Alternative Viewpoints in a Labor Strike

Economics

Focus/Summary

The purpose of this lesson is to foster in students a greater understanding of the importance of bias and viewpoint. Specifically, students will be able to appreciate the diverse viewpoints that are taken when looking at a specific event – in this case a labor strike. The study of labor movements, labor struggles, and the complicated situation regarding a labor strike must be seen by students from a variety of viewpoints.

Objective of the Lesson

Students will demonstrate an understanding of bias and viewpoint when studying a labor strike.

Prior Knowledge

Students should enter this lesson with an understanding of:

- bias and viewpoints
- the labor force, unions, and the demands of labor and management
- collective bargaining and negotiating a contract
- prior study of particular labor strikes in history

Procedure

Opening/Hook

Students will listen to and discuss the lyrics to the famous labor song *Solidarity Forever*

Development of Lesson

1. Students will be given time to read and understand Hard Pressed in the Heartland Chapter 4 “The Hormel Strike and the Future of the Labor Movement” (p. 61-71). This excerpt will provide a broad overview of a specific strike at a meatpacking plant. There are several oral histories describing the strike which will be analyzed as primary documents. The bulk of the chapter will be used as a secondary source.
2. The class will then identify the various players that were seen in the strike story.
3. The class will discuss how the strike affected the various identified players.
4. The discussion will then broaden to a new and imaginary strike that the class will develop for this lesson.
5. The students will then be given the following roles to assume:
   a. Union worker who strikes
   b. Non union worker who doesn’t want to strike
   c. Spouse of striker
   d. Child of striking worker
   e. Outside scab who is hired to break the strike
   f. Plant manager
   g. Stockholder of plant
   h. Customer of product that the plant produces
   i. Police officer or National Guard officer assigned monitor the strike
   j. Owner of local business away from the striking business
   k. Union president
   l. Union member of neighboring plant

6. The following discussion questions are written on the board or provided in a handout
   a. Describe three specific ways that the strike would affect you.
   b. Would you be in favor or against the strike? Why or why not?
   c. How would you benefit or be hurt by the strike?
   d. If the strike were to last for 30-60 days, how would you be further affected?
   e. How is your perspective unique to your role in this simulation?
   f. How is your perspective similar to others involved in this simulation?

**Concluding the Lesson**

The class will discuss how their role in the strike affected their responses to the discussion questions. The emphasis will be placed on bias and unique viewpoint.

**Lesson Assessment**

Students will write a one page reflection paper responding to the following question:

Q. Explain the unique role that you played in the strike. Describe and support THREE ways that the strike would affect you. Finally, state and support whether you would support or be against the strike.