

Labor Unions - Homestead

The Basics

Time Required

one 81 minute class period

Subject Areas

High School US History

Emergence of Modern America, 1890-1930

Common Core Standards Addressed:

Writing Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies 6-12

Author

Joel Latman (2008)

The Lesson

Introduction

John D. Rockefeller stated, "The individual has gone, never to return." This statement epitomizes the plight of the workers during the late 19th and 20th centuries.

The overall objective of this unit is to enable the students to realize the hardships that laborers, particularly unskilled laborers, faced in the late 19th and 20th century. They will also gain an appreciation for the workers' desires and determination to gain respect and humane treatment from their employers through the use of strikes during this time. So, even though, the individual may have gone, never to return, individual workers who united together were able to eventually overcome many difficult circumstances.

Guiding Questions

1. The teacher will write the following inquiry activity on the overhead for the class to ponder.



If the students cannot ascertain the answer, the teacher will give the answers (+people=steel)

2. Review of prior learning activity: Explain how the following terms are important regarding industrial production:

Wealth**“Wage Slavery”****Exploitation****3. Inquiry Activity Using Quotes Regarding Labor and Unions: Who Said It?**

Give students a handout or have an overhead transparency of the following quotes, the name or group that said the quote should be masked so that they students cannot see it. Student discussion, guided by the teacher, should lead to determining the answer.

“The individual has gone never to return.” [This statement epitomizes the plight of the workers during the late 19th and 20th centuries.]—**John D. Rockefeller** (masked)

“The unskilled are impossible to organize.... We can’t be bothered with them, nor must we become involved in such issues as the problems of Negroes and the inequities of female labor.... Our first and only duty is to those who belong to our unions, the skilled craftsmen of America.... The unskilled are as an albatrosses dangling from the necks of the labor movement....”—**Samuel Gompers** (masked)

“Thou shalt not take thy neighbor’s job.”—**Andrew Carnegie** (masked)

“Whatever its future, the IWW has accomplished one tremendous big thing.... that is the individual awakening of “illiterates” and “scum”... to the realization of their dignity and rights in this, or any other society.... They have learned.... consciousness of self.”

WE WANT BREAD AND ROSES TOO!!!!—**Magazine Writer and Workers during The Lawrence Textile Mill Strike 1912** (masked)

“The only difference between a penitentiary and the GM plant...[is] that the GM worker could go home at night...It is cruel; it is absolute cruelty”—**A worker in the Flint GM plant** (masked)

“Where you used to be a man,...now you are less than their cheapest tool.”—**A Flint Chevrolet worker, to Senator Robert La Follette in 1936** (masked)

Learning Objectives

Students will better understand the history of organized labor.

Preparation Instructions

Song used in this lesson

“The Homestead Strike”

Lesson Activities

1. The student will listen to and read the lyrics of the song “The Homestead Strike” and read “The Story Behind the Song.” Teaching strategy: students will complete the graphic organizer and address the following questions:

- a. What strikes you most about this song?
- b. What musical phrase is especially memorable? What makes it so memorable: melody, rhythm, lyrics?
- c. Write down “images” that the music “paints.” What vivid metaphors, similes, nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs are in the lyrics?
- d. What instruments do you hear? Where are they used alone and where are they used for accompaniment?

2. **Content Questions:** Students are asked to formulate responses to each of the following questions:

- a. What is the purpose of the song: to entertain, to convince or persuade, express an emotion, to encourage, to tell a story, or to commemorate? Explain. Cite examples from both the music and lyrics that demonstrate how the “message” of the song is being conveyed.
- b. How does the music reinforce or help tell the message of the song?
- c. Whom do you consider the artist’s audience? What specific action, if any, does the audience take?
- d. What message or mood does, the tune convey?
- e. Describe the occupations or pastimes the lyrics describe. Is there a hidden message in the song? Please cite evidence to support your position.
- f. In your own words, what is the message of the song? Would you consider this song “propaganda”? Why or why not? Explain.

Assessment

Writing Activity: Homestead Strike:

Discuss with the students the notions of craft and industrial unions. After this discussion and some further reading and/or research into craft and industrial unions, students will construct an essay as homework demonstrating how the philosophy, aims, and actions of craft unions were

different from industrial unions. The following day, begin a discussion of what they wrote for homework. They should be able to explain why it can be stated that industrial workers were often viewed as being one of the “factors of production.”

Resources

Lyrics

“The Homestead Strike” available at

<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5322/>

Chorus:

Now the man that fights for honor, none can blame him,
May luck attend wherever he may roam,
And no son of his will ever live to shame him,
Whilst liberty and honor rule our home!

When a band of sturdy working men started out at break of day,
Determination in their face, which plainly meant to say,
“No one shall come and take our homes, for which we have toiled so long,
No one shall come and take our place, no, it’s here that we belong”
A woman with a rifle spied her husband in the crowd,
She handed him the weapon and they cheered her long and loud.
He kissed her and said, “Mary, you stay home until we’re through,
When the trouble’s over, then I’ll return to you.”

(Chorus)

When a bunch of bum detectives came without authority,
Like thieves at night while decent men were sleeping peaceful,
Can you wonder why all honest hearts with indignation burn,
And why the worm that treads the ground when trod upon will turn?
When they locked out men at Homestead, then they were face to face
With a grasping corporation, and they knew it was their place
To protect their homes and families, and this was neatly done,
And the public will reward them for the victory they won.

(Chorus)

Kelly’s Original Text (from *Wobblies, Pile Butts and Other Heroes* by Archie Green, 1993)

We are asking one another as we pass the time of day,
Why men must have recourse to arms to get their proper pay,
And why their labor unions now must be recognized,
While the actions of a syndicate must not be criticized.
The troubles down at Homestead was brought about this way,

When a grasping corporation had the audacity to say,
 You must renounce your unions and forswear your liberty,
 And we'll promise you a chance to live and die in slavery.

Chorus:

So the man that fights for honor, none can blame him
 May luck attend him wherever he may roam,
 And no son of his will ever live to shame him
 While liberty and honor rule his home.

When a crowd of well-armed ruffians came without authority,
 Like thieves at night, while decent men were sleeping peacefully,
 Can you wonder why all honest men with indignation burn,
 Why the slimy worm that crawls the earth when trod upon will turn?
 When the locked-out men at Homestead saw they were face to face
 With a lot of paid detectives, then they knew it was their place
 To protect their home and families and that was nobly done,
 And the angels will applaud them for the victory they won.

(Chorus)

See that sturdy band of working men start at break of day,
 Determination in their eyes, which surely meant to say,
 "No men shall drive us from our homes, for which we toiled so long,
 No men shall take our places, No! For here's where we belong",
 A woman with a rifle saw her husband in the crowd,
 She handed him the weapon and they cheered her long and loud.
 He kissed her and said, "Mary, you go home till we are through!"
 She answered, "No! If you must fight, my place is here with you!"

Source for background material: James Howard Bridge, *The Inside History of the Carnegie Steel Company: A Romance of Millions*. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1991.