



Name of Lesson

I&M Canal History, A Worker's Journey

Purpose of Lesson/Overview

The purpose of this lesson is to help students understand the struggles and working conditions of laborers in the 19th century through the context of work along the I&M Canal. It should help students think critically about the factors that shaped this labor experience. This lesson should also help them spark a connection between immigrant journeys throughout different periods in United States history by comparing the experiences with each other.

The lesson will be divided into four different sections over the duration of three 50 to 60 minute class periods. The lesson will begin with an introduction to the topic of the I&M via a PowerPoint Presentation. The students will then read primary and secondary sources related to the workers on the canal and answer a set of guiding questions. The next section of the lesson involves students researching the roles of general historical positions such as Irish Canal Digger or Canal Contractor. The lesson will culminate in a town hall meeting where the students assume their roles and attempt to find a resolution to a canal digger strike that is halting work building the I&M Canal.

Objectives

After this lesson is completed students should be able to answer basic questions about the significance that the I&M Canal had to the development of northeastern Illinois. They should also be able to understand the conditions that laborers endured in order to build the canal and the historical reasoning for these conditions. As a result of this lesson, students should also develop their ability to analyze primary sources in order to assess their content and formulate an argument.

Duration

Three 50-60 minute class periods

State Standards

SS.H.8.9-12: Analyze key historical events and contributions of individuals through a variety of perspectives, including those of historically underrepresented groups.

SS.H.7.9-12: Identify the role of individuals, groups, and institutions in people's struggle for safety, freedom, equality and justice

SS.IS.4.9-12: Gather and evaluate information from multiple sources while considering the origin, credibility, point of view, authority, structure, context, and corroborative value of the sources.

Materials

PowerPoint: A PowerPoint is included and can be used as an introduction to understanding the canal. In order for students to engage with workers' stories they will at least need some background context to what they are learning.

Document packet with guiding questions attached.

Internet access.

Procedure

Period 1 Initial information/primary sources

1. The teacher will provide an overview of the history of the I&M Canal by presenting the "I&M Canal Introductory PowerPoint." (20-25 minutes)
2. Students will be asked to read the document packets given to them. As they are reading the documents they will also be asked to complete the guiding questions that go along with each document. (20-25 minutes)
3. There will then be a teacher-led class discussion about what the students found in their reading assignment. This allows the teacher to ensure students truly understand the meaning and significance of each document. (5-10 minutes)
4. Finally, the teacher will explain to students the next part of the lesson, informing them that there will be a mock town hall hearing about an ongoing strike of the canal workers and that they will be assuming the role of different positions of relevance. Roles include canal digger (Irish Catholic, Irish Protestant, Non Irish), canal contractor, canal commissioner, Investor (American, European), Illinois citizens, and note takers/meeting officials. As an exit slip they will submit their top three choices of roles. A description of roles will be given in the "Strike" handout. (5 minutes)

Period 2 Research/develop character

1. At the beginning of class, the teacher will inform students of their role assignments, further explain their task and students will begin to develop their statements for the town hall meeting. The students should consult the description of their roles on the "Strike" handout as their first resource to understand the character that they will be portraying. They will also be given a bibliography directing them towards additional resources that will aid them in creating their personal profile. (10 minutes)
2. Once students have an understanding of their role they should gather into groups of students with similar roles in an effort to collaborate on research and coordinate arguments. Students will be given the remainder of the class period to conduct research

and formulate arguments. Many of the resources they will be given to conduct further research will be available online so students should be provided with internet access during this part of the lesson. (40-50 minutes)

Period 3 Town hall meeting/reflection

1. Desks and chairs should be moved in order to accommodate for the town hall style forum. Students will be given a chance to regroup with their like-minded characters in order to touch base about their points of emphasis for the meeting. (10 minutes)
2. Students should be encouraged to get into character (dress up, have a little personality, speak with the appropriate attitude). One representative from each major group will make an opening statement (depending on time or size of each group a member of each subgroup could make a statement as well). This should be a prepared initial statement. After this, the floor will be opened up to the town hall discussion about the strike. In this time, a number of arguments will arise from each side over the circumstances over the origins of the strike. If their arguments are well thought out, each side will be able to utilize evidence learned in class to support their claims. Although it would be an unlikely end to a town hall meeting of this sort, if the discussion is particularly fruitful a compromise could be made at the conclusion of the meeting between the important parties involved resulting in a resolution to the strike. (30-40 minutes)
3. After the town hall meeting students will regroup out of character in order to review the research process and the execution of the town hall meeting. This also allows the teacher to critique the event and foster a deeper discussion about the important points brought up during the meeting or address key elements of the situation which were not brought up during the meeting. This class discussion serves two purposes. First, it allows all those involved to critique the activity so that an activity can be better molded to fit a specific classroom in the future. Second, by guiding the discussion, the teacher can ensure that students were able to understand the main concepts of the lesson. (10-15 minutes)

Strike!

The year is 1847. It has been 11 years since work on the I&M Canal began and a majority of the 96-mile waterway has been dug out. Still, there is trouble brewing as many of the Irish canal diggers are unhappy with their wages and working conditions. The workers have banded together to strike for better wages and reduced hours. This strike must be taken seriously by the canal contractors and commissioners because the canal is set to open in less than a year and investors are looking for a return on their investment. If the disagreement is not sorted out between the canal diggers and their employers soon, the canal will not open on time. In order to speed discussion along a town hall meeting has been called so that everyone involved in the canal project can voice their concerns. The people who will be invited to the meeting are as follows...

Irish Canal Diggers (Corkonians): These are Catholic Irish immigrants who came from County Cork in southern Ireland. Most are experienced canal diggers and have previously worked on canal digging projects in the eastern United States such as the Erie Canal. Canal diggers were primarily middle aged men but their families often lived with them along the canal. They had a bitter rivalry with the Irish Protestant canal diggers known as the Fardowners. The conflict with the Fardowners and the poor living conditions the workers were provided while they dug canals contributed to their reputation as being dirty, drunken, and disorderly. Despite their reputation they were considered to be the most talented canal diggers in the United States.

Irish Canal Diggers (Fardowners): The Fardowners are Irish Protestant Immigrants from Northern Ireland. There were much fewer Fardowners in the United States than Corkonians but like their counterparts, they made their way to the I&M Canal by working on other canal digging projects in the east. They have a similar reputation as the Corkrians in that they are rowdy but good canal diggers.

Canal Commissioners: These are the people that are in charge of the canal project for the state. They control the canal fund and are responsible for the completion of the canal. They award certain sections of the canal to contractors. The commissioners are held responsible by the government of the state of Illinois and its citizens.

Canal Contractors: Canal contractors are given the rights to control portions of the 96-mile-long digging project. They are paid through the canal fund in order to hire workers to build the canal. They are the people that are directly in charge of the labor force.

Foreign Investors: When the canal project fund ran out of money in the early 1840's the commissioners looked for investors to help fund the project. Many new investors came from foreign countries such as England and France. Some have never visited Illinois and are primarily concerned with getting a return on their investment when the canal opens.

Illinois Farmers/Townspeople: These are the residents of Illinois before the canal project began. Before the project started the population of Chicago was less than 5,000 so it is clear that many of the people who lived in northeast Illinois were farmers. It is reasonable to assume that these residents were optimistic about the wealth that the canal could bring but may not have liked having the Irish immigrants in town.

Minute Takers: The town hall meeting will require someone to take notes. For those of you who do not feel comfortable speaking during the town hall meeting this might be a fitting position. This does not excuse you from contributing to the meeting however. Note takers will be expected to draft an essay after the meeting detailing the arguments made during the meeting and then how they believed the strike should be resolved.

After you have been assigned a position your task is to research how your character would act during the meeting and how they would like to see the strike resolved. You are free to do your own research but websites and documents will also be provided for you. We will spend tomorrow's class researching and then the town hall meeting will be held the following day. You are also encouraged to meet with people with the same and similar positions in order to plan an argument for the meeting. The meeting will start with an introductory statement made by a representative of each position and then the floor will be opened up for discussion. I will be the discussion moderator. Don't be afraid to truly get into character.