Teaching with Primary Sources
Workshop
---
January 6-27, 2009
---
Industry in the Mon-Valley & Western Pennsylvania

Daniel Eyrolles
January 27, 2009
1. A map of Donora, which could have been any town along the Monongahela River (Monongahela, California, Monessen, Elizabeth, etc...) showing the town layout and various industries based in the town.

2. A photo of the Steel Mill along the river in Donora

3. Typical Mon-Valley/Western PA workers

4. Artists rendition of Donora showing the various industries that supported the town including the Steel Plant, Wire Plant, Zinc Plant, Railroad, Shipping, etc....
5. View of Steel Mills from Brady St. Bridge Area (P&P Digital ID: thc 5a38925)
   - This shows the Steel Mills, Coal, and Railway industry that employed many workers in Western PA


7. Connellsville Coal & Coke Region, Connellsville vicinity, Fayette County, PA (Amem Digital ID: http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/hhh.pa2870)
8. (Not Displayed) A bill to establish the Steel Industry National Historic Site in the State of Pennsylvania. (THOMAS Bill ID# S.199)

Subject Areas

This lesson was developed primarily as a Social Studies/History lesson, however I have included interdisciplinary concepts from English, Geography, and Science. I have also included ideas of how to use it solely for English, Math, or Science in the following paragraphs.

Standards

8.1.12.B. Synthesize and evaluate historical sources.
8.2.12.A. Evaluate the political and cultural contributions of individuals and groups to Pennsylvania history from 1890 to Present.
8.2.12.B. Identify and evaluate primary documents, material artifacts and historic sites important in Pennsylvania history from 1890 to Present.
8.2.12.C. Identify and evaluate how continuity and change have influenced Pennsylvania history from the 1890s to Present.
8.2.12.D. Identify and evaluate conflict and cooperation among social groups and organizations in Pennsylvania history from 1890 to Present.

Overview

This lesson is a local retrospective of industry in the Mon-Valley and Western Pennsylvania region. This area has a rich history centering on the steel mills and branching out into all facets of life. This has left an indelible mark on the people in the area and how they view themselves. From the coal mines to the steel mills, workers in the past developed a hard working, blue-collar mentality which is still evident today in the people who call Western Pennsylvania home.

This lesson is very basic, however, can be used as an offshoot for many other lessons and subject areas. I wanted to design it to be flexible for all subject areas, but also retain its meaningfulness to students no matter what classroom they may be in. In science you could discuss the different elements that are combined to make steel, the forming of natural resources, among many other topics. In English you could cover the literature of the era and include “The Honour of Labour” and find many other titles such as “Out of this Furnace” which encompasses local history. In Math this lesson could give way to the transportation of resources from one place to another discussing the differing speeds by way of railway and boat or how long it might take to mine ten tons of coal with workers who work at variable speeds.

But at the heart of it I designed this lesson for Social Studies. I tried to incorporate all aspects of Social Studies or things that could lead into those areas. You could use it simply as a local history lesson discussing Pittsburgh and the role in played in developing the country. It could lead into Sociology/Psychology and the study of how people develop a certain work ethic and develop what is important to them. This could incorporate Geography and its importance on the development of business and industry in certain areas.
Lesson Development

Student will read LOC Primary Source #8 “The Honour of Labour” and write a reaction to the following questions. They will read and analyze this source in order to gain a better understanding into the mentality of workers in the past. This shows how workers in the past did not work to live, but rather lived to work. This was especially true in Western PA and the Mon-Valley as many men worked 12 on 12 off seven days a week and only had one day off every two weeks.

1. Based on the excerpt, how do you think workers in the past felt about their “jobs?”

2. How has this viewpoint changed over time? What things may have contributed to this?

Furthering the Lesson

The Various Industries and their Co-Dependence in Western Pennsylvania

Have students examine photograph sources from the Donora Smog Museum (#1, #2, & #4) and LOC (#5 & #7.) These are photos of some of the various industries that helped to build Western PA into what it is today. Many of the student’s ancestors or current family members may have worked in one or more of these industries.

1. Based solely off of the photographs, list some things that were produced in Western Pennsylvania?
   - Factual Knowledge of Western PA Industry
     - Steel, Boating, Railroad, Coal, Coke, Wire, Zinc

2. List some other items that were produced in Western PA that are not shown in the pictures.
   - Prior Knowledge of Western PA Industry
     - Iron, Glass, Copper, Petroleum, Natural Gas

3. What particular geographic features and natural resources make Western PA so primed for industry?
   - Prior Knowledge of Western PA Region and Geography
     - Accessibility of Rivers, Availability of Coal,

4. How are sources 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, & 7 all interrelated?
   - Making connections between the industries and their co-dependent nature on one another.
     - Not one industry could have existed alone by itself. Coal miners produced coal which was shipped by either train or barge to mills, power plants, or distribution facilities. This heated the furnace’s which were used to melt materials to produce steel, wire, glass, and other products. Also the byproduct of burning coal was coke which
was used in heating furnaces and also able to be used safely to heat homes. From the mine to the mill, each industry was dependent upon one another to succeed.

Branching off into Other Areas

After students answer these questions, have an open discussion of the answers that students came up with. Talk about your friends/family members who may have worked in one of these industries and have the student disclose their own personal connections to these. Chances are they have a family member who either is/was employed in one of these local industries. This will make the information more relevant to the students and give it some meaning behind it so it seems more important.

Direct student attention towards sources 3 & 6. These are photos of workers from the past. Ask students if they can see more similarities or differences. Discuss what the students come up with, but more than likely they see more similarities. Note that this is how the blue collar, hardworking ethic developed in the Mon-Valley/Western PA and as previously noted due to the similarities, has stuck around and can still be seen among many today. However, one thing has changed and that is people’s attitudes towards work. Instead of living to work as was the case in the past, now people work to live.

From here you could discuss several different things. You could begin to discuss attitude changes and value shifts over time. This could involve a lesson in worker’s rights, labor unions, and anti-trust acts which helped bring about an end to big business. You could discuss the living and working conditions of people while referencing sources 3 & 6. This might lead into various acts which improved working conditions for people in America.

With this lesson I think the possibilities are endless but I feel it can go wherever you want it to depending on where you place it in the course of the school year. As a Social Studies teacher I would probably use it in the late 1890’s and early 1900’s because I feel that is where it would fit most appropriately. The primary sources could be used multiple classes at different points in a particular unit in order to give the time period more continuity and flow while establishing connections that the students can physically look at.

In wrapping up this lesson I would introduce source #8. This is a bill that would establish the Steel Industry as a National Historic Site in Pennsylvania. Being as this bill was just introduced in 2009 by Arlen Specter I feel it would really hit home with student spark their interest if nothing else had up to this point (I hope this wouldn’t be the case). You could discuss several key sites you may have mentioned already activating prior learning (The Homestead Steel Works, Hot Metal Bridge, Carrie Furnace complex) and also ask the student if they have been to any of these or know where they are. This would be an apt way to wrap up this lesson and give it meaning.
How important do you think it is to make history “come alive?” How do you think museums can help accomplish this goal?

Students are so often quoted as saying “history is boring” and “why do we have to learn this.” The worst thing a teacher can do is to let this go without response or action. As a history educator, I feel it is my job to ensure my students do not have this attitude while in my classroom. Now invariably, it would be foolish to think that I can’t change everybody’s attitude, however, I know I can try to by making history meaningful and interesting.

The easiest way to make history meaningful, fun, and interesting is by making it come alive. Whether it be through wearing costumes, running around the room like a fool avoiding weapon-fire, sharing your own experiences, or just teaching with an actual piece of history making history come alive is not as difficult as it seems. By sharing actual pieces of history with you students, and not just telling them about it, gives subject matter context and makes it more concrete.

Finding the meaning behind history is what we want for our students to do. Each can find their own meaning by actually experiencing history. This screams the importance of museums for our students. Students can each have their own experience at a museum and take away from it what they want to. Also students then can analyze and evaluate primary source material and decipher why it is so important to remember and preserve. A museum can allow students to decipher their own meaning to history.

History undoubtedly becomes more fun and interesting with direct interaction. This direct interaction can show students that there is more to history than I could ever tell them. I can remember the first time I was able to hold a piece of the Berlin Wall in my hands. I remember smelling it, spinning it in circles and examining its surfaces. I remember thinking about the oppression that it represented and the meaning behind myself now being able to hold a piece of it in my hands. That is what student’s can experience when making history come alive.