

Teacher Handout & Lesson Guide

Instructor Guide - ~45-60 minutes - 5 short lessons + discussion

Learning Objectives

By the end of this class, apprentices will be able to:

- Explain what a union is and how collective bargaining gives workers a voice.
- Describe the conditions that gave birth to the labor movement in the 1800s.
- Identify major labor wins (weekend, 8-hour day, minimum wage) and the laws behind them.
- Recognize that labor leaders A. Philip Randolph and Bayard Rustin organized the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.
- Connect the 1968 Memphis Sanitation Strike and "I AM A MAN" to workers' and civil rights.
- Understand how a union apprenticeship offers a debt-free path to a career.

Tip: Play each narrated lesson in the app (Labor History 101), then use the Key Points and Discuss prompts below. Hand out the Vocabulary Sheet at the start and the Exit Quiz at the end.

Lesson 1: What Is a Union?

The Story

A union is a group of workers who join together to have a voice on the job. Alone, one worker has little power against a large employer - together, through collective bargaining, they negotiate as equals. The result is a contract covering wages, benefits, safety, and fair treatment. Key idea: solidarity - an injury to one is an injury to all.

Key Points

- Alone = little power. Together = an equal seat at the table.
- Collective bargaining produces a written contract (wages, benefits, safety, fairness).
- Core value: solidarity - an injury to one is an injury to all.

Discuss

- ? Why does one worker have little power alone? What changes when workers act together?
- ? What does "an injury to one is an injury to all" look like on a real jobsite?

Lesson 2: The Birth of the Labor Movement

The Story

In the 1800s, workers - including children - labored 12 to 16 hours a day in dangerous factories with no weekends, overtime, or safety laws. They organized and fought back. The 1886 movement for the eight-hour day led to the Haymarket affair, remembered worldwide every May Day, and gave rise to the early unions and the American Federation of Labor.

Key Points

- 1800s conditions: 12-16 hour days, child labor, no safety laws, no weekend.
- Workers organized and fought back - change was won, not given.
- 1886: the eight-hour-day movement & Haymarket affair (origin of May Day) -> the AFL.

Discuss

- ? Which protections we take for granted today did workers have to fight for?
- ? Why do you think employers resisted the eight-hour day so fiercely?

Lesson 3: Labor Wins That Changed Your Life

The Story

The labor movement built the middle class. The weekend, the eight-hour day, and overtime pay were all union wins. The 1935 Wagner Act made it legal to organize and bargain. The 1938 Fair Labor Standards Act created the minimum wage, the 40-hour week, and outlawed the worst child labor. Safety laws, health insurance, and pensions came from organized workers demanding them.

Key Points

- Weekend, 8-hour day, overtime pay = union wins that touch everyone.
- 1935 Wagner Act: made organizing & bargaining legal.
- 1938 Fair Labor Standards Act: minimum wage, 40-hour week, ended worst child labor.

Discuss

- ? Which of these wins affects your life the most right now?
- ? What would a typical week look like without the weekend or overtime pay?

Lesson 4: The 1963 March on Washington - Led by Labor

The Story

Most people picture Dr. King's "I Have a Dream" speech - but Dr. King did not organize the 1963 March on Washington. Its architects were two labor leaders: A. Philip Randolph, founder of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (the first Black union chartered by the AFL), and Bayard Rustin. Its full name says it all: the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. Jobs came first - the demand was for decent wages, an end to job discrimination, and economic justice. Organized labor was behind that day.

Key Points

- Organized by labor leaders A. Philip Randolph and Bayard Rustin - not Dr. King.
- Randolph founded the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, the first Black union chartered by the AFL.
- Its full name - 'for Jobs and Freedom' - put economic justice and fair wages first.

Discuss

- ? Why do you think so many people don't know that labor leaders organized the march?
- ? What does it mean that the march demanded 'Jobs and Freedom' together?

Lesson 5: Memphis 1968 & "I AM A MAN"

The Story

In 1968, Memphis Black sanitation workers struck after two men were crushed by a faulty truck. Paid poverty wages and denied dignity, they carried signs reading I AM A MAN. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. came to stand with them - and it was here, supporting a labor struggle, that he gave his final speech. The fight for workers' rights and civil rights have always been one.

Key Points

- Trigger: two workers crushed by a faulty truck; poverty wages; no dignity.
- The sign "I AM A MAN" demanded dignity and respect, not just a raise.
- Dr. King stood with the strikers - and gave his final speech in Memphis.

Discuss

- ? Why did Dr. King see this labor strike as part of the civil rights movement?
- ? What did "I AM A MAN" demand beyond higher pay?

Lesson 6: Why It Matters to You

The Story

A union card is still one of the surest paths to the middle class. Through an apprenticeship you earn while you learn - no mountain of debt - with fair wages, health care, retirement, and a real voice on the job. You also join something bigger: a movement of working people looking out for each other. When we don't grow, we die. The future is the next generation - that's you.

Key Points

- A union card = a proven path to the middle class.
- Apprenticeship: earn while you learn, no debt; fair wages, health care, retirement.
- You join something bigger. The future of the movement is the next generation - you.

Discuss

- ? How is "earn while you learn" different from the four-year-college path?
- ? What does joining "something bigger than yourself" mean to you?

Wrap-Up

Close by connecting the history to the room: everything they now expect on a job - the weekend, overtime, safety, a voice - was won by workers standing together. Their apprenticeship is the next chapter. Invite them to take the Exit Quiz and to keep exploring the app.