



LESSON PLAN

WEST VIRGINIA MINE WARS MUSEUM

wvminewars.org

401 Mate Street Matewan, West Virginia 25678

Lesson 4: Newspapers, Memory, and the Paint Creek-Cabin Creek Strike

Objectives:

- The Paint Creek-Cabin-Creek Strike was the deadliest strike in West Virginia's history. This lesson introduces students to the most famous event around the Paint Creek-Cabin Creek Strike of 1912-13, the attack by the "Bull Moose Special" on the miners' camp at Holly Grove.
- In addition to giving students additional background and historical narratives, it also offers them conflicting narratives about the events. It allows students a chance to do the work that historians do and examine real historical documents and voices.

Materials Needed:

- [Lyrics and recording of "Law in West Virginia Hills"](#)
- Newspaper handouts for students with prompt questions
 - [Baltimore Sun article "C.&O. Train Fired Upon" February 8, 1913.](#)
 - [Washington Post article "Strikers Fired Upon" February 9, 1913.](#)
- [Handout for guided discussion questions](#)

Introduction:

Show the students [a photo of the Holly Grove tent colony](#), and give them some background information we've provided below:

Miners and their families Tent colonies were established during the strike at Eskdale and Holly Grove to house the families that had been evicted from their company-owned housing, and continued to be used throughout the Mine Wars. The UMWA supplied canvas tents, predominantly bell and wall tents, which varied in size. Some tents were quite small, similar to this reproduction wall tent, while others sheltered three to four families each. Larger canvas tents also served as makeshift cafeterias or were used to store provisions.

Violence during the strike often centered around the trains coming to and from the coal towns. Typically these trains were used to bring in strike-breaking scab workers to keep the mines open. Sometimes miners would destroy train tracks and fire on the trains, while the mine guards and policemen attacked and fired on the miners from the train

cars. One in particular, a specially armored train known as the Bull Moose Special, peppered the Holly Grove tent colony with machine gun and rifle fire on the night of February 7, 1913.

Today, we'll be diving a bit deeper to understand the event of the Bull Moose Special.

Activity 1:

(Synchronous) Distribute the lyrics to "Law in West Virginia Hills" and play the recording ([here's a link to a youtube video](#)). Facilitate a discussion about what this song means and can tell us about life in the coal camps, particularly during strikes, and how the law was broken.

(Asynchronous) Distribute the lyrics to "Law in West Virginia Hills" and play the recording ([here's a link to a youtube video](#)). Have the students draw what the song means and can tell us about life in the coal camps, particularly during strikes, and how the law was broken.

Activity 2:

(Synchronous) Divide the class into groups, and give each group a different newspaper account of the events of the Bull Moose Special attack on Holly Grove. Each group will be given a handout with guiding discussion questions.

(Asynchronous) Distribute each student a newspaper account of the events of the Bull Moose Special Attack on Holly Grove as well as the guided discussion questions handout. Have students illustrate their responses to these questions visually, creating posters, drawings, or comic strips illustrating their conclusions.

Closing Discussion

Facilitate a class discussion to help students explore the what and why of the differing accounts of the event. Some suggested questions include:

- What were the main differences reported by the different sources?
- Why do you think the accounts differed? What does it mean to be biased?
- What can this tell us about newspaper reports generally? Can you connect it to any news stories about current events today?
- Compare the accounts, do you think these were meant to make people more or less sympathetic to the miners and their families? Why?

Historical Context/Background Resources:

- (3 minute read) [e-WV article: The Bull Moose Special](#)
- (2 minute listen) [WV Public Broadcasting February 7, 1913: The Bull Moose Express Used to Attack Striking Miners](#)
- [Photograph: Bull Moose Special Train](#), Courtesy of Doug Estepp at Coal Country Tours
- Photograph: [Holly Grove Tent Colony](#)

For more resources on forming a union in southern West Virginia, please visit our website at www.wvminewars.com

WV 8th Grade Curriculum Standards:

SS.8.7 Correlate West Virginia economic conditions with the effects on its citizens (e.g., employment, population, migration, and health).

SS.8.8: Analyze the impact of absentee ownership, renewable and nonrenewable natural resources, labor unionization and the development of infrastructure on the economic growth of West Virginia

SS.8.24 Demonstrate an understanding of West Virginia's development during the early twentieth century. (Analyze the evolution of the labor movement in West Virginia. Summarize the progressive reform movement in West Virginia)

Student Handout #1

[Law in the West Virginia Hills](#)¹

In a little country churchyard,
Underneath a grassy mound,
There sleeps my own dear sister
In the cold and silent ground.

She was so tender hearted, oh,
So full of youthful life.
Oh the people that knew her loved her dear.
She was my brother's wife.

My brother was a mining man,
Toiling almost day and night
Deep down in those old coal mines
Far away from God's sunlight.

To this valley came a union, oh,
Brother joined with the band
For to better his condition of life
Children starved on every hand.

When the cruel mine foreman knew,
He sent my brother home,
No more to feed his wife and child
Digging that old black coal.

All over Kanawha Valley oh,
"We will strike!" the workers said. For we
are tired and starved to death And our
children cry for bread.

These miners banded together on
One warm, sunny July day
And they laid aside their shovels and picks
And they struck for better pay.

Then the company gun thugs came,
Officers from all around
Drove the miners from their house and
home,
Kicked their wives and children down.

My sister, saw their cruelty,
As they ran loose among the town
Saw them murder unborn babies lord,
Kick their helpless mothers down.

The murders she did witness lord,
They say she lost her mind.
By the time the doctor came to her side, Not
a heartbeat could he find.

My brother is locked in a prison cell,
Until death shall set him free.
But waiting for the Judgment Day
When his family again he'll see.

Peace is a stranger in this valley,
Justice is never there.
As I tell to you this story,
Tell me, do you think it's fair?

As I tell to you this story,
Tell me, do you think it's fair?

¹ Lyrics with new arrangement by Sam Gleaves,
based on a 1931 song written by Roger Seacrist.
Song provided courtesy of the Blair Pathways project
(blairpathways.com).
Sam Gleaves on vocals and guitar, Jordan Engel on
bass, and Myra Morrison on fiddle.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nizJu-FxKZs>

Student Handout #2

C. & O. TRAIN FIRED UPON: Rioting In West Virginia Coal Mining Region Grows In Seriousness
The Sun (1837-1993); Feb 8, 1913; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Baltimore Sun
pg. 9

C. & O. TRAIN FIRED UPON

Rioting In West Virginia Coal Mining Region Grows In Seriousness.

Charleston, W. Va., Feb. 8.—Strikers on Paint Creek last night shot up a passenger train on the Paint Creek branch of the Chesapeake and Ohio Railway, near Holly Grove, and several passengers were slightly injured.

Special officers on the train returned the fire with machine guns and rifles.

Later a special train carrying Sheriff Hill and a posse of deputies was attacked near the same place.

Sheriff Hill has called upon Governor Glascock for military assistance in quelling the rioting.

At midnight Sheriff Hill and his posse of 25 men fortified themselves at Mucklow.

Governor Glascock will refer the situation to the Legislature early tomorrow.

Two posses of deputy sheriffs left last night for Paint Creek to capture rioters who spent most of the day shooting at coal company employes, company stores and mining plants around Mucklow and Holly Grove.

The rioting broke out afresh about noon, when three mine watchmen and a physician started from Mucklow to Hansford to take Ben Burke, a miner injured in the Mucklow mine, to a hospital for surgical treatment. Near the strikers' camp at Holly Grove shots were fired at the wagon from the hilltops. Desultory firing continued until Hansford was reached, though no member of the crew was hurt. Shortly after reaching the hospital Burke died.

Late in the day an attack was made on the company store at Mucklow, shots being fired from the hillsides. A squad of watchmen sent to drive away the rioters were repulsed and had to seek cover.

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Newspaper clippings can be hard to read, so we've transcribed the clipping below:

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Student Handout #3

STRIKERS FIRED ON, NONUNION MINERS THOUGHT AS ASSAILANTS AT SPAN...
Special to The Washington Post, Feb. 8, 1912. Original Historical Newspaper: The Washington Post.

STRIKERS FIRED ON

Nonunion Miners Thought Assailants at Holly Grove.

STATE TROOPS UNDER ARMS

Gov. Glasscock Ready to Send Militia to Kanawha District.

Miners Threaten to March Up Paint Creek to Avenge the Death of Jacob Estep, Who Was Killed When Sheriff and Deputies Used Machine Gun. Strikers Occupy Strong Positions on Mountainsides.

Special to The Washington Post.
Charleston, W. Va., Feb. 8.—Six companies of militia are spending tonight in their armories waiting developments in the Kanawha strike situation, especially at Mucklow, where rioters yesterday and last night shot up the town, and at Holly Grove, where several hundred strikers are living in tents and where last night a special train bearing Sheriff Bonner H. Hill and a dozen deputies was fired upon. The situation is reported most threatening not only on Paint Creek, but throughout the strike zone.

Late tonight Gov. Glasscock decided to await tomorrow's developments before sending troops to Paint Creek. If there are no further outbreaks tonight or tomorrow the sheriff, it is believed, can handle the situation. The question of again declaring martial law is being considered by the governor, who may put the matter up to the legislature, which is in session.

Man Killed and Woman Wounded.

A striker named Jacob Estep was killed and a woman was shot in the foot during the battle at Holly Grove last night when the sheriff and his deputies returned the fire with a machine gun.

Late today several hundred miners working at union mines near the strike district organized and armed themselves, declaring they would march up Paint Creek to avenge the death of Estep.

Two separate attacks were made on the strikers' camp at Holly Grove this afternoon, and several hundred shots were fired from the hillsides. It is believed the shots were fired by nonunion miners employed at nearby mines, at whom the strikers have been shooting for the past few days.

The miners occupy strong positions on the mountainsides, and are said to be closely guarding all approaches to the camps.

Governor Withholds Message.

When the legislature assembled this afternoon it was thought the governor would send a special message to that body, asking it to declare martial law in the Kanawha coal fields. The governor was informed later that a bill introduced by Senator England, Republican, to authorize the county courts to expend money to employ detectives to hunt criminals, had met with opposition, and, therefore, did not send his message. The county courts at present are not allowed to employ detectives. Senator MacCorkle, Democrat, led the opposition to Senator England's bill, and after considerable debate, the measure was made a special order for Monday.

Sheriff Hill made formal application for troops, and three companies at Huntington, two at Charleston, and one at Fayetteville were ordered to assemble.

Gov.-elect Hatfield was called into conference concerning the situation by Gov. Glasscock, and is expected to assist the governor from now on.

Assessed to Aid Strikers.

Indianapolis, Feb. 8.—To aid strikers in the West Virginia coal fields, the executive board of the United Mine Workers today issued orders that each member of the organization should be assessed 50c a month to raise a monthly fund of \$200,000.

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Strikers Fired On

Nonunion Miners Thought as Assailants at Holly Grove State Troops Under Arms

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Student Handout #4

1. On your own, please write down the answers to these questions:

- Write down what is happening in this article.
- Who is involved?
- Given what you know about the events on Paint Creek and Cabin Creek at this time, analyse how these events might affect the situation there.
- What potential biases do you think the author might have?

2. With your group, discuss the following questions and take notes (be sure to assign a notetaker and spokesperson for your group):

- Why do you think this happened?
- What pieces of missing information do you think would help us better understand this article?
- What background might other readers not know that you do know?
- Is this article surprising?
- Do you think readers across the country found it surprising at the time? How might they have reacted?

3. Prepare to report out to the class:

- In order to make a statement on behalf of your group, what are the main points of the article? What would help the rest of the class understand the main points of the article?
- Take a few moments to jot these points down before reporting back, or illustrate your responses to these questions visually. Here's a few ideas: create a poster, make a drawing, cartoon, or develop a comic strip to illustrate your conclusions.