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Title: Homestead Steel Strike Structured Academic Controversy

Subject Area/Grade Level: US History/High School

Educator's State: Georgia

Abstract:

Students will use primary sources to have a small group debate about the Homestead Steel Strike, ultimately deciding if Andrew Carnegie was a Captain of Industry or a Robber Baron.

Introduction, overview, and unit rationale

The purpose of this lesson is to use the Homestead Steel Strike as a case study to examine industrialization and labor during the Gilded Age. Using the [Structured Academic Controversy](#) format introduced by the Stanford History Education Group, students will study the primary sources to learn about working conditions, the events of the strike, and the aftermath. The students will use what they've learned to have a small group debate about whether Andrew Carnegie was a Captain of Industry or a Robber Baron. The goal is for students to have a greater understanding of the Gilded Age from the point of view of the owners, management, and workers.

Unit goals

The Georgia Standards of Excellence do not specifically mention the Homestead Steel Strike. Because the standards are more general in nature, the Homestead Steel Strike makes an excellent case study. Students can use the strike to better understand Andrew Carnegie, the overall impact of the steel industry, the use of immigrant labor, and significance of labor unions. This lesson provides students with the opportunity to use primary sources to engage in an academic conversation. Small groups allow each student to participate in the activity.

Connections to state standards

Georgia Standards of Excellence for US History:

SSUSH11 Examine connections between the rise of big business, the growth of labor unions, and technological innovations.

- a. Explain the effects of railroads on other industries, including steel and oil.
- b. Examine the significance of John D. Rockefeller and Andrew Carnegie in the rise of trusts and monopolies.
- c. Examine the influence of key inventions on U.S. infrastructure, including but not limited to the telegraph, telephone, and electric light bulb.
- d. Describe Ellis and Angel Islands, the change in immigrants' origins and their influence on the economy, politics, and culture of the United States.
- e. Discuss the origins, growth, influence, and tactics of labor unions including the American Federation of Labor.

Detailed description of what will happen

1. The students will engage in this activity towards the end of a unit on Industrialization. By this point, they will have been introduced to the Gilded Age, including background about Andrew Carnegie, the steel making process, and the use of immigrant labor. This activity will be part of a unit-long conversation about the leaders of this period.

2. Each student will be given the materials for the lesson including the directions, answer sheet, and documents.

3. Students will be divided into groups of four. Each group of four will be subdivided into a group of two. One group will use the documents to find five pieces of evidence to support the claim that Andrew Carnegie was a Captain of Industry. The other group will use the documents to find five pieces of evidence to support the claim that Andrew Carnegie was a Robber Baron. Students will get 30 minutes to do this. Teams will record the evidence on the answer sheet.

4. Next, each group will get 10 minutes to present the evidence they've found. Each side will record the opposing team's evidence on their answer sheet.

5. Lastly, the groups are free to abandon their assigned position. Through discussion, the group will come to a consensus about whether Carnegie was a Captain of Industry or a Robber Baron using evidence from the document set.

Formal and informal assessment

Informal assessment will occur as the teachers circulates through the classroom during the group discussion and debate. Formal assessment will occur through submission of the answer sheet. Formal assessment will also occur on the unit test. One of the free response questions will ask the students to take one side of this debate:

Were the wealthy industrialists Captains of Industry or Robber Barons? Provide 2 specific pieces of evidence to defend your answer.

Technological needs

This assignment could be done with no technology other than a copy machine. However, the documents could be placed on a learning management system and students could record their answers digitally.

Material needed to complete the unit

Students will need copies of the directions and answer sheet and the documents to complete the lesson.

Other sources to consider

- [The University of Pittsburgh Library System](#) has an excellent site devoted to the Homestead Steel Strike.
- [Google Arts and Culture](#) features a compilation of photographs, political cartoons, and other media about the Homestead Steel Strike.