. A person who worked in coal mines           |
| 10. disappeared _____  | j. d. Old British coins, smaller than pennies     |

## B. True or False

---

1. Knocker-uppers worked in the afternoon. \_\_\_\_
2. People paid knocker-uppers a few pence each week. \_\_\_\_
3. All knocker-uppers were young men. \_\_\_\_
4. Knocker-uppers used bamboo sticks to tap on windows. \_\_\_\_
5. The job disappeared in the 1800s. \_\_\_\_
6. Some knocker-uppers had their own knocker-upper. \_\_\_\_
7. Factory workers didn't need to wake up early. \_\_\_\_
8. The last knocker-upper stopped working in the 1970s. \_\_\_\_
9. Knocker-uppers only worked when the weather was good. \_\_\_\_

## C. Fill in the Blanks

---

**Word Bank:** alarm, bamboo, customer, women, disappeared, morning, factory

1. Long ago, \_\_\_\_\_ clocks were not cheap or easy to buy.
2. Knocker-uppers carried a long \_\_\_\_\_ stick to tap on windows.
3. Each \_\_\_\_\_ paid a few pence every week for this service.
4. Most knocker-uppers were older people or \_\_\_\_\_ who could not work in factories.
5. The job slowly \_\_\_\_\_ when alarm clocks became cheap to buy.

## D. Comprehension Questions

---

1. Why did people need knocker-uppers before alarm clocks?
2. What tools did knocker-uppers use to wake people up?
3. How much money did customers pay for this service?
4. Who usually worked as knocker-uppers?
5. When did the last knocker-upper stop working?

## E. Discussion Questions

---

1. How do you wake up in the morning? What would you do if you didn't have an alarm clock?
2. Do you think being a knocker-upper was a good job? Why or why not?
3. What other old jobs do you know that don't exist anymore? Why did they disappear?

# Answer Key

*Knocker-Uppers: A Job from the Past — Teacher Reference Only*

**A. Vocabulary:** 1-e, 2-f, 3-g, 4-h, 5-a, 6-i, 7-c, 8-j, 9-b, 10-d

**B. True/False:** 1-F, 2-T, 3-F, 4-T, 5-F, 6-T, 7-F, 8-T, 9-F

**C. Fill Blanks:** undefined

**D. Comprehension:**

1. Because alarm clocks were not cheap or easy to buy, and people needed to wake up early for work
2. They used long bamboo sticks to tap on windows or pea-shooters with dried peas
3. A few pence each week
4. Older people or women who could not work in factories
5. In the 1970s