

Homestead Strike

The Basics

Time Required

1-2 class periods

Subject Areas

11th Grade American Literature, and US History
Emergence of Modern America, 1890-1930

Common Core Standards Addressed:

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

Author

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The Lesson

Introduction

The idea behind using this song as a segue into the unit “Who will speak for us?: Strong Voices of the People” is to emphasize that while it is good to study speeches given throughout history that speak for the common man, we must not forget that it is the common man that forms the impetus/grassroots need for most of these speeches. And in most cases, the speeches result from the common man being “pushed to the brink” (ex: King, Jr.: Civil Rights injustices; Thomas Jefferson: unnecessary taxation; etc). The Homestead Strike, though it did not result in one praised speech, is commemorated in song and was led by the people themselves. In this case, the common man spoke for himself and though he did not end up with a situation that was ideal, he was able to maintain his “liberty and honor.” In this case, the strength came from direct action. Though major, positive legal change did not result, the strength of character of those men that fought for themselves, including the voices of the strike leaders, still resonated enough to carry on the folk tradition over 100 years later.

Were it not for those with strength of character to fight for themselves and for others (certain movements just happened to have the right speaker at the right time) in a national climate that, though sometimes very difficult, allowed as much, then America could not claim to be what it is—a nation that allows free speech/the right to protest, etc.

Guiding Questions

How do stories of important events pass from one generation to the next?

Learning Objectives

- To analyze instrumentation and lyrics in song
- To analyze an image
- To discuss changes in perception of images before and after being presented with background information
- To identify mood and tone in different mediums

- To discuss who qualifies as a legitimate and “strong voice”

Preparation Instructions

Materials used in this lesson:

Homestead Strike Image

“The Homestead Strike” by Pete Seeger

Lesson Activities

Show the students the Homestead Strike image. This can be found at:

http://www.americaslibrary.gov/assets/jb/nation/jb_nation_pinkerto_4_e.jpg

Present the following prompts with the image:

- Identify at least three of the details that you notice.
- What seems to be the setting?
- What is the mood of the participants?
- Speculate about the situation. What might have caused the participant’s mood, etc? (5 minutes)

Advise students to draw a line underneath their answers. Do not discuss them yet.

Pass out lyrics* to students. Read through the lyrics aloud once and without too much inflection. Play the song once. Before playing the song, advise the students that you want them now to consider the lyrics in relation to the artwork. (3-5 minutes)

Present the following questions after the song (the photo should still be displayed):

- Do you notice any details that you did not notice previously?
- Look at what you speculated about the situation in the last set of questions. Do you think the situation is any different from what you originally thought? Explain. (2-3 minutes)

Briefly discuss answers. Be sure to note any changes that the students made in their understanding of the picture. (2-3 minutes.)

Explain the situation regarding The Homestead Strike of 1892. Refer to the following sites for further information regarding the strike: (4 minutes)

This site provides more in-depth information on the side of all parties involved.

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/carnegie/peoplevents/pande04.html>

Pose the following concepts/questions:

Character, according to Dictionary.com, is defined as “the combination of qualities or features that distinguishes one person, group, or thing from another.”

- What does it mean to have strength of character?
- The workers went on strike against their employer, Amalgamated Steel. Based on the situation, does this show strength of character to you? Explain why or why not in 2-3 detailed sentences.

Once discussed, listen to the song again. However, before listening, discuss with students that strength of character is best conveyed via actions. Since we can no longer actually see the actions of the Homestead Strikers, though, how might an artist, over 100 years later, convey a striker's strength of character?

Answer: instrumentation; strong, positive connotations in words and phrases; inflection; use of color; etc – varies for different arts

Pose the following questions for the students to consider:

As you listen to the song, identify any of the following that reflect strength of character:

- instrumentation
- voice inflection
- strong, positive connotations in words/phrases (12-15 minutes)

Briefly discuss answers and point out any unmentioned answers that you deem relevant. (5 minutes)

Assessment

Discuss: Why do you think everyone went on strike even though the union members were in the minority? Can you respect the strikers for some of the things they did when they could have easily gone back to the company and avoided conflict altogether? Wouldn't it have been a good idea to get one strong representative, sort of like a Martin Luther King, Jr.? Why do you think the strikers did not get someone to represent them? (5 minutes)

Resources

Lyrics

“The Homestead Strike”

We are asking one another
as we pass the time of day
Why working men resort to arms
to get their proper pay,
And why our labor unions
they must not be recognized,
While the actions of a syndicate
must not be criticized.

Now the troubles down at Homestead
were brought about this way
When a grasping corporation
had the audacity to say:
"You must all renounce your union
and forswear your liberty,
And we'll give you a chance to live
and die in slavery."

Cho.

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.

Now this sturdy band of working men
started out at the break of day
Determination in their faces
which plainly meant to say:
"No one can come and take our homes
for which we have toiled so long
No one can come and take our places ---
no, 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're through."
She answered, "No. If you must die,
my place is here with you."

Cho.

When a lot of tramp detectives
came without authority
Like thieves at night when decent men
were sleeping peacefully---
Can you wonder why all honest hearts
with indignation burn,
And why the slimy worm that treads the earth
when trod upon will turn?

When they locked out men at Homestead
so they were face to face
With a lot of bum detectives
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 victories they won.

Other sources:

Goldner, Cheri. "The Homestead Strike." Spring 1997 *1890's: A Chronology* 25 July 2006.

"People and Events: The Homestead Strike." 1999 *PBS Online* 25 July 2006
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/carnegie/peopleevents/pande04.html>

Shaped by Steel: Traditional Music and Stories from Southwestern Pennsylvania. Steel Industry Heritage Corporation, 2005.

"The Homestead Strike." Google images. 24 July 2006.

http://www.americaslibrary.gov/assets/jb/nation/jb_nation_pinkerto_4_e.jpg