

## **Union Poster**

4<sup>th</sup> Grade (40 minute lesson)

This lesson is an introduction to the challenges of coal camp life, and illustrates why workers and their families wanted to join a labor union. It also encourages students to think about how joining together when a community faces difficulties is an effective approach to solving problems and good citizenship. Finally, it raises awareness about immigrants, and the important roles they have played in American and West Virginia History.

### Learning Themes:

- Teamwork and citizenship
- Knowledge of coal camp life, labor unionism
- Diversity and inclusion

### Introduction to coal camp life and background

Give a brief introduction to coal camp life through story, using photos to help explain major concepts: company town, company house, company store, scrip:

“When your great, great-grandparents were alive, in the late 1800s and early 1900s people first started to mine coal in West Virginia. And towns worked a little differently then than they do now. Not many people lived in West Virginia, so what happened is, a person with a lot of money would come to West Virginia, buy or take a big piece of land and build a whole town. This person worked for a company and owned everything in the town: the church, the school, the houses, the store--everything. And the rich man who owned the town told people that were looking for a job to come work there. And they did--they were some of the first miners in West Virginia. And these miners lived in houses that the company owned and went to the church that the company ran, and they were even paid in special company money called “scrip.”

Use photos to facilitate a discussion of what students thought life was like in a coal camp with questions about the way the houses look similar, how wealthy they think mining families were.

### Discussion of challenges and why people wanted to join a union

The instructor facilitates a list of what challenges families in coal camps faced based on what students just saw in the film, and other knowledge students have.

Once the list is created, a short brainstorm of what people could do to solve these problems and make their lives better.

Then the instructor reveals what people actually did: Joined a union! Explain what it is and why it was effective, if possible by challenging students to supply the answers (“How would joining together in a union make it possible to get the company to change things?” etc.). Also, it is important to raise the point that it only works if most people join.

## Poster making

Ask students where the miners came from, and raise the issue of them speaking different languages. If you have a map, show where miners came from (include that many were African Americans from the South).

Tell students that they are now going to have to make a poster to encourage others to join the union, but they must do it without using words since not all miners spoke English. If you need to, you can have a quick group discussion about what symbols you might use.

### **Notes:**

Supplies: Paper for posters and art supplies. Photos of coal camp life.

If you have already discussed coal camp life in a previous lesson, you could spend more time on the posters, and do them as a group project. This would allow students to practice working together and mimic the teamwork of joining a union. This could also be tied into a lesson where students in groups were given countries to research beforehand that had large numbers of immigrant miners to the US (examples include: Italy, Poland, Hungary, Lithuania, Wales, Slovakia). Each group would then make a poster for each group.

### **Meets the Following WV Content Standards**

4<sup>th</sup> Grade

**SS. 4.18:** Compare and contrast W.V.'s population, products, resources, transportation, from the 19<sup>th</sup> century through the present day

5<sup>th</sup> Grade

**SS. 5.8:** Critique the economic reasons for immigration

**SS. 5.15:** Analyze the significance of large scale immigration

**SS. 5.24:** Analyze the people and factors that led to industrialization in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century

**SS. 5.25:** Reconstruct the economic, social, and political history of WV through the use of primary source documents