

Teaching American History Grant: Learning Experience 2007-2008

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Topic Title: Sweat it out!

Grade Level: 8

Overview of the Learning Experience:

Students will simulate a sweatshop in the classroom and then examine primary sources to learn about the events of the Triangle Shirtwaist fire. Students will examine primary source documents including an old newspaper article relating to the Triangle Factory fire to understand why terrible working conditions have led workers to join labor unions.

New York State Social Studies Learning Standard(s) Addressed:

Standard 1: History of the United States and New York State

The skills of historical analysis include the ability to explain the significance of historical evidence; weigh the importance, reliability, and validity of evidence; understand the concept of multiple causation; understand the importance of changing and competing interpretations of different historical developments

Essential Question(s):

Why do people form groups (like organized labor)?

Topical Questions(s):

- What conditions existed in factories and sweatshops that were unfavorable to workers?
- How does a tragedy like the Triangle Fire heighten awareness of social problems like the mistreatment of labor?

Learning objectives:

- Students will be able to define sweatshop, assembly line, strike, strikebreaker, scab, organized labor
- Students will be able to explain the interests of business owners and their workers
- Students will be empathetic to the plight of factory workers in the late 19th Century

Time Allotment (classroom time): 1-2 days

Vocabulary (key terms):

Shirtwaist, Assembly Line, Sweatshop, Strike, Strikebreaker, Scab, Labor Union, Immigrants

Materials/Resources:

- Factory Noise (optional)
- Set up 2 rows of 5 desks in the center of the classroom, line all other desks around the perimeter of the classroom (Day 1 Only)
- Whiteboard/Blackboard and Markers/Chalk
- Hundreds of 4x5' pieces of paper
- Do Now Question and Triangle Shirtwaist Newspaper article

Procedure:

- Do Now Questions (5-minutes)
- Begin the Factory Simulation (15-minutes)
 - Draw an image of on the whiteboard using four different colors
 - Have students sketch the entire drawing to become familiar with how to draw it
 - Explain that having to draw the whole thing takes considerably more time than just drawing one part and passing it along in an assembly line. Moreover, if students are consistently drawing only one part, they will become much more efficient at that part of the drawing.
 - The center rows will become a classroom assembly line with each student drawing one part of the image
 - They don't need any special skills to draw, but their images must be well-done or they will be fired and replaced by one of the students on the outside perimeter of the classroom (these students are your "immigrants")
 - The last person on the line can be your foreman. This person must check for quality control and can fire anyone on line that they feel isn't doing a good job. If the whole line isn't doing well, the boss (teacher) can fire the foreman
 - I usually play favorites with the foreman – complimenting him/her while I'm yelling at the rest of the line
 - Allow students to create the shirtwaists in an assembly line fashion
 - As students are working, play factory noise loudly in the background – also, if possible make the classroom an uncomfortable temperature to simulate sweatshop conditions
 - Encourage students to race one another – only "pay" the line that completes the most images up to your standards (I used candy to pay them)
 - Become a strict boss and start to criticize their work. Yell at students who are not working quickly enough. Start firing employees and replacing them with immigrants from the perimeter of the classroom. Since you do not need specific skills to work in a factory any immigrant will do.
 - If students decide to go on "strike" put them in "jail" (possibly one corner of the classroom) When several students are on strike – end the simulation
 - NOTE: It may take some encouragement from the teacher to convince the students not to accept the harsh treatment from the foreman and organize themselves into a "union"
 - To end the simulation, tell students that we will now focus on an event that occurred in an actual sweatshop in New York City
- Distribute the picture of an actual sweatshop and the article about the triangle shirtwaist fire. Have students respond to questions (10-minutes)
- Full Class discussion of lesson (5-minutes) include strikes and strikebreakers in your full-class discussion
- Allow students to work on the essay question (remainder of class)

Assessment:

Essay question. Rubric listed on the assignment.

Name: _____
Social Studies/Tantillo

Date: December 5, 2007
Period: ____

Do Now Question: Sweatshops



Source: http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/?nclc:4./temp/~pp_41ua::displayType=1:m856sd=nclc:m856sf=04457:@@mdb=fsaall,app,brum,detr,swann,look,gottscho,pan,hor,yd,genthe,var,cai,cd,hh,yan,bbcards,lomax,ils,prok,brhc,nclc,matpc,iucpub,tgmi,lamb

SWEATSHOP: a shop employing workers at low wages, for long hours, and under poor conditions. The rooms may be hot, but the sweat in sweatshop usually refers to the intensity of the work that is occurring.

1. What dangers exist in the picture of the sweatshop above?

2. Why might someone be willing to work in a sweatshop in spite of the dangers?

Name: _____
Social Studies/Tantillo

Date: _____
Period: ____

Triangle Shirtwaist Fire

New York Times, March 26, 1911, p. 1

Three stories of a ten-floor building at the corner of Greene Street and Washington Place were burned yesterday, and while the fire was going on 141 young men and women at least 125 of them mere girls were burned to death or killed by jumping to the pavement below.

The building was fireproof. It shows now hardly any signs of the disaster that overtook it...

The victims who are now lying at the morgue waiting for some one to identify them by a tooth or the remains of a burned shoe were mostly girls from 16 to 23 years of age. They were employed at making shirtwaist by the Triangle Waist Company, the principal owners of which are Isaac Harris and Max Blanck. Most of them could barely speak English. Many of them came from Brooklyn. Almost all were the main support of their hard-working families...

How the fire started no one knows. On the three upper floors of the building were 600 employees... 500 of whom were girls. The victims mostly Italians, Russians, Hungarians, and Germans were girls and men who had been employed... after... a strike in which the Jewish girls, formerly employed, had been become unionized and had demanded better working conditions...

What burned so quickly and disastrously for the victims were shirtwaists, hanging on lines above tiers of workers, sewing machines placed so closely together that there was hardly aisle room for the girls between them, and shirtwaist trimmings and cuttings which littered the floors above the eighth and ninth stories.

Girls had begun leaping from the eighth story windows before firemen arrived...

Source:

http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/trianglefire/texts/newspaper/nyt_032611_5.html?location=Fire!

DIRECTIONS: Answer the following questions based on the information in above and our earlier class experience.

1. How many people worked in the Triangle Shirtwaist sweatshop? How many of them were girls?
2. The building was “fireproof,” so what actually burned during the fire?
3. From what countries did many of the workers in the factory come from?
4. Why did these immigrants replace the Jewish girls who formerly worked in the factory?
5. The triangle factory operated much like our classroom sweatshop. Many of these girls worked more than 12 hours a day and 7 days a week. The doors were locked so the girls could not leave work early. Based upon the article and our simulation in class, pretend you are one of the workers from the Triangle Shirtwaist factory. Write a letter to a loved one explaining what it was like to work in this factory and the events of the fire. Your essay will be graded based upon the attached rubric.

	20-25 Points	15-20 Points	10-15 Points	0-10 Points
CONTENT	The letter contains at least 5 accurate facts about the topic.	The letter contains 3-4 accurate facts about the topic.	The letter contains 1-2 accurate facts about the topic.	The letter contains no accurate facts about the topic.
ORGANIZATION	Ideas were expressed in a clear and organized fashion. It was easy to figure out what the letter was about.	Ideas were expressed in a pretty clear manner, but the organization could have been better.	Ideas were somewhat organized, but were not very clear. It took more than one reading to figure out what the letter was about.	The letter seemed to be a collection of unrelated sentences. It was very difficult to figure out what the letter was about.
SPELLING/ GRAMMER	Writer makes no errors in grammar or spelling.	Writer makes 1-2 errors in grammar and/or spelling.	Writer makes 3-4 errors in grammar and/or spelling	Writer makes more than 4 errors in grammar and/or spelling.
NEATNESS/ CARE	Letter is typed or neatly hand-written, clean, not wrinkled, and is easy to read with no distracting error corrections. It was done with pride.	Letter is neatly hand-written, clean, not wrinkled, and is easy to read with few distracting error corrections. It was done with care.	Letter is typed and is crumpled or slightly stained. It may have 1-2 distracting error corrections. It was done with some care.	Letter is typed and looks like it had been shoved in a pocket or locker. It may have several distracting error corrections. It looks like it was done in a hurry or stored improperly.