

## **“The Eight Hour Day”**

### **The Basics**

#### **Time Required**

2 days

#### **Subject Areas**

10<sup>th</sup> Grade American Literature

Emergence of Modern America, 1890-1930

#### **Common Core Standards Addressed:**

Writing Standards for English Language Arts 6-12

#### **Author**

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### **The Lesson**

#### **Introduction**

This song captures the energy of the movement for the 8 hour workday—an issue at the heart of the Haymarket Riots in Chicago. Like the Homestead Strike, the violence at Haymarket turned public opinion against the workers, now seen as radicals, and damaged their campaign for labor reform.

#### **Guiding Questions**

How long does the school day last? Is this too short? Too long?

#### **Learning Objectives**

Using a variety of texts, students will examine the national labor movement at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, focusing on worker motivation as well as local ramifications of the rise and fall of industry.

#### **Preparation Instructions**

Used in this lesson:

“The Eight Hour Day” (c.1897)

“Happiness” (A poem by Carl Sandburg)

#### **Lesson Activities**

DAY 1

Opening Activity: Carl Sandburg's poem: "Happiness"

- Possible Discussion questions: What does the speaker think of the executives and professors? How do you know? Why does the speaker admire the Hungarians? What do you need in order to be happy at home? What do you need in order to be happy at work? Why would the executives be incapable of describing happiness? (Respond in writing 5 mins, then discuss)

Main Activity: "The Eight Hour Day" and Selected Chicago Labor Incidents

- Step One: Listen to the song.
  - Discussion questions: According to the lyrics, what obstacles are keeping the workers from experiencing "peace and happiness?" Do you think their requests are unreasonable? If you were their boss, would you be in favor of granting their requests? Why or why not? Do you think this song would have been a powerful persuader for their cause? Why or why not? [NB: The tune for this song is "The British Grenadiers," a well-known tune from the Revolutionary era. Why might this tune be used for this text?]
  - How do the instrumental sounds of the song add to its overall meaning? Do you think the musical tone matches the emotional content of the lyrics? How does the music serve to emphasize the more important sections of lyric?
- Step Two: Writing in response to images from press relating to Haymarket and Pullman.
  - (Online resources at Chicago Historical Society - <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/1211.html> -and Library of Congress.) Teacher will select a collection of images, and number them for distribution around the room. (Images for Pullman and Haymarket, approx. 10 each, should be grouped separately.)
  - Students will be assigned an event to explore, and will then travel from photo to photo, briefly describing what they see in the images. Who are the subjects of the photo? What is happening in the photo? What is the environment, etc.
  - Once the circuit is completed, students will write a brief newspaper article describing either Haymarket or the Pullman strike. Writing should be completed as homework.

DAY 2

- Opening Activity: Carl Sandburg's poem, "Chicago" (Poem available: <http://carl-sandburg.com/chicago.htm>)
  - Discussion questions: List the industries described in the opening stanza of the poem. What sort of mental images do you see when you read this poem? (sketch them) What is the overall tone or emotion of this song? What words help build the tone of the poem? Why do these struggling people seem to be happy?
- Main Activity: Upton Sinclair's The Jungle (entire text available online at: <http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/Literature/Sinclair/TheJungle/>)
  - Read chapter one of the novel and write a paragraph explaining why Carl Sandburg would classify these characters as happy people.

- **\*\*At this point, the focus of the class will turn to additional excerpts of the novel, not included/discussed here. Estimated additional instructional time at this point of the unit: approx. 5 days, at teacher’s discretion\*\*\***
- To close discussion of novel, study will focus on the public reaction to the novel, and the policy changes that eventually were made in response.
- Also at this point would be a review of the significant labor incidents in Chicago history—students will be able to compare their writings to the primary sources documenting those events.

### **Assessment**

- View models of poetry slam (see resources below) and discuss elements of “slam.” – What does it look like? What does it sound like? What kinds of messages are being communicated? (Rubric for project could be developed based on student input at this stage)
- Write a poem/song dealing with the issues of worker rights, past or present. These poems will be performed in “slam” format—so be conscious of how you will present them...What percussive elements, or movements, or verbal emphases, can add additional layers of meaning to your message?

### **Extending the Lesson**

- Field Trips to local historic sites.
- Extended Research projects based on local events or individuals

### **Resources**

“The Eight Hour Day” available at

<http://www.lipwalklyrics.com/lyrics/373334-peteseeger-eighthourday.html>

“Happiness” available at

<http://carl-sandburg.com/happiness.htm>