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Title: Homestead Strike “Choose Your Own Adventure”

Subject: AP US History, part of Unit on Gilded Age and Industrialization

State: Pennsylvania

Abstract:

In most history classes, historic events are usually presented as a finished story. Every new event covered in class has a pre-determined beginning and an end. To students, each event is preordained to end in a certain way. It is often difficult for students of history to appreciate the uncertainty experienced by historic actors at the time. The purpose of this activity is to re-create the uncertainty of the outcome of the Homestead Strike of 1892 using lecture, primary sources, student discussions and student decision making and analysis.

1. Introduction, overview, and unit rationale

In AP US History, there was an essay prompt on the AP exam that read something like this, “Evaluate the effectiveness in unions had in addressing the needs of American workers during the late 19th and early 20th centuries”. The responses were usually fleshed out versions of “not very effective”. In this lesson, students will play the role of the Strike Committee of the Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers (AAISW) and make decisions about the strike as scenarios are presented to them by the teacher. The purpose of this exercise is place the students within the historic narrative by demonstrating how fluid events can be and how the outcome is so often unknown at the time. Students will better understand the labor conditions of the period, the obstacles faced by organized labor and the effectiveness of unions in addressing the needs of workers in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

2. Unit Goals

- Students will be able to identify the historic figures and organizations involved in the Homestead Strike of 1892.
- Students will be able to identify and analyze the position of labor in the Homestead mill prior to, during and after the strike.
- Students will be able to identify the events that occurred during the Homestead Strike of 1892.
- Students will be able to anticipate the outcome of historic events when presented with particular scenarios.
- Students will be able to evaluate the effectiveness of unions in addressing workers’ needs in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

3. Connections to state standards

This lesson will connect to the following Pennsylvania Department of Education Academic Standards for History:

- 8.1.12. Historical Analysis and Skills Development
 - A. Evaluate chronological thinking.

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

3. **Technological needs:**

Computer with internet connection, screen, PowerPoint, students could use their smartphones with QR scanner.

4. **Detailed Description**

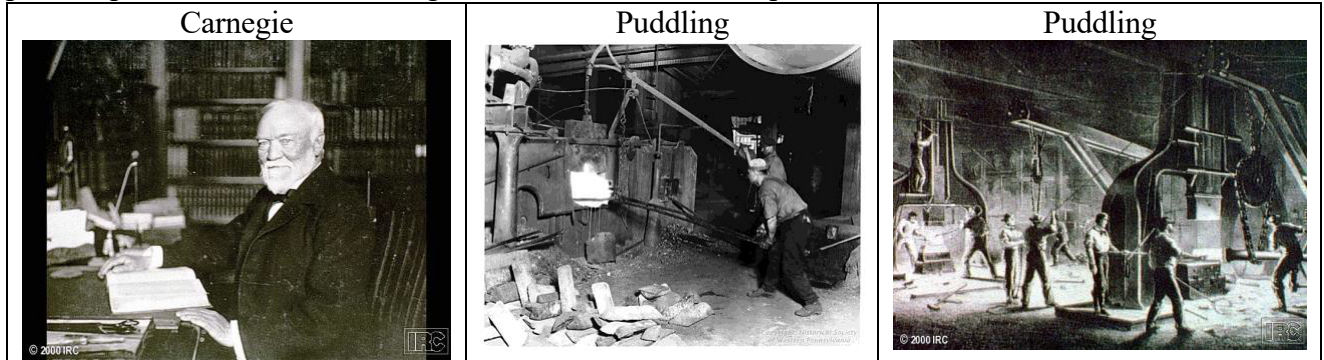
The following could be presented in a slideshow format.

Day One

Part 1

Throughout most of the 19th century, steel had been made using the puddling process: a long and laborious process of handmade steel that involved puddlers and other skilled craftsman who passed down their steel and iron making skills to their sons. Puddlers in mills controlled all

aspects of production and were paid high wages. In the 1880's Carnegie was introduced to the Bessemer process that promised to mass produce steel using mechanization. Steel could be produced in mass quantities, very cheaply. Carnegie hoped to use this method to sell steel to the rapidly growing railroad market. However, no one had yet been able to make the Bessemer process profitable. Should Carnegie invest in the Bessemer process?



Part 2

Pros: Bessemer could provide mass quantities of stronger steel at a faster pace and decreased cost.

Con: This process is unproven and might not work. If it does work, it will replace skilled craftsmen with lesser skilled and unskilled workers who are paid much less.

Students then break into small groups to discuss the pros and cons of this process. They should especially focus on the implications of losing skilled workers. The students are not yet in the role of the AAISW.

Part 3

Vote: "As a steel maker will you invest money in converting your operation over to the Bessemer process?"



Review votes and ask students why they voted the way they did.

Part 4

Outcome

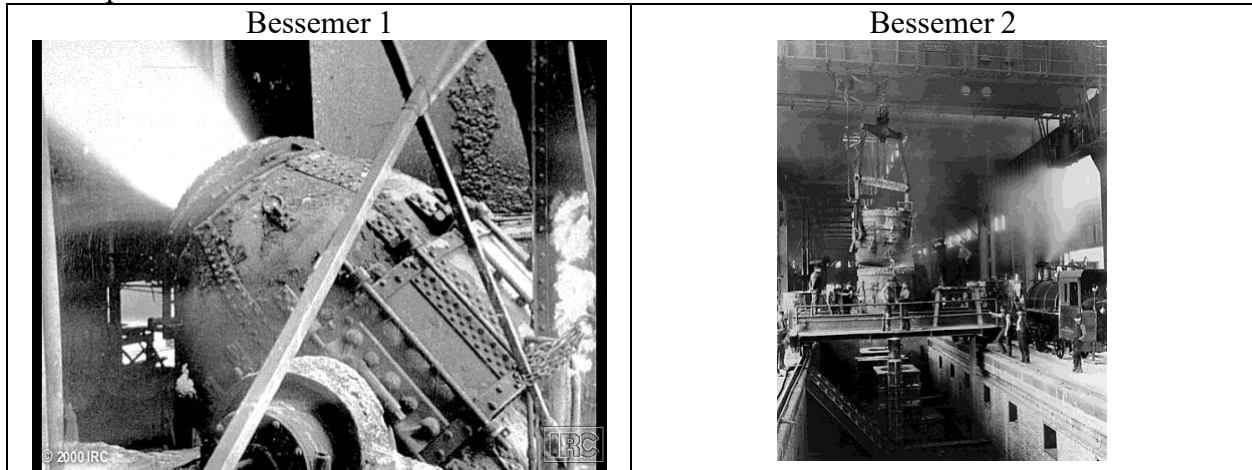
Carnegie did invest in Bessemer and quickly established or bought three mills outside Pittsburg: Thomson, Braddock and Homestead. He formed a partnership with Henry Clay Frick who owned coke production business and placed Frick in charge of his steel mills

Part 5

Puddling produced 1 units of steel per man per hour. \$350 per ton to produce. It took ½ hour to make 1 ton of steel

Bessemer produced 30 units of steel per man per hour. \$35 per ton to produce. It took one hour to produce 60 tons of steel.

Open hearth produced 600 units of steel per man per hour. \$15 per ton to produce. It took one hour to produce 300 tons of steel



Part 6

Union Forming

Although much of the work in a Bessemer mill was mechanized it still relied on skilled or semi-skilled labor to run the operation. These workers had formed a union, the Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers (AAISW). These workers tended to be drawn from the old English and Scots-Irish stock as well as Irish immigrants. Lower paid unskilled work was confined to recent Eastern European immigrants especially from Slovakia and Hungary. The English and Irish workers referred to them as “Hunks” or “Hunkies”. Frick had managed to break the union in 2 of the 3 mills. Homestead’s skilled workers was represented by the AAISW and had a contract with Carnegie that expired in 1892.

Part 7

Should union be for skilled or unskilled?

Only a small minority of Homestead’s workers were represented by the AAISW, about 300. Students will discuss in small groups: What are the benefits or drawbacks of having a skilled workers only union?

Vote: Should the Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers Union (AAISW) represent only skilled workers or all workers, skilled and unskilled?



Students then discuss the implications of the AAISW remaining a skilled workers union. In 1892 there were 720 skilled workers covered by the AAISW and 3,800 non skilled workers not covered by a union.

Part 8

Frick wants to break the union but Carnegie wishes to try to get major concessions from the union first. Frick wants to significantly reduce the rate of pay for the AAISW workers who were paid based on how much steel they produced. The workers also had much control over the production of steel. Frick pushed for total management control over production and pay based on the market price of steel, which often fluctuated.

Students in groups discuss the pros and cons of Frick's proposal. They should understand that a strike means that all workers will have no income which is a major burden on people making so little money.

Part 9

Vote: Should the AAISW declare a strike on Homestead Steelworks?

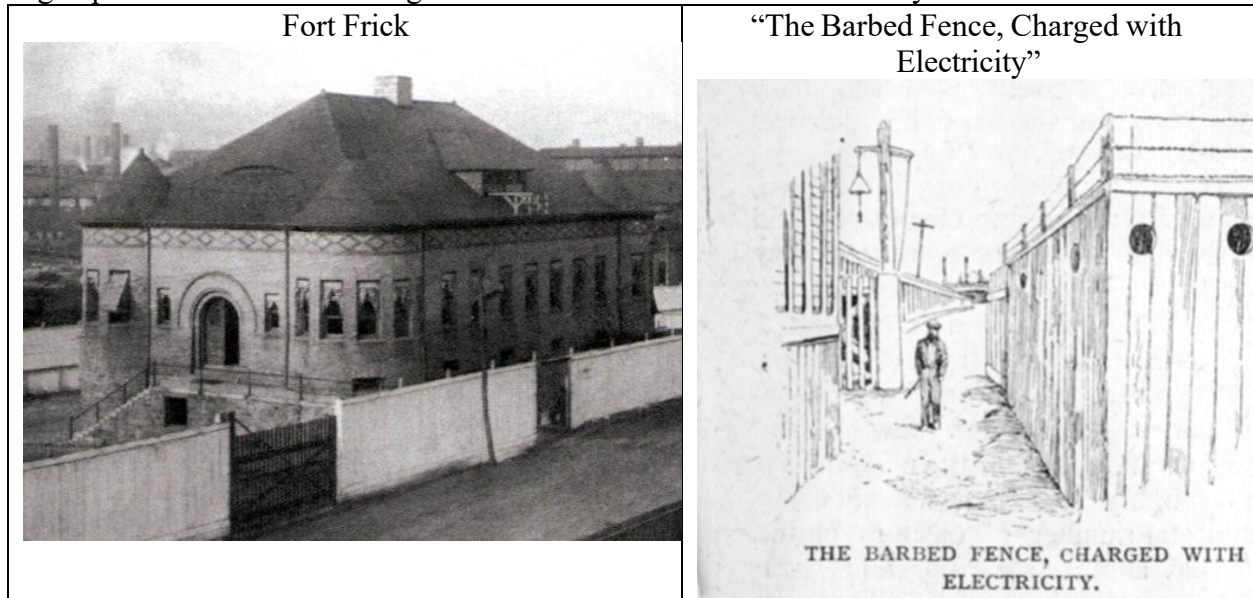


Discuss with the students the possible outcomes for this decision. What does a union victory look like? Will the unskilled non union workers join? Students will submit their thoughts on a possible victory.

Day Two

Part 10

Frick has decided to break the union. He has locked out all of the workers and shut down the mill. Workers may return to work if they sign an agreement that they no longer belong to a union and will not form a new one. Otherwise, all workers will be replaced. Carnegie approved this decision while away in Scotland. Frick then fortified the mill with a high fence complete with guard towers, high pressure water hoses, port holes and electrified barbed wire. Shut out workers began protests outside the mill gates. Frick even turned the sheriff away.



Have students examine these images and discuss what Frick is planning to do. Make a list of possible outcomes.

Part 11

Have students discuss this telegram from Frick to Carnegie:

<https://digital.library.pitt.edu/islandora/object/pitt%3A31735066205083/viewer#page/1/mode/2up>

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July 4, 1892.

My Dear Mr. Carnegie;

My time has been very much occupied for several days past looking after all matters pertaining to the Homestead labor trouble. I think we have everything in about as good shape as it could well be.

The workmen seem to be well organized, and have things, so far, very much their own way, that is to say, are guarding every avenue to the works; stopping all who may, or try, to get in the works. This is rather in our favor in view of our arrangements. We have a thorough understanding with the Sheriff; Notice, as per enclosed copy, has been served on him today, and we are having 350 proclamations printed for him, which he will, tomorrow, take to Homestead, and distribute and post, at the same time distributing around our works as many Deputy Sheriffs as he can secure.

Tomorrow night, about 11 o'clock, 350 Watchmen obtained from Pinkerton, will leave the cars at Bellvue Station on the Fort Wayne Road, and take passage on two barges, and two boats that will be there ready to receive them. They will go at once to Homestead, reaching there, we hope, about three or four o'clock on the morning of the 5th. The barges are well fitted up, and well provisioned, as are also the boats. The boats contain the uniforms, the arms, the ammunition, etc.

Summarize the telegram with students. What is happening? What will happen?

Part 12

Have students discuss how should Homestead workers deal with the arrival of the Pinkertons?

1. Should the union physically resist the arrival of Pinkerton? Why or why not?
2. Should the union allow the Pinkertons into Homestead? Why or why not?

Vote: Should the workers of Homestead allow Carnegie and Frick's private army of Pinkertons into town and Fort Frick? Or should the workers of Homestead physically keep the Pinkertons from entering town and the mill?






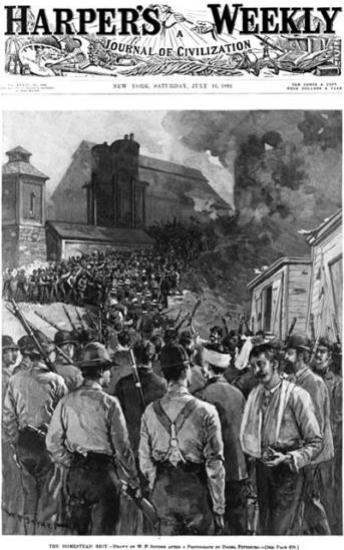
Discuss student responses.

Part 13

Show clip from the documentary “The River Ran Red” about the Homestead Strike of 1892. Show the segment clip from 22:00-31:30 minutes about the battle itself.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SKlbyGZms6g&t=59s>

Discuss students’ impressions of the battle itself and the gauntlet. In small groups students discuss and share what the workers did right and what they did wrong. Note that 10 workers died and 2 Pinkertons.

<p>Drawing of the Battle</p> 	<p>Burning of the Barge</p> 
<p>Repulse of the Pinkertons</p> 	<p>The Gauntlet</p>  <p>THE HOMEMADE BOLT - Shown as W. P. Harvey and a Pinkerton at South, Pennsylvania (The York Press) THE HOMEMADE BOLT - Shown as W. P. Harvey and a Pinkerton at South, Pennsylvania (The York Press)</p>

Part 14

Students Vote: How should the AAISWU respond to the violence against the Pinkerton prisoners?

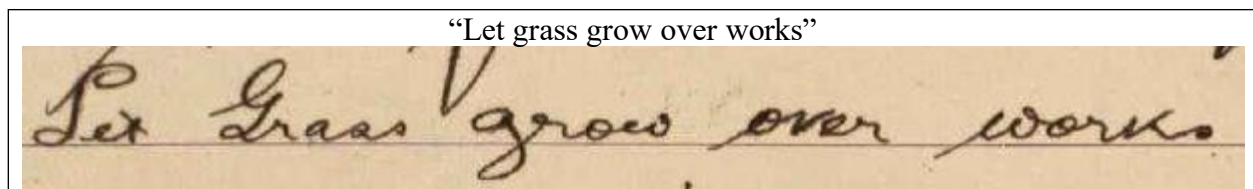


Have students discuss their views.

Part 15

Students examine Carnegie's telegram to Frick supporting his actions, noting the infamous quote, "let grass grow over works"

<https://digital.library.pitt.edu/islandora/object/pitt%3A31735061570549/viewer#page/1/mode/2up>

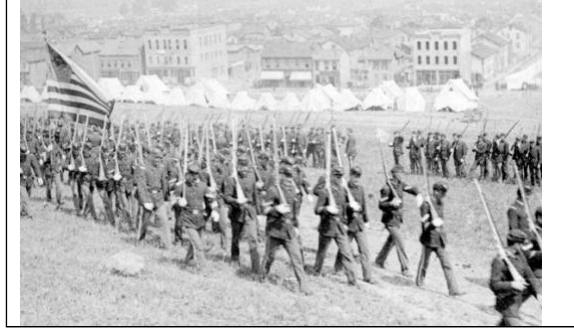


Discuss this telegram. How would you characterize this exchange?

Part 16

The Pennsylvania governor sent 8,500 militia troops into Homestead.

Militia camp and march overlook of Homestead



Have students discuss the pros and cons of the presence of the militia? Why would some in the union believe that they could persuade the militia to side with the striking workers?

Vote: Should the AAISW attempt to oppose or welcome the presence of the Pennsylvania militia in Homestead?



Part 17

Militia stayed and opened the mill.

Union leaders arrested and charged with many offenses including treason. None found guilty.

Many workers could not feed their families and began returning to the mill under Frick's demands.

Then this:

Berkman's assassination attempt against Frick



Show clip from River Runs Red about the assassination attempt. Show minutes 42:30-45:37.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SKlbyGZms6g>

Discuss how Berkman's assassination attempt could have affected support for the strike. Note that Berkman had no connection to the AAISW and did this on his own.

Part 18

By the fall of 1892 most workers had returned to the mill agreeing to leave the union and never form another. It was clear that the union would be unable to press Frick and Carnegie any further.

Discuss the pros and cons of ending or extending the strike.

Vote: Should the AAISW end or extend the strike against Homestead Steel?



Conclusion

Union broken until 1937. Unskilled workers and low pay dominated the industry. Trials and acquittals of strikers. Blacklisted strike leaders.

Carnegie sold to Morgan (felt some guilt). Discuss his charitable donations.
Frick stuck around and became wealthier. Discuss his charitable donations.
Union returns in 1937.
Steel leaves in 1980's.

5. **Assessments**

Informal: Discussion. What could the AAIW have done differently?

Formal: How can you use this event to address the AP essay question: How effective were unions in addressing worker's needs in late 19th century? Write 2-3 sentence thesis answering the prompt. Write 2-3 paragraphs using the Homestead Strike as evidence to support your thesis.