



Miners vs Dunsmuirs

Film Summary: A name that is infamous in British Columbia, particularly related to the coal mines on Vancouver Island, this film presents a snapshot of working in Dunsmuir-run coal mines in the 19th century.

Curriculum Application

Social Studies 9

The Essential Question:

What historical factors led to labour unrest in BC's Coal industry in the Laurier period and how did this affect the rise of worker rights in Canada?

Summary of the Lesson Activities

1. Focus questions for the vignette provide a short lesson option. (15 minutes)
2. Reading exercise of supplementary materials
3. Research activities on the lives of 19th Century Coal Miners in BC
4. Focused writing exercise creating a biography to conclude the lesson

Learning Standards

1. To demonstrate an understanding of some of the main causes of labour disputes and unrest in early British Columbia (**cause and consequence**)
2. To demonstrate an understanding of early BC economic history through the BC worker biography project. (**perspective**)
3. Use Social Studies inquiry processes and skills to: ask questions; gather, interpret, and analyze ideas; and communicate findings and decisions.
4. Assess the significance of people, places, events, or developments, and compare varying perspectives on their significance at particular times and places, and from group to group. (**significance**)
5. Assess the justification for competing historical accounts after investigating points of contention, reliability of sources, and adequacy of evidence. (**evidence**)
6. Compare and contrast **continuity and change** for different groups at particular times and places.
7. Make reasoned ethical judgments about actions in the past and present, and determine appropriate ways to remember and respond. (**ethical judgment**)

Materials and Resources Provided

- [Miners vs. Dunsmuirs Episode 1- Working People: A History of Labour in British Columbia](#)
- BC Coal Miner Biography Lesson Plan/Strategy (Document 1)
- A class set of "Robert Dunsmuir Biography" sheets (Document 2)
- A class set of "BC Coal Miner Biography" handouts (Document 3)
- Miners vs Dunsmuirs Source materials (Document 4)

Additional Suggested Materials

- [The Labour Movement in British Columbia 1840-1914](#)
- [Video- Edge of the World: Coal Miner's Lament](#)
- [DVD-"These were the reasons" The Big Strike 3:48-5:12](#)
- [On the Line: A History of the British Columbia Labour Movement-Chapter 2](#)
- [Biography – DUNSMUIR, ROBERT – Volume XI \(1881-1890\) – Dictionary of Canadian Biography \(biographi.ca\)](#)
- [Biography – MYERS, SAMUEL H – Volume XI \(1881-1890\) – Dictionary of Canadian Biography](#)

Vignette Questions

1. What were conditions like in the coal mines of British Columbia owned by Robert Dunsmuir?
2. What were the causes of the workers strike against Dunsmuir's coal mines?
3. What was Dunsmuir's first response to the workers strike?
4. What role did the government of BC play in the strike?
5. What was the effect of the strike on the coal miners?
6. How did James Dunsmuir differ from his father in dealing with strikes?

Lesson Activities

1. See Document 1 for a more detailed description of this lesson plan to develop a fictional biography of a BC Coal Miner
2. This lesson is designed to be taught in conjunction with a Grade 9 unit on the development of BC and its history in the late Victorian period. Previous teaching on this subject is advised.
3. Hand out the biography handout for Robert Dunsmuir (Doc. 2) and ask the class to read it. After the students have read the handout, the teacher should then play the video vignette "Miners vs. Dunsmuir" for the class, asking them to pay particular attention to the conditions the workers in the mines faced and the reasons they chose to organize unions and strike.
4. Following the video discuss questions such as "Why did the workers strike? What was Dunsmuir's reaction to the strike? Why do you think many industrialists like Dunsmuir punished workers for unionizing and did their best to destroy unions?"
5. Introduce the Coal Miner's Biography assignment with the information sheets (doc. 3-5) provided.
6. Provide class time and or additional research time in a library or computer lab

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Credit: Teaching Activities and Lesson Plan developed by John Decaire