

Of Farms and Factories: Assessing the American Labor Movement through *Of Mice and Men*

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Abstract

Of Farms and Factories is a textual and film analysis unit designed for a high school English or ESOL classroom. The unit uses John Steinbeck's classic text, *Of Mice and Men*, to study and analyze the foundations of the American labor movement. Additionally the unit will pair this novel with a documentary on contemporary labor in order to allow students to assess the successes and failures of the movement. Students will engage in a variety of classroom activities including but not limited to text analysis, primary source appraisal, constructed response writing prompts, and collaborative discussion. Ultimately, students will have a chance to lead a discussion with their classmates about the future of labor and worker's rights in America. Of Farms and Factories attempts to engage students in historical thinking while also demanding that they apply that history to the world around them.

Content Objectives

Rational

It is no secret that teaching literature in the high school classroom is an uphill battle. There are myriad reasons for this, there continues to be a lack of funding to support reading initiatives for preschoolers, social media offers quick and easy mental stimulation, and teachers are urged to spend less time on novels and more time on excerpts in order to prepare students for standardized tests, just to name a few. It feels safe to say that the novel is losing its place as a standard component of a high school English class. The results of this are concerning. Students in Philadelphia lag behind their peers in Pennsylvania in terms of average reading level and reading comprehension. Additionally, students at the school I teach in have shown low scores when tested for Common Core skills such as determining an author's purpose behind a text and inferring information from a text. Clearly, these deficiencies need to be addressed to give our students the fair chance they deserve to succeed in whatever post-secondary life brings them.

While not immediately apparent, one of the best methods for getting students to engage in more serious reading is to use film to set context and scaffold instruction. While many students may not have confidence when approaching a large text like a novel, almost all students at the high school level feel comfortable watching a film. This isn't surprising, considering how much television and film has come to dominate modern

society and the cultural zeitgeist. When employed effectively, film can serve as an anchor for students' ideas and opinions when approaching a larger text. Film can be incredibly effective for getting students to connect texts to their own world. This is especially true when the films employed focus on real events or use real footage to create a historical narrative or documentary. This unit will seek to pair *Of Mice and Men* with several films focusing on labor rights and the labor movement in order to engage students more deeply with the text and make modern day connections between the world they live in and the world the characters of *Of Mice and Men* occupy.

I teach English at a relatively small neighborhood high school in Kensington, Philadelphia. The school population is racially mixed, comprised of 70% Latino students, 25% African American students, and 5% listed as "other." Many students report feeling that the subject matter discussed in school either does not interest them, or worse, the subject matter discussed in school is wholly inapplicable to their own lives. I find it hard to blame them, many of the texts so often taught in high school English classrooms exist in a world that doesn't exist anymore, or doesn't seem to. It is no surprise students cannot connect to texts when they see these texts of relics of an age long since ended. Additionally, many students at Kensington CAPA read below or well below grade level, which makes immersing students in complex texts especially challenging.

This unit addresses the following Pennsylvania Department of Education Standards for Language Arts education:

Standard - CC.1.3.9-10.A

- Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.

Standard - CC.1.3.9-10.H

- Analyze how an author draws on and transforms themes, topics, character types, and/or other text elements from source material in a specific work.

Standard - CC.1.2.9-10.G

- Analyze various accounts of a subject told in different mediums (e.g., a person's life story in both print and multimedia), determining which details are emphasized in each account.

Standard - CC.1.4.9-10.D

- Organize ideas, concepts, and information to make important connections and distinctions; use appropriate and varied transitions to link the major sections of the text; include formatting when useful to aiding comprehension; provide a concluding statement or section.

Background

Goals of the Labor Movement

In order to teach a unit that uses the American labor movement as one of its core themes, it goes without saying that teachers and students alike need to have some familiarity with what the labor movement was (is) and what its goals were (are). The history of the American labor movement is incredibly long, detailed, and complex, so it would be impossible to cover everything in one unit (or even one school year!). For this purpose, this unit will take a broad look at the labor movement, specifically focusing on its overarching goals that have existed throughout American history on into contemporary society. Spoken most generally: “the purpose of the labor movement is justice for the underprivileged. Whether the injustice is social, political, or economic, the labor movement adjusts itself to the combat.”¹

While the specific goals the labor movement varied between decades and industries, one does not have to look hard in order to find common themes. One of the most commonly cited causes for action has always been fighting for higher wages and better job security.² In order for common men with relatively little property to their names to change these factors, they needed to band together to form workers unions. As stated by sociologist William Green, “the spirit of fraternity and fellowship has drawn workers together in the cause of labor, and organization has welded these ties into social power.”³ Green goes on to state that smaller localized labor unions began to see the value of a more federated structure.

While the histories of these unions and movements are all incredibly rich and detailed, the most important thing for students to understand are the underlying causes for unionization of labor in America in general. Students should also be made aware of the movements overarching goals for itself as it began to gain traction in America.

Steinbeck and the Labor Movement

When teaching a text like *Of Mice and Men*, teaching the context in which the novel was written is of the utmost importance. This is doubly true when teaching the novel through the lens of the American labor movement. Written during the fallout of the Great Depression and informed by Steinbeck’s own experiences growing up as a laborer in California, the novel questions the validity of the so called “American Dream” in a climate where workers are seen as disposable. Steinbeck asks readers to consider the

¹ Green, William. "The Goals of Organized Labor." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 184 (1936): 147.

² Green, William. "The Goals of Organized Labor." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 184 (1936): 148

³ Green, William. "The Goals of Organized Labor." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 184 (1936): 147

effects that being bound to the land you work on impacts America's most fundamental idea of personal freedom and happiness.

Steinbeck's life and work are inseparable from the American labor movement. During his childhood he worked on farms along the Californian coast as a migrant laborer; he would later use these experiences as source material in many of his novels. As noted above, he lived and wrote through the Great Depression, one of the major low points for workers of the 20th Century. The Great Depression initially saw a decrease in Union Membership of close to 40%, and an anxiety over the future of average American laborers is palpable throughout Steinbeck's work.⁴

Though Steinbeck did not write on behalf of any specific labor union or movement, he was certainly embraced with open arms by labor organizations both in America and abroad.⁵ Though his works have been resonant among laborers from a myriad of industries and fields, Steinbeck's work was overwhelmingly focused on the plight of migrant farm laborers in California. Steinbeck saw that, "[w]hile the production and value of agricultural goods climbed in the early thirties, recovering slowly from the late twenties slump, wages kept going down, plummeting to an all-time low."⁶ This led him to be closely associated with the Farm Labor Movement in California, eventually basing the novel *In Dubious Battle* on a 1933 labor strike in Tulare County California.⁷

Clearly, Steinbeck was a voice of the labor movement. His consistent focus on the lives of laborers, coupled with his widespread readership across the world makes him one of it's most prominent authors. While works like *The Grapes of Wrath* and *In Dubious Battle* are frequently cited as classics of Proletarian Literature, *Of Mice and Men* is more often overlooked. Yet throughout the book there is a deliberate focus on the tension between worker and owner, land and labor, and a host of rich themes founded in the labor movement.

Labor Rights in Of Mice and Men

While *Of Mice and Men* is less frequently praised for its connection to the labor movement than some of the aforementioned titles, it has many important points to raise about the changing dynamics between employee and employer in America. Labor rights, or a lack thereof, are displayed in the novels through the physical spaces the characters occupy, the things they experience there, and the relationships between the characters themselves. The novel offers many opportunities to make modern day connections, and its strong characters have resonated with students for generations. For these reasons, *Of Mice and Men* should be celebrated as a labor rights novel.

⁴<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentations/timeline/depwwii/unions/>

⁵ Yancey. *The Steinbeck Review* Vol. 9, No. 1 (Spring 2012), pp. 38-53

⁶ Benson, Jackson J., and Anne Loftis. "John Steinbeck and Farm Labor Unionization: The Background of 'In Dubious Battle.'" *American Literature* 52, no. 2 (1980): 198.

⁷ Be Benson, Jackson J., and Anne Loftis. "John Steinbeck and Farm Labor Unionization: The Background of 'In Dubious Battle.'" *American Literature* 52, no. 2 (1980): 202.

The physical spaces the characters of *Of Mice and Men* occupy offers readers both direct and symbolic commentary on labor rights in 20th Century America. The novel opens with George and Lennie walking through a wide open landscape which Steinbeck describes in lush language. They have no money, but the two men are free to roam and make their beds wherever they please. The instant the men take up positions as migrant laborers, their circumstances change drastically. Suddenly, they are bound to their specific plot of land. The bunkhouse which the men occupy serves as a stark contrast to the Californian countryside that led them there. There are many passages throughout the text that describe the poor conditions that the ranch workers must deal with, but perhaps the best comes at the opening of the second chapter. Here, Steinbeck details the dehumanizing conditions that so many farm laborers had to find a way to call home. The men live among rats and bugs, sleep on old bales of hay, and ultimately can only find comfort in places they dream of. In fact dreaming of open land is a major plot device of the book, as George and Lennie's entire motivation stems from saving enough money to become independent one day. Throughout the novel, there is a stark contrast between the freedom offered by the open countryside and the submission demanded by the conditions found on the ranch. Indeed, *Of Mice and Men* explores the, "relationship between land, labor, and capital."⁸

While the novel's main story details George and Lennie, we meet many of their peers at the ranch and learn about their experiences too. Collectively, these experiences give the reader insight into what the average day laborer might be subjected to in order to feed themselves. One of the most obvious instances of labor representation in the novel comes through the relationship between the main characters George and Lennie and their bosses at the ranch. They are immediately introduced to the owner of the ranch, who they more or less have to trick into giving them jobs. He makes it known that he is suspicious of the two, and that he will be watching them closely. Soon after we meet the boss's son Curley, who almost immediately threatens Lennie with physical assault for seemingly no reason. Here in Chapter 2, "control is established by the authoritarian gaze of the boss and his son."⁹ The relationship between Curley and the ranch hands is an important one to focus on. Candy tells George and Lennie that Candy has a pattern of physically abusing workers who he takes issue with. He sees them as replaceable and takes comfort in knowing that they are unlikely to fight back, as they are dependent on the job in order to feed themselves. This pattern of abuse sets into motion a chain of violence that extends outward and eventually affects many of the characters on the ranch. There are also many, less plot specific references to labor rights (or lack thereof) in the novel, like Candy's maimed hand, the social inequity on the ranch, and discussions about wages and what one can do with them.

⁸ Marsden, John L. "California Dreamin' The Significance of 'A Coupla Acres' in Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*." *Western American Literature* 29, no. 4 (1995): 291

⁹ Marsden, John L. "California Dreamin' The Significance of 'A Coupla Acres' in Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*." *Western American Literature* 29, no. 4 (1995): 293

The relationships between the laborers on the ranch are what has made the novel stand the test of time. The relationships are rich, realistic, and varied in purpose, allowing the reader to infer a great deal of information. First and foremost is the central relationship of the book, the partnership formed between George, Lennie, and Candy. George and Lennie have always planned on saving their wages to buy land of their own and become independent. When they befriend Candy, the men decide to pool their money together in order to escape the ranch sooner, as escaping the ranch represents, “the opportunity to escape the Darwinian consequences of capitalism.”¹⁰ While their group is limited to only three men, their actions are motivated by the same factors that motivated the labor movement: a desire for personal freedom and something to call their own. We are also introduced to two characters who can be considered outsiders in the novel, and the way they relate to the rest of the laborers is certainly worth discussing. First there is Crooks, a stable worker who is the only black man on the ranch. Because of his race Crooks is relegated to sleeping in the barn with animals, and is explicitly not included in the laborers’ weekly social outings. At one point Crooks seems to join the group that George, Lennie, and Candy are forming, but ultimately doesn’t as he is threatened by Curley’s wife that she will have him, “strung up from a tree.”¹¹ Crooks story shows how race functioned as a source of division among laborers. Curley’s wife is the second outsider character in the novel. She is the only woman on the ranch, and while Steinbeck doesn’t go into great detail about her role there, it is interesting to note that she is the only woman in the entire novel and is never given a name. She functions as a great character to discuss the role women play in society and how they have historically been shunted by Capitalism.

Contemporary Labor Struggles

It would be impossible to argue that the labor movement in America has not seen massive successes. The abolition of child labor, a massively expanded middle class, and the creation of government agencies like OSHA are only a few examples of the gains of the movement. However, for all of its successes, the labor movement has not won all of its battles. It is clear looking around modern day America that the social, political, and economic injustice the labor movement fought hard to eliminate still effects a sizable portion of Americans. In this way, our modern world is more similar to the world that George and Lennie occupied may be more similar than they initially appear.

A common topic in contemporary politics revolves around the metaphoric “death” of traditional American jobs. The type of jobs one could spend an entire career working at and provide a reasonable living for one’s family. As author and labor activist Jack Metzgar describes in his article *Blue-Collar Blues: The Deunionization of Manufacturing*, traditional blue collar American jobs have actually weathered the storm

¹⁰ Marsden, John L. “California Dreamin’ The Significance of ‘A Coupla Acres’ in Steinbeck’s *Of Mice and Men*.” *Western American Literature* 29, no. 4 (1995): 295

¹¹ Steinbeck, John. *Of Mice and Men*. London: Penguin Books, 2017: 79.

of a hyper competitive global economy quite impressively. He notes, however, that American unions, have not.¹² In fact the number of Americans working in blue collar “labor” related jobs has seen a drastic increase in the past thirty, while union membership has fallen drastically across all industry (curiously government is the only sector which has seen a rise in unionization).¹³ Metzgar goes on to predict that within the next thirty years manufacturing unions could disappear altogether. This has led to a host of problems, one of which Metzgar describes as, “sheer employer viciousness.”¹⁴ Generally put, if an individual worker attempts to unionize, they will be fired or potentially face legal pressure. When a large group of workers move to unionize, the employer can simply strong arm the movement by threatening to close or move the plant. This is something that can be seen clearly in both *Of Mice and Men* as well as *American Factory*, serving as perhaps the main theme of the latter. Metzgar states the effectiveness of this strategy succinctly, “the threat is effective because the reality is there. Manufacturing employers can move and will move (even at considerable expense) to avoid unions.”¹⁵

This information not only helps us appraise just how far (or short) we’ve come since George and Lennie’s days working south of Soledad while also contextualizing *American Factory* for students. It is important that students make note of labor issues that affected the characters in *Of Mice and Men*, but it is even more valuable for them to see modern day examples of these issues remaining pervasive in contemporary American society. In order for students to truly understand what makes *Of Mice and Men* a uniquely American story, they must understand the successes and failures of the labor movement that followed its publication.

Objectives

This unit is designed for a 9th-10th grade English course, however it could also be applicable to any middle school or high school Language Arts based class depending on student reading levels and educational needs. There are no prerequisites to this unit, however students should ideally have at least a basic familiarity with reading novels and viewing films. This unit is designed for a 50-minute class schedule, but can be revised for an alternate schedule if needed.

¹² Metzgar, Jack. "Blue-Collar Blues: The Deunionization of Manufacturing." *New Labor Forum*, no. 10 (2002): 20-23.

¹³ Metzgar, Jack. "Blue-Collar Blues: The Deunionization of Manufacturing." *New Labor Forum*, no. 10 (2002): 21.

¹⁴ Metzgar, Jack. "Blue-Collar Blues: The Deunionization of Manufacturing." *New Labor Forum*, no. 10 (2002): 22.

¹⁵ Metzgar, Jack. "Blue-Collar Blues: The Deunionization of Manufacturing." *New Labor Forum*, no. 10 (2002): 22.

The objectives for this unit include the following:

- Analyze the relationship between the Great Depression, the Labor Movement, and modern day labor conditions in America
- Compare and contrast how authors tell a story with how directors tell a story
- Make textual inferences about an author's purpose or message
- Analyze the effects that a global economy will have on the American workforce

Teaching Strategies

In this unit students will be required to engage in close reading, critical film analysis, and persuasive writing in order to explore the connections between the labor movement of the 20th Century and modern day economic realities. Students will be offered a core text (John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*) along with a core film (*American Factory*). Additionally, students will be offered supplementary nonfiction texts and labor related newsreels from various freely available archives. In order to achieve the goals of this unit a number of instructional strategies will be employed. See the text below for a list of strategies, many of which have materials attached in Appendix A:

Critical Vocabulary

For the unit to be successful, it is essential to establish an academic vocabulary for students to use when analyzing/criticizing film. Having this vocabulary not only allows students to view and discuss film through a critical lens, it also helps students think critically about how and why films display their subjects in order to ask more meaningful questions. A critical vocabulary should be established early on in the unit in order to maximize the benefits of the other strategies.

Content Specific Vocabulary

In order for students to be able to engage in rich discussions about labor as seen in *Of Mice and Men* and labor films, they must have a grasp of vocabulary specific to the labor movement and its goals. Having content specific vocabulary allows students to confidently engage with materials as well as demonstrate mastery more authentically. Students will employ this content specific vocabulary when formulating constructed responses and while discussing content with their peers.

Constructed Response Questions

In addition to being a point of focus in many school districts, constructed response questions are a fantastic way to engage students in a focused critical analysis. Constructed response questions offer meaningful opportunities to hone their writing skills in a semiformal setting. Throughout the unit, constructed response questions will be utilized in order to facilitate student reflection and analysis on readings and film viewing.

Jigsaw

Students will be paired or grouped in order to break down readings into small pieces. Students can be grouped on reading level, interest, or any factor that will aid their learning. Groups/pairings are given a section of a text or set of texts which they are responsible for reading and analyzing. After each group/pairing has had some time, all groups/pairs meet and present their findings to one another so that the overall gist of the reading(s) reaches the entire class.

Graphic Organizers

Throughout the reading process, students will use graphic organizers to create character analyses as well as create an evolving hierarchy of labor in the novel. Additionally, students will use graphic organizers to compare and contrast what they read in the novel and see in old labor newsreels with what they see in contemporary labor films and supplementary readings.

Do Now

Each lesson will begin with a do now to set the thematic tone for the day. Additionally this allows the teacher to clear up and student misconceptions before beginning and students have a safe and private place to begin engaging with course content.

Primary Source Analysis

During this unit students will view film clips produced during the labor movement as well as newsreels pertaining to the labor movement. Additionally students will analyze photographs from the great depression era in order to ground their understanding of their reading in the novel's real world context.

Bibliography

The following resources were used in order to create the unit or teach the unit to a classroom:

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Classroom Activities

*Many specific materials are attached to this unit plan. Please keep in mind that you as an educator can choose to use or not use specific materials, techniques, or exercises at your own discretion. For the purpose of slideshow presentations that are required during direct instruction, I suggest creating your own that you feel comfortable with, but would *heavily* encourage you to draw on sources found in the bibliography for this purpose

Lesson One: What is Labor?

Objectives: Students will read primary and secondary sources in order to define the term labor and engage in a discussion about what it looks like in today's culture. This lesson is designed to establish a common understanding of labor and the labor movement amongst students. Additionally this unit is designed to tease the further discussion the unit will bring in order to gain student buy in.

Materials and resources:

- Writing instruments for students
- Teacher created slideshow detailing labor as a concept and highlights of the Labor Movement
- The Rise of Organized Labor in the United States (Published by NEWSELA, Appendix A Fig. 1)
- New Americans, 1955 Labor Film Clip (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HMwtffhPuoM>)
- Constructed Response Question #1 (Appendix A Fig. 2)

Standards:

- Standard - CC.1.2.9-10.G
Analyze various accounts of a subject told in different mediums (e.g., a person's life story in both print and multimedia), determining which details are emphasized in each account.
- Standard - CC.1.4.9-10.D
Organize ideas, concepts, and information to make important connections and distinctions; use appropriate and varied transitions to link the major sections of the text; include formatting when useful to aiding comprehension; provide a concluding statement or section.

Phase One: Begin the lesson by displaying the question “Do you or anyone you’re close with have a job? List 5 things you(they) like about it and list 5 things you(they) dislike about it.” as the days Do Now activity. While students are responding, create a T chart on the board separated into “Good/Bad”.

Phase Two: Allow students to volunteer their responses. Ideally every student will get to share out one positive and one negative in order to create as comprehensive as possible. This list should remain on the board as it will be referenced later in the lesson. Once you and the students are satisfied with the lists that have been generated, it may be worthwhile to count how many positives there were in comparison to negatives, but this is optional.

Phase Three: Once the initial share out has completed, using your classroom display (projector, smart board, etc.) present your slideshow focusing on the concept of labor. Go through each key detail slowly, allowing time for students to copy/organize information into their notebooks. Before moving on to a new slide/concept, be sure to ask students if they can think of an example of how these concepts relate to our modern day lives. Before moving on to phase three of the lesson, ensure that all students have copied down all necessary information.

Phase Four: Inform students that they are about to view a news clip from the 1950s that will give them a brief look into what attitudes towards labor were. Prior to showing the clip, ask students to think about whether or not they have modern day clips about similar topics. Once the clip has shown, have students do a quick write on the question, “Do you think the values highlighted in the labor clip remain commonly held values in modern day America? Explain.”

Phase Five: After students have finished their quick writing activity. Pass out the article *The Rise of Organized Labor in the United States* (see Appendix A). Encourage students to annotate text while reading or highlight any similarities they saw between the clip and the reading. After students have finished reading independently, ask for volunteers to summarize each subsection of the reading. Allow for student discussion if it’s there.

Phase Six: For the final phase of the lesson, students will answer Constructed Response Question #1 for the unit (worksheet attached in Appendix A Fig. 2). While students are writing, circle the room in order to keep students on task as well as check in on student work. If time allots, allow students to share out their responses with the class.

Closing the lesson: For the lessons exit ticket, students should write one sentence answering the questions “why do workers deserve rights?”. This could be a historical fact, an anecdotal answer, or really anything that gets to the heart of the question.

Lesson Two: Analyzing Labor in *Of Mice and Men*

*This lesson serves as an example for what a typical lesson focused on reading the novel will look like in this unit. While this lesson will focus specifically on Chapter two, other chapters can and should be supplemented with materials in the same style this lesson is. Resources for supplementary labor clips can be found in Appendix B.

Objectives: Students will analyze the text of a chapter in *Of Mice and Men* in order to make connections between the events of the text and the real world labor movement. This lesson is designed to engage students directly with text by supplementing it with newsreel footage and labor movement produced shorts. Students will also fill out a graphic organizer while reading. As stated above the chapter being analyzed in this lesson is chapter two.

Materials and resources:

- Writing instruments for students
- Student copies of *Of Mice and Men*
- Chapter Two Labor Analysis Organizer (Appendix A Fig. 3)
- *The Land is Rich* Produced by Harvey Richards (via Prelinger Archives https://archive.org/details/Land_Is_Rich_The)
- Constructed Response Question #2 (Appendix A Fig. 4)
- Smartboard or projector connected to teacher computer

Standards:

- Standard - CC.1.3.9-10.A
Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.
- Standard - CC.1.3.9-10.H
Analyze how an author draws on and transforms themes, topics, character types, and/or other text elements from source material in a specific work.
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Analyze how an author draws on and transforms themes, topics, character types, and/or other text elements from source material in a specific work.

Phase One: Begin the lesson by displaying a Do Now on the board to activate prior knowledge from the last time students were reading the novel. Many different Do Now questions could work for this, for example, “What characters did we meet in chapter one? List two traits about each character.” Once students have been given the appropriate amount of time to record their responses, record information on the board so that it remains available for students to look at.

Phase Two: Have students take out their novels (or distribute them) and open to chapter two. Once all students have their text, pass out the Chapter Two Analysis Organizer. Inform students that they will be given the next thirty minutes to read as much of the chapter as they are able to. Remind them to fill out their organizer with information from the novel when relevant. If possible display a timer that allows students to see how much time they have left on this task. While students read and work on their organizers, circle the room to answer questions and concerns.

Phase Three: After the thirty minute reading period is over, students may put their texts away. Inform students that anything they did not finish should be finished outside of the classroom before the next reading day (if you have a different system, use your discretion). Ask students how they may have fared in a situation like the one George and Lennie have found themselves in. After some brief discussion inform students that they are about to view a short documentary about farm workers in the 1960s, people just like George and Lennie, who fought to unionize and improve working and living conditions. Tell students that while they watch they should fill out the compare and contrast section of their organizer. While the video plays, pause to clarify when necessary and allow students to ask questions/make connections.

*The documentary may run over allotted time, if needed teacher selected sections and clips can be shown rather than the entire thing.

Closing the lesson: After finishing the documentary, allow students space to ask questions, discuss, and make connections to the text. It may be necessary to play a facilitating role in this. As students get ready to pack up hand the Constructed Response #2 (Appendix A Fig. 4)

Lesson Three: American Factory Part 1

Objectives: Students will begin viewing the documentary *American Factory* in order to categorize successes, failures, and ongoing struggles of the modern day labor movement. While viewing the documentary students will make comparisons between what they are seeing in the documentary and what they have read in *Of Mice and Men*. The goal here is to have students judge how much (or how little) organized labor has changed over the past eighty years.

Materials and resources:

- Writing instruments for students
- Smartboard or projector connected to teacher computer
- *American Factory* directed by Steven Bognar and Julia Reichert.
- Constructed Response Question #3 (Appendix A Fig. 5)
- American Factory Compare and Contrast Analysis (Appendix A Fig. 6)

Standards:

- Standard - CC.1.2.9-10.G
Analyze various accounts of a subject told in different mediums (e.g., a person's life story in both print and multimedia), determining which details are emphasized in each account.
- Standard - CC.1.4.9-10.D
Organize ideas, concepts, and information to make important connections and distinctions; use appropriate and varied transitions to link the major sections of the text; include formatting when useful to aiding comprehension; provide a concluding statement or section.

Phase One: Begin the lesson with a Do Now that requires students to list a number of labor struggles that appeared in *Of Mice and Men*. After giving students time to complete their individual lists, ask for students to share their responses and record them on the board as a list. This will be helpful for the next phase of the lesson.

Phase Two: After discussing the Do Now, ask students to turn their thinking towards the modern world. Ask students whether or not any of the issues they raised are still relevant today. Before facilitating a discussion on this, pass out Constructed Response Question # 3, which asks students to engage in this discussion with a written response. Remind students that they should be citing examples from the real world or from the text in order to back up their claims. Use your discretion about whether or not students may talk through their work with peers. It can be a great way to help students extend their

discussion, but if you'd like for the response to be more formal, it can be done without group discussion.

Phase Three: With about thirty minutes remaining in class, pass out the American Factory Compare and Contrast Analysis. Inform students that they will be viewing a modern documentary about successes and failures of the labor movement (ideally you will have already informed them this as a way to build anticipation and engagement throughout the unit). Once students have what they need in order to complete the analysis, begin playing the documentary.

Phase Four: While viewing the documentary, students will answer questions and record responses in their compare and contrast organizer. Allow for students to ask clarifying questions and make tie ins to the text or real world experiences. It is a good idea to screen the documentary for yourself before class in order to identify some scenes or clips that can help facilitate a group discussion. This lesson will be broken up into two parts, so play the documentary until class ends in order to stay on pace.

Lesson Four: America Factory Part 2

Objectives: Students will finish viewing *American Factory* in order to further their analysis of the failures and successes of the labor movement. Students will work on a compare and contrast analysis while viewing the documentary. Afterwards, they will answer a constructed response question to plot out their findings. This lesson will serve as a culminating project for the unit.

Materials and resources:

- Writing instruments for students
- Smartboard or projector connected to teacher computer
- *American Factory* directed by Steven Bognar and Julia Reichert.
- Constructed Response Question #4 (Appendix A Fig. 7)
- American Factory Compare and Contrast Analysis (Appendix A Fig. 6)

Standards:

- Standard - CC.1.2.9-10.G
Analyze various accounts of a subject told in different mediums (e.g., a person's life story in both print and multimedia), determining which details are emphasized in each account.
- Standard - CC.1.4.9-10.D
Organize ideas, concepts, and information to make important connections and distinctions; use appropriate and varied transitions to link the major sections of the text; include formatting when useful to aiding comprehension; provide a concluding statement or section.

Phase One: Begin the lesson with a Do Now that activates prior learning, something like "List three things that stood out to you from our first viewing of *American Factory*" will suffice. List student answers on the board so that all prior knowledge is displayed. Once students are satisfied with their responses, move onto showing the documentary.

Phase Two: Announce that students will be finishing the rest of the documentary and have them take out their compare and contrast worksheets from the prior class. Clear any misconceptions students may have had in the do now and answer any questions before hitting play.

Phase Three: While viewing the documentary, students will answer questions and record responses in their compare and contrast organizer. Allow for students to ask clarifying questions and make tie ins to the text or real world experiences. As the documentary begins to reach the end, remind students that they should have a complete analysis by the end of the viewing.

Phase Four: As the film ends, pass out Constructed Response Question #4. For the remainder of class, students should use their compare and contrast analysis to inform their answer on the constructed response. Move around the room in order to help clear up and questions and monitor student progress. It is up to you whether students may complete their responses outside of class time, but it is recommended as it allows students to explore their ideas more deeply and construct a more deliberate response.

Lesson Five: Contemporary Labor Rights PSA

Objectives: Students will work in small groups in order to research, identify, and create a PSA about a contemporary labor issue. Students will use computers to perform research online while organizing their findings. If time allows, groups can present their final product to the rest of the class in order to further the discussion.

*The implementation of this lesson/project is highly flexible. It may take one lesson, or several. Students may work in groups or on their own. Students may create their public service announcement using video, podcasting, creating a PowerPoint, etc. Additionally, the presentation aspect of the project can be made a focal point or ignored outright. The project should be tailored to your students and resources at hand.

Materials and resources:

- Computers with internet access
- Public Service Announcement Assignment Sheet (Appendix A Fig. 8)
- PSA Research Organizer (Appendix A Fig. 9)

Standards:

- Standard - CC.1.2.9-10.G
Analyze various accounts of a subject told in different mediums (e.g., a person's life story in both print and multimedia), determining which details are emphasized in each account.
- Standard - CC.1.4.9-10.D
Organize ideas, concepts, and information to make important connections and distinctions; use appropriate and varied transitions to link the major sections of the text; include formatting when useful to aiding comprehension; provide a concluding statement or section.

Phase One: Begin the lesson by displaying a Do Now on the board to get students thinking about contemporary issues in labor. Something along the lines of "In the modern world, what ways are workers taken advantage of?" could suffice. Remind students that in the documentary, they saw how many companies are global enterprises, so they shouldn't limit their thinking to just their own experiences.

Phase Two: Once students have been given the appropriate amount of time to record their responses, ask students to share out what they wrote in order to facilitate a discussion. Record responses on the board to organize ideas, this will be useful for students who are struggling to choose a topic later. After the discussion has begun to conclude, pass out the Public Service Announcement Assignment Sheet and PSA Research Organizer.

Phase Three: Briefly review the assignment with students in order to go over and questions or concerns. Once students know what they are supposed to do, form groups of students to work together. How students are grouped is entirely up to the individual teacher, students may choose their own groups if the class culture permits, but assigning groups has obvious benefits for the quality of work.

Phase Four: Once students are grouped, distribute laptops or assign computers and allow groups to work through the assignment. Circulate the room in order to engage with students, direct focus, and enforce ideas. This stage of the lesson should primarily focus on student directed and student to student learning and will probably take the rest of a class period.

Optional Stage Five: After student groups have completed their assignment and created their PSA, allow each group to present and discuss their PSA with the class. Groups should be given a few minutes to talk about their project and how they went about creating it, show their PSA, and answer some questions. After a group has presented, move on to another. Repeat this process until all groups have had a chance to share.

Appendix A

Fig. 1

The Rise of Organized Labor in the United States (published by NEWSELA)

In the mid-19th century, the vast majority of American work was still done on the farm. By the turn of the 20th century, the United States economy revolved around the factory.

Most Americans living between the 1870s and 1900 – also known as the Gilded Age – worked 10-hour shifts, six days a week, for wages barely enough to survive. Men, women, and children as young as 8 worked tirelessly. Medical coverage did not exist, and pregnant women were often fired. People who got hurt on the job got nothing.

Workers unite to demand change

Soon workers realized that they must unite to demand change. They lacked money, education, or political power, but they knew that there were simply more workers than there were owners. Together, they formed unions to bargain with factory owners.

Bosses often took extreme measures to prevent a union from taking hold. Still, slowly but surely unions grew.

Organized labor has brought tremendous positive change to working Americans. Today, many workers enjoy higher wages, better hours, and safer working conditions.

It began with the Great Upheaval. Railroad workers in West Virginia decided they had had enough when their pay was cut for the second time in eight months. On July 16, 1877, they declared that no train would leave until the owners restored their pay.

It took federal troops to arrive before the trains could leave, and even then they were sabotaged and harassed. Only one train reached its destination.

Workers versus bosses

The battle was clearly drawn between workers and bosses, and each side had their own tools.

Workers often used the strike – they stopped working so that the company would lose money and eventually agree to a change. Most of the time, workers were demanding higher wages and better working conditions.

In small communities, workers could also convince the townspeople to boycott. Townspeople would stop buying things from a factory until the owners agreed to change. In desperate times, workers sometimes sabotaged equipment or used violence.

Management strikes back

Owners had tools of their own, like a lockout, or a reverse strike, in which the owner tells the employees not to show up until they agree to a pay cut. Sometimes they made workers sign a yellow-dog contract, or an oath to never join a union.

Bosses hired strikebreakers, or scabs, to take the place of the regular labor force during a strike. The striking workers often responded with violence.

Before the 20th century, the government never sided with the union – strikes were often declared illegal, and strikers were thrown into prison. The government sometimes even sent the army.

The National Labor Union

By 1866, there were about 200,000 workers in local unions across the United States. The first nationwide labor organization was named the National Labor Union. The NLU fought for higher wages and shorter hours. It also focused on political issues, like banning prison labor.

The NLU brought together skilled and unskilled workers, as well as farmers, though it did not admit African-Americans. Skilled workers have a special skill, training, or knowledge, like plumbers or cooks. Unfortunately for the NLU, it tried to represent too many different groups, and it withered away after 1873.

The Knights of Labor

The Knights of Labor was next. Begun as a secret society in 1869, the Knights admitted all workers, including women and African-Americans.

The Knights supported the entire political agenda of the NLU and more. In 1886, the Knights boasted 750,000 workers – but then disaster struck.

Tragedy in Haymarket Square

In May 1886, the Knights went on strike demanding an eight-hour day for all laborers. At a rally in Haymarket Square in Chicago, someone threw a bomb into the crowd. One police officer died and several people were injured.

Who was responsible? No one was really sure, but the American press, government, and general public blamed the Knights of Labor. Membership began to fall greatly.

American Federation of Labor

The next big labor organization was the American Federation of Labor. It was started by Samuel Gompers in 1886. The AFL was a loose grouping of smaller craft unions, such as the cigar makers' union and the hat makers' union. Every member of the AFL was a skilled worker.

Samuel Gompers was born in London in 1850. He came to New York City during the Civil War. He was an effective organizer and speaker.

Gompers wanted to keep it simple. He focused on "bread and butter" issues of higher wages and better working conditions. This helped him maintain the support of the

American government and public. By 1900, the ranks of the AFL swelled to over 500,000.

Unions were growing in size and importance. There were over 20,000 strikes in America in the last 20 years of the 19th century. In many cases, workers' demands were completely or partially met. The AFL served as the most important national labor organization until the Great Depression.

Eugene V. Debs and American socialism

Still, some Americans still held extreme views. American socialists were basically like communists, and based their beliefs on the writings of Karl Marx, the German philosopher. They suggested that the government should own all industries and divide the money more equally.

Eugene V. Debs founded the American socialist movement. He was born in Indiana in 1855 and formed the American Railway Union in 1892.

Two years later he led one of the largest strikes in American history — the great Pullman Strike. When its workers refused to accept a pay cut, the Pullman Car Company fired 5000 employees. To show support, Debs called for the members of the American Railway Union to stop operating any trains that used Pullman cars. The strike was shut down by the government.

Debs was not originally a socialist, but his experience with the Pullman Strike led him to believe that drastic action was necessary.

The following year, the Socialist Party was formed. At its height, the party numbered over 100,000 active members. Debs ran for U.S. president five times. In the election of 1912, he received over 900,000 votes.

The "Wobblies"

Even more extreme than the Socialists were the members of the Industrial Workers of the World, or IWW. Founded in 1905, the "Wobblies" encouraged their members to fight for justice directly against their employers. Although small in number, they led hundreds of strikes across America. The IWW won few battles, but their efforts sent a strong message across America that workers were being mistreated.

Fig. 3

Chapter 2 Analysis Organizer

Directions: While reading the novel, respond to the prompts below in order to complete the organizer. Remember to be as detailed as possible and cite the text when necessary. Use a separate sheet of loose leaf paper to complete your answers.

1. Use the space below to keep track of new characters from this chapter

Character	Description

2. What similarities (if any) do you notice in the relationships between characters in this chapter and the employee/employer relationship we've discussed up to this point? How would you characterize the way the day workers and higher ups at the ranch interact?
3. What differences (if any) do you notice in the relationships between characters in this chapter and the employee/employer relationship we've discussed up to this point?
4. Describe the conditions of the bunkhouse that the farm workers live in. Use at least three details from the text.
5. In your opinion, why does Curley act the way he is? Use details from the text to support your answer.

Fig. 6

American Factory: Compare and Contrast Analysis

Directions: While watching the documentary, respond to the prompts and questions below. Some prompts may require you to keep a running list of notes throughout the movie, so feel free to write in bullet points when needed. If necessary, write your answers on a separate sheet of paper.

1. Use the chart below to keep track of **improved** conditions for workers in the film and **similar** conditions between the film and the novel.

Improved conditions:	Similar conditions:

2. List three instances of workers being treated with more equity in the documentary.
3. List three instances of workers being treated poorly/unfairly in the documentary.

Fig. 8

Public Service Announcement Assignment Sheet

Purpose: To demonstrate an understanding of labor rights and their relevance to the modern world. Throughout this unit we have read texts focusing on American history through the eyes of laborers and the labor rights movement. Additionally, we have watched a documentary which details how labor has become a global issue as well as showing us that equity in labor has not yet been achieved. This assignment will have you choose a contemporary labor issue, research it, and create a public service announcement (like the ones we've looked at in class!) to raise awareness of that labor issue.

Process: This assignment will take place in several stages. Below is a brief description of the process.

Grouping- This project will be done in a small group. Groups will be assigned. While the overall grade will be assigned to the group for the final product, individual effort will also be evaluated. Once you receive your group, work together to think of a possible topic.

Researching- After grouping up and selecting a topic, you will receive laptops. Use these laptops to research your topic and look up information. If you are struggling to find a topic, use the laptop to help you! Remember to focus your research on reputable websites and sources. If you are having trouble appraising a source, use your peers or myself for help.

Organizing- While researching, your group will receive a Public Service Announcement Research Organizer. Fill out this organizer with the relevant information to ensure that you will cover the necessary criteria when creating your PSA. Feel free to add any additional details or information you find along the way!

Creating- Once you have a good idea about your topic and feel confident you can move forward, you can begin creating your PSA. This is a highly open ended portion of the project, and it is up to you what medium to use. You could use the camera on your phone to direct a video, you could create a slideshow, make a poster, or anything that allows you to get out your message. If you are unsure about what method to use, ask me and I'll be happy to brainstorm with you!

Presenting- After creating your PSA, you will have a chance to present it to the class in order to get your message out. This will not be a formal presentation, you are merely expected to briefly talk about your topic, present your PSA, and answer any questions from the class.

Requirements: While much of this presentation is up to you, there are several ground rules that your presentation is expected to adhere to:

- Completed Public Service Announcement Research Organizer (note: you only need to turn in one per group)
- Complete Public Service Announcement created by your group. Remember, your public service announcement can take many forms but it must address the following details:
 - What labor issue is your PSA addressing? Make sure you are clear on this.
 - Who is affected by this issue? Remember to be as specific as possible and think beyond the immediate impacts.
 - Where is this labor rights issue taking place? Again, be specific here but also think globally.
 - What, if any, advocacy groups exist for your labor issue? Give a brief breakdown of them. If there are none, look into why that may be.
 - Propose possible solutions to the issue. They don't necessarily need to be immediately actionable so feel free to get creative.

Fig. 9

Public Service Announcement Research Organizer

Directions: While researching your topic online, fill out this organizer to keep track of your information. Once you begin creating your PSA, use the information collected on this document to guide your project. It is acceptable to use bullet points when organizing your information.

What is your topic? What labor rights issue will your PSA be drawing attention to?

Who is affected (or could be affected) by the labor rights issue you're researching? Remember that problems do not always affect everyone equally and that unfair treatment can create problems for more than just workers.

Where does this labor rights issue most commonly occur? Think beyond just country here, is it an issue that primarily affects cities or rural communities etc.

List any advocacy groups that exist for your labor rights issue. What are the organizations and what do they do? This information is crucial for a PSA because those affected need to know how to get help. If there are no advocacy groups, why do you think that is?

What are some possible solutions to your labor rights issue? What are possible changes we could make to ensure a more equitable labor environment?

List 3 things everyone should know about your labor rights issue:

Annotated Bibliography

The following resources were used in order to create the unit or teach the unit to a classroom:

Hall, Jacquelyn Dowd. "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past." *Journal of American History* 91, no. 4 (March 1, 2005): 1233.

- The touchstone text of the unit, Hall's essay argues that the Civil Rights Movement was an extension and expansion of the American labor movement that preceded it. This essay questions whether or not we can truly call either of these movements "over" and describes the dangers of looking at these movements as though they are complete. This is a great essay to read to understand the ideas students should walk away from the unit with.

Steinbeck, John. *Of Mice and Men*. London: Penguin Books, 2017.

- Steinbeck's novel is a classic text in the secondary education setting and a fantastic retelling of workers struggles in early 20th century America. Students will read this novel for the unit and frequently draw comparisons between the text and the contemporary world.

American Factory. Higher Ground Productions, 2019.

- This documentary focuses on a factory in contemporary Ohio and details the tensions felt there after it is bought by a Chinese glass company. The documentary works great as a companion with *Of Mice and Men* as you can see the areas where the labor movement secured victories as well as areas where little progress has been made. Students will view this documentary after reading the novel.

Rosenzweig, Roy, Christopher Clark, and Nancy Hewitt. *Who Built America?: Working People and the Nation's History*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2008.

- Excellent textbook that details American History through the lens of laborers. The textbook can be used as a supplemental; text in the classroom, and otherwise provides good background for educators.

The Prelinger Archive (<https://archive.org/details/prelinger>)

- Video archive with extensive amounts of newsreel, public service announcement, and advert films. Clips range in era as well as field of labor allowing educators to select what suits them best from a wide variety. Clips from this archive are used during lessons to

supplement text.

Marsden, John L. "California Dreamin' The Significance of 'A Coupla Acres' in Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*." *Western American Literature* 29, no. 4 (1995): 291–97.

- In this article, Marsden breaks down the themes found in *Of Mice and Men* and discusses its significance as a labor novel. This article helped inform several constructed response questions used in the unit and should be read by any educator seeking to teach this unit.

Benson, Jackson J., and Anne Loftis. "John Steinbeck and Farm Labor Unionization: The Background of 'In Dubious Battle.'" *American Literature* 52, no. 2 (1980): 194.

- Article discussing Steinbeck's connection to the labor movement. Benson and Loftis provide a history of Steinbeck's work with laborers in California and give context to many of his novels. Overall the article makes a convincing argument that Steinbeck can be seen as a voice of the American labor movement.

Cornfield, Daniel B. "The US Labor Movement: Its Development and Impact on Social Inequality and Politics." *Annual Review of Sociology* 17 (1991): 27-49. Accessed April 14, 2020.

- In this article, Cornfield discusses the decline in union membership in post-World War II America. His argument touches on how deunionization has led to social and political inequality in contemporary America. This article helped inform the goals of this unit.

Green, William. "The Goals of Organized Labor." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 184 (1936): 147-53.

- Green lays out the groundwork of what the American labor movement sought to achieve and why it was formed. While this is a massive topic that could have multiple books written on it, Green provides a digestible and streamlined version.

Metzgar, Jack. "Blue-Collar Blues: The Deunionization of Manufacturing." *New Labor Forum*, no. 10 (2002): 20-23.

- Metzgar's article details deunionization specifically in contemporary manufacturing. He argues that the "death" of manufacturing in America has been largely overstated, yet the death of unions has been completely unnoticed. He makes a strong case that the death of what we knew as manufacturing is really just the lack of labor protection that existed in the mid 20th century. A must read text for teaching *American Factory*.