

Coal Culture

Lesson Plans

Wages for their Labor

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Grade Level: 6-12

Introduction:

This lesson can be taught at both lower and upper grades. It can be used in a Social Studies, History or Economics class.

Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- a) Interpret primary source material.
- b) Develop critical thinking skills.
- c) Develop arithmetic skills.

Teaching Time: One 40-minute period

Disciplines:

Economics

History

Reading and Writing

Math

Materials for Lower Grade Levels:

- Sufficient copies of pay envelopes to be distributed to each pair of students. Mr. Kuzemchak's [May 15](#) and [June 15](#), 1935 pay envelopes for lower grades.
- Sufficient copies of Worksheet 1 and Worksheet 2 (lower grades).

Material for 12th Grade Economics:

- Sufficient copies of Mr. Kuzemchak's May 15 June 15 1935, July 15 and August 15, 1935, October 15 and Nov 15, 1935 pay envelopes. [can we hyperlink these?]
- Sufficient copies of Worksheet 1 and Worksheet 2 (Economics)
- Computer Lab OR sufficient copies of the table showing annual average consumer price index:
<http://minneapolisfed.org/research/data/us/calc/hist1913.cfm>

Procedure for Lower Grades:

- Provide each student with Worksheet 1.
- Provide students in lower grades with one photocopy of two pay envelopes for a coal miner's wages at the Ebensburg Coal Company. [Use Mr. Kuzemchak's May 15 and June 15 1935 pay envelopes]
- Separate students into pairs.
- Get students to examine the pay envelopes, paying attention to the items for which deductions have been taken. Guide students in extrapolating what some of those items (for e.g., check weighman, check, smithing, powder) mean.
- Have students complete Worksheet 1 using information found on the pay envelope.
- Discuss with class as a whole the answers they have written down to the questions in Worksheet 1.
- Have students complete Worksheet 2 (Lower Grades)
- Ask students what they think of the amount of money that this specific coal-miner was taking home on May 15, 1935 (\$27.95). He would not be paid again till the end of the month. Be sure to have them think about expenses he and his family may incur.
- Introduce to students the basic concept of inflation. How can students judge whether \$27.95 in 1935 dollars is a lot of money in today's terms?
- Discuss with students the deductions taken from Mr. Kuzemchak's pay. Discuss with students the deductions that are routinely deducted from a current pay stub.
- Without going into the details about the Consumer Price Index, the teacher can explain to students the basic concept of inflation and

what this does to purchasing power. For example, the teacher can use the price per gallon of gas as an example to illustrate this.

Procedure for a 12th Grade Economics Lesson:

Pair Work

1. Provide students in upper grades with photocopies of several of Mr. Kuzemchak's pay envelopes at the Ebensburg Coal Co.) [Mr. Kuzemchak's May 15 June 15 1935, July 15 and August 15, 1935, October 15 and Nov 15, 1935 pay envelopes]
2. Get students to examine the pay envelopes, paying attention in particular to the items for which deductions have been taken. Guide students in extrapolating what some of those items (for e.g., check weighman, check, smithing, powder) mean.
3. Using information found on the pay envelopes, complete Worksheet 1.

Discussion and Instructional Input

- Discuss with class their answers in Worksheet 1.
- Ask students how they can compare two weeks' worth of wages at \$27.95 in 1935 with money made by coalminers today.
- Ask students how they can judge whether \$27.95 in 1935 dollars is a lot of money in today's terms?
- Explain to students the concept of inflation.
- Explain to students the concept of consumer price index (CPI).
- Explain to students the concept of current dollars vs. constant dollars.
- Explain to students how the CPI can be used to convert current dollars from a different year (e.g. 1935) into constant dollars today (e.g., 2007).

Pair work

- Provide students with Worksheet 2 (12th Grade Economics).
- Assign each pair of students to a computer station to work on Worksheet 2. If a computer lab is not available, the teacher can

project the material on a overhead screen. Or the teacher can make copies of the material for the class.

Discussion

- Review with students what their completed work.
- Prompt students to think about what was going on in the United States in 1935. While the worst of the economic downturn associated with the Great Depression was in 1932-1933, the economy really did not fully recover until war production geared up.

Conclusion

- Review concepts discussed in the lesson.

Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening	History	Economics	Math Assessment Anchors
1.1.5.G 1.1.8.G 1.1.11.G	8.1.6.A 8.1.6.B 8.1.9.A, 8.1.9.B, 8.1.9.C	6.1.9 6.1.12	MA. Numbers and Operations
1.2.5.A 1.2.8.A 1.2.11.A	8.1.12.A, 8.1.12.B, 8.1.12.C	6.5.9 6.5.12	ME. Data Analysis and Probability
1.6.5.A 1.6.8.A 1.6.11.A	8.2.6.C 8.2.9.C 8.2.12.C		
1.6.5.E 1.6.8.E 1.6.11.E			

“The Wages They Earned” -- Worksheet 1

Researchers use primary sources to provide them with information so that they can figure out what happened and why.

It is important to ask a few basic questions first when you are working with primary sources.

1. What is the source?
2. Who wrote it or made it?
3. When was it written or made?
4. Where was it written or made?
5. What does this source tell us?

“The Wages They Earned”: Worksheet 2 (Lower Grades)

What percentage of Mr. Kuzemchak’s wages was spent on work-related expenses?

	Type of Expense	Amount
Items that are work-related expenses:	_____	_____
	_____	_____

Total amount of work-related expenses:

Total amount of wages for the half month ending May 15:

Percentage of wages spent on work-related expenses =

$(\text{Total Amount of Work-Related Expenses} \div \text{Total Amount of Wages}) \times 100 = \text{_____}\%$

“The Wages They Earned” -- Worksheet 2 (Upper Grades)

1. How do you figure out Mr. Kuzemchak’s 1935 wages in 2007 constant dollars?

Current dollars = dollars earned in a specific year (e.g. 1935)

Constant dollars = dollars earned with the impact of inflation factored out.

Formula:

Wages in 2007 constant dollars = Wages in 1935 Current Dollars (CPI in 2007/CPI in 1935)

Go to <http://minneapolisfed.org/research/data/us/calc/>

Click on Consumer price index and inflation

This will give you a table of the annual average CPI. Find the information for 2007 and 1935 and pluck them into the formula.

Mr. Kuzemchak’s half-monthly wages for a given period in 1935
= _____

Mr. Kuzemchak’s half-monthly wages in 2007 constant dollars
= _____

2. How can you figure out what the wages of Mr. Kuzemchak can buy in 2006?

Go to <http://minneapolisfed.org/research/data/us/calc/>

Use the calculator to complete the following.

May 15, 1935 \$ _____ 2006 \$ _____

June 15 1935 \$ _____ 2006 \$ _____