

Homestead Strike Lesson Plan

Central Historical Question:
Why did the Homestead Strike turn violent?

Materials:

- Transparencies of Documents A and B
- Copies of Documents A and B
- Copies of Guiding Questions
- Copies of Homestead Timeline

Plan of Instruction:

1. [NOTE: This lesson should follow a more thorough lecture on labor and industry that includes the following concepts: rise of industrialism (inc. railroad expansion, steel, oil, etc.); monopolies/trusts; unions and strikes].

Review key concepts about labor/industry relations:

- a. Workers formed labor unions to protect their rights and to give them power to collectively bargain.
- b. Business owners saw labor unions as unfair because they prevent competition.
- c. Throughout the industrial era, unions were involved in a number of strikes; often, these strikes turned violent.

Today, we're going to practice the skills of SOURCING and CLOSE READING and CORROBORATION, while looking at different accounts of one of the most violent strikes of the time: The Homestead Strike.

2. Hand out Homestead Timeline. Have students follow as you lecture on background on Homestead:
 - *Andrew Carnegie (robber baron, captain of the steel industry) owned a steel mill in Homestead, PA, near Pittsburgh.*
 - *Union at the steel mill, the Amalgamated Association (AA), formed and won a couple of early strikes.*
 - *Homestead was run by Henry Clay Frick whose goal was to break the union.*
 - *When the union's contract was up in 1892, Frick refused to negotiate a new contract and locked workers out.*
 - *Frick hired the Pinkerton Detectives to provide security and break the strike.*
 - *When the Pinkertons tried to enter the mill, there was conflict. The conflict lasted for 14 hours and left 16 people dead.*

- *The strike lasted four more months until the union gave in. Frick succeeded in breaking the union.*

3. Transition:

Today we are going to look at two documents with different perspectives on the Homestead Strike. As we look at these documents, we are going to decide why these documents offer such different accounts of the strike and which account is more believable.

4. Cognitive modeling/guided practice: Document A: Emma Goldman

Hand out copies of Emma Goldman document and put transparency on overhead projector.

a. Guided practice: Sourcing

- *We see here that she's an anarchist and supports labor rights. What position do you expect her to take on the strike?*
- *When was this written? How does that make you feel about the reliability of the document?*

b. Cognitive modeling: Close reading

- *Now I'm going to demonstrate close reading. I've already determined that Goldman probably supports the workers. Now I'm going to see if I am right. I'm going to circle all the words that seem particularly strong and think about what effect these words have.*
- *Read through document. Circle powerful phrases, for example:*
 - *"men of decision and grit"*
 - *"great wealth and prosperity"*
 - *"open declaration of war"*
 - *"manly"; "rebellious forebears"*
 - *"slaughter of steelworkers"*
- *Do these words make one side seem "right" or "wrong"? How do I know?*
- *I'm also going to ask: whose perspective is missing in this document?*

5. Guided practice on Document B: Henry Frick:

Hand out copies of Henry Frick document and put transparency on overhead projector.

Now we are going to look at a document written by Henry Frick.

a. Sourcing:

- *Who wrote this? What's his perspective?*
- *How might his description and his language differ from Goldman's?*
- *Date July 8—one week after the crisis—how might this effect what Frick will say?*

b. Close Reading:

- *What words stand out? ["final" "impossible" –sounds like he's talking to children].*
- *Is there any evidence that he's trying to sound reasonable and logical? Why might he want to sound reasonable?*

6. Corroboration between Goldman and Frick: Students complete Guiding Questions. (Skip to discussion if time is limited).

7. Discussion:

- Why did the Homestead Strike turn violent?
- What are the differences between Goldman's account and Frick's account?
- Which account do you find more believable? Why?
- Can we ever know what happened?
- What other materials would you want to look at in order to try to figure out what happened at Homestead?

Citations:

Emma Goldman, *Living My Life* (New York: Alfred Knopf, Inc., 1931) 83–88.
<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/99/>

Henry Frick, *Pittsburgh Post*, 8 July 1892. Reprinted in House Report 2447, 52nd Congress, 2nd Session: *Employment of Pinkerton Detectives* (Washington, D.C.: 1892).
<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5349/>

Homestead Strike Timeline

Where: Homestead, Pennsylvania

Union: Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers

Company: Carnegie Steel Company

1876:

Amalgamated Association, union for iron and steel workers, forms.

1881:

Carnegie put Frick in charge of the Homestead factory.

1882 and 1889:

Amalgamated Association won two big strikes against the Carnegie Company. After 1889, the union became very powerful and organized. They had a very strong union contract.

February 1892:

Amalgamated Association asked for a wage increase. Frick responded with a wage decrease.

June 29, 1892:

The old contract expired without the two sides reaching an agreement. Frick locked the workers out of the plant, using a high fence topped with barbed wire.

June 30, 1892:

Workers decided to strike and they surrounded the plant to make sure that no strikebreakers would enter.

July 6, 1892:

After the local sheriff was unable to control the strikers, Frick hired guards from the National Pinkerton Detective Agency to secure the factory so that strikebreakers could enter.

The Pinkertons arrived by boat in the middle of the night, hoping to surround the factory unnoticed.

The strikers knew they were coming. Shots were fired and people killed on both sides.

Document A: Emma Goldman (Modified)

It was May 1892. Trouble had broken out between the Carnegie Steel Company and its workers, organized in the Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers. Amalgamated Association was one of the biggest and most efficient unions in the country, consisting mostly of strong Americans, men of decision and grit, who stood up for their rights. The Carnegie Company, on the other hand, was a powerful corporation. Andrew Carnegie, its president, had turned over management to Henry Clay Frick, a man known for his hatred of unions and workers.

The Carnegie Company enjoyed great wealth and prosperity. Wages were arranged between the company and the union, according to a sliding scale based on the current market price of steel products.

Andrew Carnegie decided to abolish the sliding scale. The company would make no more agreements with the Amalgamated Association. In fact, he would not recognize the union at all. Then, he closed the mills. It was an open declaration of war.

The steel-workers declared that they were ready to take up the challenge of Frick: they would insist on their right to organize and to deal collectively with their employers. Their tone was manly, ringing with the spirit of their rebellious forebears of the Revolutionary War.

Then the news flashed across the country of the slaughter of steel-workers by Pinkertons. In the dead of night, Frick sent a boat packed with strike-breakers and heavily armed Pinkerton thugs to the mill. The workers stationed themselves along the shore, determined to drive back Frick's hirelings. When the boat got within range, the Pinkertons had opened fire, without warning, killing a number of Homestead men on the shore, among them a little boy, and wounding scores of others.

Source: Emma Goldman was political activist and radical who fiercely supported workers' rights. The document above comes from her autobiography, written in 1931, where she remembers her reaction to the Homestead strike, thirty-nine years later.

Document B: Henry Frick

I can say as clearly as possible that under no circumstances will we have any further dealings with the Amalgamated Association as an organization. This is final.

The workmen in the Amalgamated Association work under what is known as a sliding scale. As the price of steel rises, the earnings of the men also rise; as the prices fall, their wages also fall. The wages are not allowed to fall below a certain amount, which is called the minimum. Until now, the minimum has been \$25 per ton of steel produced. We have recently changed the minimum to \$23 instead of \$25. We believe this is reasonable because the Carnegie Company has spent a lot of money on new machinery that allows workers to increase their daily output, and therefore increase their earnings. The Amalgamated Association was unwilling to consider a minimum below \$24, even though the improved machinery would enable workers to earn more. We found it impossible to arrive at any agreement with the Amalgamated Association, so we decided to close our works at Homestead.

The Amalgamated men surrounded our property and blocked all of the entrances and all roads leading to Homestead. We felt that for the safety of our property, it was necessary for us to hire our own guards to assist the sheriff.

We brought our guards here as quietly as possible; had them taken to Homestead at an hour of the night when we hoped to have them enter without any interference whatever and without meeting anybody. All our efforts were to prevent the possibilities of a confrontation between the Amalgamated Association and our guards.

We have investigated and learned that the Amalgamated men and their friends fired on our guards for twenty-five minutes before they reached our property, and then again after they had reached our property. Our guards did not return the fire until after the boats had touched the shore, and after three of our guards had been wounded, one fatally.

Source: In this newspaper interview in the Pittsburgh Post on July 8, 1892, Frick explains his opposition to the union's demands.

Guiding Questions

Name _____

1. How are Goldman and Frick's claims about the Homestead strike different?

2. Whose claim is more believable? Why?