

## TEACHING AMERICAN HISTORY PROJECT

### ***Lesson Title – The Impact of the IWW on the Nation Or Who were the Wobblies?***

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Grade - Secondary level

Length of class period – 100 minutes (or two 45-50 class periods)

Essential questions:

1. What is the impact of populist (grassroots) labor groups on the U.S. government in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century?
2. How effective are grassroots groups in changing government and the majority of Americans views on the rights of workers?
3. How do political cartoons (of that era) and related folk music affect the causes of protest groups?

Objectives:

2. The students will know the major labor issues at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
3. The students will explain the reasons for the creation of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) and interpret how effective the organization was for American workers at that time.
4. The students will interpret period political cartoons that demonstrated the conflict between the IWW and the U.S. government.
5. Students will analyze the impact of protest songs for the labor unions at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
6. Students will evaluate the importance of key American socialist and union organizers on federal and state government decisions regarding unions and business responsibilities.

Materials:

1. History of the IWW (with period political cartoons on the IWW):  
[www.reuther.wayne.edu/exhibits/iww.html](http://www.reuther.wayne.edu/exhibits/iww.html)
2. Information on the IWW (& Joe Hill):  
<http://www.kued.org/joehill/early/wobblies.html>
3. Background on the IWW & influence of music on the movement:  
<http://www.fortunecity.com/tinpan/parton/2/iww.html>
4. List of Joe Hill's songs & tributes:  
<http://www.fortunecity.com/tinpan/parton/2/hill.html> and  
<http://www.bloomington.in.us/~mitch/iww/lrs.html>

### Activities:

1. Ask the students the following introductory question: *'How much influence have protest groups had against our federal government's policies?'* [2<sup>nd</sup> essential ?]and have them write a response in their notebooks. Then discuss the relevance of today's protestors with the labor rights protestors at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
2. Then have students read the background readings dealing with the history of the IWW (see the material list). They should become familiar with the terminology of the *Wobblies* and their list of demands by completing the IWW summary sheet.
3. Next, students will listen & read the lyrics to period songs of the *Wobblies* and complete a song analysis sheet for each song (see the material list). Optional songs – *Solidarity Forever*, *The 1913 Massacre*, & *The Banks are Made of Marble*.
4. Then have students (*students work in pairs*) interpret the meaning of at least two of the IWW political cartoons by answering the political cartoon questionnaire.
5. Optional- students may find a recent political cartoon and compare & contrast it to the IWW cartoon.
6. Finally students will answer the first essential question by utilizing their summary sheet and labor conditions at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (additional research may be needed or the instructor may present the students with the information).

### Extension activities:

1. Have students' research leading IWW and labor organizers during the Progressive Era and create a 'historical resume' for that person.
2. Students could investigate the trial of Joseph Hillstrom (Joe Hill) for murder & robbery and decide if he was guilty or not based on the evidence-at-hand. (They will need to write an argument for explaining his guilt or innocence).

### Evaluations:

1. Students will write answer the essential question utilizing their summary sheet of the IWW and responses from their song analysis sheet(s) & political cartoon questionnaire.
2. Students will share their responses with their peers and reach a consensus on the second essential question. (They may add this reflection in their notebooks).
3. Additional evaluations in include the 'historic resume' and/or the written arguments on the Joe Hill trial. (Please see the extension activities).

Connecticut Framework Performance Standards:

1. Students will develop historical thinking skills by recognizing change of workers rights over time. This will be accomplished by researching and interpreting historical sources of the IWW with contrasting interpretations offered by the U.S. government. [CT Social Studies St.1].
2. Students will relate the importance of the historical knowledge of the labor movement and the Progressive Era in their lives and in the U.S. & International community at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. [CT Social Studies St.3 and 4].

The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW)

Name:

[Summary sheet = 16 points]

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Please answer the following questions by reading the accompanying IWW articles.

1. When & why was the IWW started?
2. What was the IWW asking from employers during the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century?  
[Give at least 3 demands].
3. Who was allowed to join the IWW? (& Who were the traditional members in the American Federation of Labor union?)
4. What did the IWW give to the labor movement (that still affects unions today?)
5. What were the weaknesses of the IWW management that eventually led to its downfall?
6. Why did the U.S. government during World War I attack the IWW?
7. What happened to the IWW? (Explain its history after the 1<sup>st</sup> World War.)

8. CT? =*Is there a need for a stronger IWW for today's workers?* [Please explain with supporting facts.]

Social studies

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Name:

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**SONG ANALYSIS WORKSHEET:**

Students need to listen to the song (read the lyrics) & complete the following requests.

1. What is the name of the song & who is the composer?

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2. When was the song written?

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3. What time in history was this song used as an example?

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4. In a paragraph, describe the song.

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5. In another paragraph, explain what this song said about life during the time it was first performed?

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6. Originally, who performed this song?

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7. How does the song reflect on what is happening in the U.S. &/or the world today?

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*Extra credit- if you know a song related to the theme of the above song, tell the name & explain how the 2 songs are related.*

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