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*Note:* This lesson would be within a larger unit on Labor Unions in America. Students will be previously made familiar of key terminology and concepts within the union movement. Students will have extensive experience with primary sources, particularly the framework for analyzing primary sources.

**NCSS Thematic Standards:** Individuals, Groups, and Institutions and Civic Ideals and Practices

**Learning Target(s):**
- I can describe **three** major reasons why people joined unions in the early 20th century.
- I can identify **one** obstacle faced by people who joined unions.

**Do Now:** As students enter the classroom, each will be given a handout about current union strife in Bronx, New York. Students will have five minutes to read the article and respond to the following prompt in their social studies notebook:

- What facts and which values separate the union and management positions?
- Does this article give a fair portrayal of the arguments of both sides— the union and management? Why or why not?

Students will pair up and report their responses back to the rest of the class.

**Class Activity:** Teacher will have four stations set up with four different types of documents. Students, working in groups, will circulate around classroom (7 minutes at each station), and respond to the different questions for each of their documents at the station. Documents will include:

- Excerpts from *The Jungle.*
- Excerpts from Congressional Investigation of Meatpacking Industry in Chicago and New York
- Songs “Talking Union” by Pete Seeger and “Stand by the Union” by Lyell Sayer
- Images from Meatpacking Industry in early 20th Century

**Brief Class Discussion (potential questions):**
- What were the conditions in the meatpacking industry like?
- Could you work in the meatpacking industry in Chicago at this time?
- Why do you think people worked in these jobs despite the deplorable conditions?
- According to the two songs, what are the benefits of joining the union?

**Assessment for Learning:**

**Final Assignment:** Imagine you were working in the meatpacking industry in Chicago in the early 20th century. Based on what you have seen, read and discussed today, would you join the meatpackers union? What obstacles might you face in joining the union? Why do you think someone might want to join the union? You must explain at least three reasons for joining a union. Your response should be **two to three paragraphs.**
Co-op City building workers back to work — for now

BRONX, N.Y. - More than 500 maintenance workers at Co-op City, the world's largest co-op apartment complex, have agreed with management to seek the aid of federal mediators in a dispute over wages and health care coverage that culminated in an eight-day work stoppage June 1-8.

The workers are members of Service Employees Local 32BJ. They maintain Co-op City's15,372 residential units, in 35 high-rise buildings and 236 townhouses.

"The importance of keeping these workers on the job became abundantly clear during the lockout," Kyle Bragg, vice president of 32BJ SEIU, said in a statement. "No one likes to see Co-Op City with mountains of garbage piling up, and the thousands of people who live there should not be subjected to such a mess and public safety threat."

Management called it a strike. The workers and their union called it a lockout, citing management refusal to accept a union offer to continue negotiations for a week as the contract was running out.

In a petition filed with the National Labor Relations Board, workers charge they received phone calls the night before the contract expiration, telling them not to come in to work the next day, and workers who did report for work were not permitted to go to their jobs, but were sent home instead.

At the point when negotiations broke down, agreement had been reached on almost all points, including modest wage hikes over the next few years. One sticking point remained - management demanded a change of health care plans that it says will save $1.3 million annually, and that workers say would reduce their coverage, and put a $200,000 cap on payouts.

Workers are now back at work pending outcome of the talks.

"Many of us don't just work at Co-Op City, but live there too, so we're the last ones that want to see a work stoppage," said Filomena Velasquez, a Co-op City resident who has worked on staff for 18 years. "But with our wages, we cannot afford to pay for health care out of pocket. We really need our current health plan, and we need a cost of living increase just to stay afloat."

The complex, in addition to its residential units, also has eight parking garages, three shopping centers, a high school, two middle schools and three grade schools, its own power plant, a four-story air conditioning generator and a firehouse. If it were a separate municipality, instead of part of Bronx county, it would be the 10th largest city in New York State.

Respond to the questions below in your notebook:

- According to the article, what are the major differences between the union and the management?
- Does this article give a fair portrayal of the arguments of both sides- the union and management? Why or why not?
Station One: The Jungle

In 1905, in midst of union strike, Upton Sinclair wrote the best-selling novel, The Jungle. The Jungle exposes the harsh realities of the meatpacking industry in Chicago, Illinois. The book is best remembered for revealing the unsanitary and unsafe conditions in which meat was produced. Sinclair’s portrayal of the meatpacking industry was crucial in the passing of the Pure Food and Drug and Meat Inspection Act of 1906 which sought to better regulate food production. As you read the document, consider the questions below:

1. What was ‘The Jungle?’ Who wrote it? Why was it significant?

2. Describe the conditions of the meatpacking facility in Chicago. Use direct examples from the text!

3. Based on what we have read today, why do you think the workers agreed to work in these conditions?

4. How would you feel if you had a job as a meatpacker during this time period?
The Jungle Excerpt, Chapter 9

“There were the men in the pickle-rooms, for instance, where old Antanas had gotten his death; scarce a one of these that had not some spot of horror on his person. Let a man so much as scrape his finger pushing a truck in the pickle-rooms, and he might have a sore that would put him out of the world; all the joints in his fingers might be eaten by the acid, one by one. Of the butchers and floorsmen, the beef-boners and trimmers, and all those who used knives, you could scarcely find a person who had the use of his thumb; time and time again the base of it had been slashed, till it was a mere lump of flesh against which the man pressed the knife to hold it. The hands of these men would be criss-crossed with cuts, until you could no longer pretend to count them or to trace them. They would have no nails,—they had worn them off pulling hides; their knuckles were swollen so that their fingers spread out like a fan. There were men who worked in the cooking-rooms, in the midst of steam and sickening odors, by artificial light; in these rooms the germs of tuberculosis might live for two years, but the supply was renewed every hour. There were the beef-luggers, who carried two-hundred-pound quarters into the refrigerator-cars; a fearful kind of work, that began at four o’clock in the morning, and that wore out the most powerful men in a few years. There were those who worked in the chilling-rooms, and whose special disease was rheumatism (painful arthritis); the time-limit that a man could work in the chilling-rooms was said to be five years. There were the woolpluckers, whose hands went to pieces even sooner than the hands of the pickle-men; for the pelts of the sheep had to be painted with acid to loosen the wool, and then the pluckers had to pull out this wool with their bare hands, till the acid had eaten their fingers off. There were those who made the tins for the canned-meat; and their hands, too, were a maze of cuts, and each cut represented a chance for blood-poisoning. Some worked at the stamping-machines, and it was very seldom that one could work long there at the pace that was set, and not give out and forget himself, and have a part of his hand chopped off. There were the “hoisters,” as they were called, whose task it was to press the lever which lifted the dead cattle off the floor. They ran along upon a rafter, peering down through the damp and the steam; and as old Durham’s architects had not built the killing-room for the convenience of the hoisters, at every few feet they would have to stoop under a beam, say four feet above the one they ran on; which got them into the habit of stooping, so that in a few years they would be walking like chimpanzees. Worst of any, however, were the fertilizer-men, and those who served in the cooking-rooms. These people could not be shown to the visitor,—for the odor of a fertilizer-man would scare any ordinary visitor at a hundred yards, and as for the other men, who worked in tank-rooms full of steam, and in some of which there were open vats near the level of the floor, their peculiar trouble was that they fell into the vats; and when they were fished out, there was never enough of them left to be worth exhibiting,—sometimes they would be overlooked for days, till all but the bones of them had gone out to the world as Durham’s Pure Leaf Lard!”
Station Two: Music

At this station, you will listen to two songs. The lyrics are on the pages below:

1. According to the songs, what are the benefits of joining the union? Cite specific examples from the text?

2. According to both songs, what are the challenges of forming a union?

3. In the early 20th century, songs were an important way for union organizers to spread their message. Based on the two songs, do you think this would be an effective technique?
Pete Seeger-Talking Union (1941)

Now, if you want higher wages let me tell you what to do
You got to talk to the workers in the shop with you
You got to build you a union, got to make it strong
But if you all stick together, boys, it won't be long
You get shorter hours, better working conditions
Vacations with pay. Take your kids to the seashore

It ain't quite this simple, so I better explain
Just why you got to ride on the union train
'Cause if you wait for the boss to raise your pay
We'll all be a-waitin' 'til Judgment Day
We'll all be buried, gone to heaven
St. Peter'll be the straw boss then

Now you know you're underpaid but the boss says you ain't
He speeds up the work 'til you're 'bout to faint
You may be down and out, but you ain't beaten
You can pass out a leaflet and call a meetin'
Talk it over, speak your mind
Decide to do somethin' about it

Course, the boss may persuade some poor damn fool
To go to your meetin' and act like a stool
But you can always tell a stool, though, that's a fact
He's got a yaller streak a-runnin' down his back
He doesn't have to stool, he'll always get along
On what he takes out of blind men's cups

You got a union now, and you're sittin' pretty
Put some of the boys on the steering committee
The boss won't listen when one guy squawks
But he's got to listen when the union talks
He'd better, be mighty lonely
Everybody decide to walk out on him
Suppose they're working you so hard it's just outrageous
And they're paying you all starvation wages
You go to the boss and the boss would yell
"Before I raise your pay I'd see you all in hell."
Well, he's puffing a big cigar, feeling mighty slick
'Cause he thinks he's got your union licked
Well, he looks out the window and what does he see
But a thousand pickets, and they all agree
He's a bastard, unfair, slavedriver
Bet he beats his wife

Now, boys, you've come to the hardest time
The boss will try to bust your picket line
He'll call out the police, the National Guard
They'll tell you it's a crime to have a union card
They'll raid your meetin', they'll hit you on the head
They'll call every one of you a goddam red
Unpatriotic, Japanese spies, sabotaging national defense

But out at Ford, here's what they found
And out at Vultee, here's what they found
And out at Allis-Chalmers, here's what they found
And down at Bethlehem, here's what they found
That if you don't let red-baiting break you up
And if you don't let stoolpigeons break you up
And if you don't let vigilantes break you up
And if you don't let race hatred break you up
You'll win. What I mean, take it easy, but take it
Stand by the Union- Lyell Sayer (1984)

How often have you heard it said, 'I can't afford the fees! No, I don't need the union and they don't need me. But when the chips are down, they're the first to complain. When you don't join the union, you play the bosses' game!

For when you stand by the union, the union stands by you, When we all band together we can stand straight and true, If he tries to stand alone, then a worker's sure to fail, But if he stands by the union, the union shall prevail!

Our fathers learned this lesson well, so many years ago, That workers must be ready to trade blow for blow, For when it comes to the crunch, in the factory or mine, All gains must be won by the strike and picket line.

We'll fight for shorter hours, for a Health and Safety Bill, An end to conditions that injure and kill, A future for our kids and fair taxes as well, And them that don't like it, well they can go to hell!
Station 3- Pictures/Drawings of Early Meat Houses

1. Pick one of the pictures from below and describe what you see. Would you like to work in the environment in your picture? Why?

2. Why do you the artist decided to take a picture/sketch that specific scene? What does the picture reveal to the viewer?

3. Though pictures can reveal many important details, they are very limited. What things about meatpacking can you not learn through this picture?
Dressing Beef at the Swift & Co Packing Plant, Chicago, 1923
The William Davies Company facilities in Toronto. This facility was then the second largest pork-packing plant in North America.

Sketch of meatpacking facility in Ohio.
Station 4: Congressional Investigation of Meatpacking Industry

1. Did the Congressional investigators taking a positive or negative stance towards the Meatpacking Industry? How can you tell? Using evidence from the text!

2. How could a union help to address some of the problems in the meatpacking industry?

3. Imagine you were living during this time and read the Congressional report about the horrors of meatpacking. How do you think would impact meat consumption, if at all? Why?
One of the most important functions of Congress is oversight—the ability to examine an industry for the betterment of the American people. For example, the United States Congress closely examines food to ensure they are safe for consumption. Below are excerpts from a 1906 congressional investigation of the meatpacking industry.

Section IV of Report—Conditions

“In another establishment piles of sausages and dry moldy canned meats, admittedly several years old, were found, which the superintendent stated to us would be tanked and converted into grease…It might all be treated with chemicals mixed with other meats, turned out in any form of product desired, and yet the packages or receptacles in which it was to be shipped out to the public.”

“Another instance of abuse in the use of the labels came to our notice. In two different establishments great stocks of old canned goods were being put through a washing process to remove old labels. They were then subjected to sufficient heat to “liven” up the contents—to use the phrase of the room superintendent. After this, fresh labels, with the Government name on them, were to be placed upon the cans, and they were to be sent out bearing all the evidence of being a freshly put up product.”

Section V of Report—Treatment of Employees

“Much of the work in connection with the handling of meat has to be carried on in rooms of low temperature but even here a callous disregard was everywhere seen for the comfort of those who worked in these rooms. Girls and women were found in rooms registering a temperature of 38 degrees Fahrenheit, without any ventilation whatever, depending entirely upon artificial light. The floors were wet and soggy, and in some cases covered with water, so that the girls had to stand in boxes of sawdust as a protection for their feet…In many cases girls of 16, 17, and 18 years stand ten hours a day at work, much of which could be carried on while sitting down.”

“The neglect on the part of their employers to recognize or provide for the requirements of cleanliness and decency of the employees must have an influence that cannot be exaggerated in lowering the morals and discouraging cleanliness on the part of the workers employed in the packing houses. The whole situation as we saw it in these huge establishments tends necessarily and inevitably to the moral degradation of thousands of workers.”

“Restrooms, where tired women workers might go for a short rest, were found as rare exceptions…In some instances what was called a restroom was simply one end of the privy partitioned from the remaining enclosure. A few girls were found using this, not only as a restroom, but as the only available place in which to sit to eat their luncheon.”
Final Assignment: Imagine you were working in the meatpacking industry in Chicago in the early 20th century. Based on what you have seen, read and discussed today, would you join the meatpackers union? What obstacles might you face in joining the union? Why do you think someone might want to join the union? You must explain at least three reasons for joining a union. Your response should be two to three paragraphs.

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