

Labor Unions - Lawrence

The Basics

Time Required

Two 80 minute periods

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

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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 analyze the Lawrence Strike through the thematic lens of big business exploiting immigrant workers and the role of music in organizing and uplifting union morale. Students will look at these themes via union music, poetry, oral history, and secondary source material. They will be expected to recount a broad outline of events, compare and contrast themes, and relate these themes to modern issues.

Preparation Instructions

Songs used in this lesson

“My Children are Seven in Number”

“Bread and Roses”

Lesson Activities

1. Day One:

Students will have been studying the Industrial Revolution in America during the 19th century. We will shift focus from the “farms to factory” narrative to the role unions played in navigating how America understands work – normal working hours, fair wage, discrimination in the workplace, safety conditions, and legal working age.

To start this lesson students will be given readings explaining the IWW history and the Lawrence Strike. The excerpts will be from the book “Pie in the Sky” by Irving Werstein. The next day, we will do the following:

- Discuss the main ideas from their homework and put them on the board – what a union is/does, what a strike is, what makes the IWW different from all other unions, why a union was necessary. (5 minutes)
- They will then read an excerpt from “Wobblies: a graphic history of the industrial workers of the world” edited by Paul Buhle and Nicole Schulman” that narrates the Lawrence Strike of 1812 in comic book style. (25 minutes)
- Students will be broken into 4 groups and will have to create a storyboard narrative that outlines the main events of the story using both their “Pie in the Sky” reading and the graphic novel. They will also have to identify major themes they find in their section. Break the story into 4 major parts – pre-strike background, IWW organizes, Demands met, Trial ends & the aftermath. (20 minutes)
- We will return as a class to create an idea web on the board to discuss the themes they found. (10 minutes)
- Handout graphic organizer for listening activity. Listen to Pete Seeger’s version of “My Children are Seven in Number”. Listen first time without taking notes, second (time through – they must fill out the organizer in their original groups. (15 minutes)
- Get back together and go over. (5 minutes)

2. Day Two:

- Do Now Activity – Read NYT article on Mexican workers rally at Kosher meatpacking plant in Iowa – July 2008. They will have to write a paragraph or two about the similarities and differences between the issues faced by workers then and now. (25 minutes)
- Hand students “Bread and Roses” poem and read together as a class. Contextualize this poem – possibly a slogan that came out of the strike. (5 minutes)
- Compare and contrast the poem to the lyrics of “My Children are Seven in Number” – make sure they are clear on the differences in expectations each perspective holds. Specifically, bread and roses being more than just working for shoes, soap, and milk. Try to get at the philosophy behind wanting more – The American Dream. (10 minutes)
- Transition to American Dream of African Americans working in industrial North. Relate the IWW to the African American experience via oral history excerpt from “Solidarity Forever” about the dock worker James Fair. Talk about the racial/ethnic/class bias of the AFL versus the anti-bias of the IWW. (10 minutes)

Assessment

- 1: Write a 5 part essay on: 2 themes that we have discussed so far and explain them in their historical context. Also, explain what effect the IWW had on addressing these themes.
- 2: Write a song from the perspective of the workers and describe your life and what you dream/want for your children in America. Use events from the Lawrence Strike as a guide. Create your own melody or use an already existing one to set the lyrics to. (30 minutes)

Resources

Lyrics

"My Children Are Seven in Number" available at

<http://www.folkarchive.de/mychild.html>

"Bread and Roses" available at

<http://www.folkarchive.de/breadrose.html>