

His Father's Namesake

Lesson 1: Journeyman's Diary

Focus Questions

How did work in Chicago change during the 19th century? What factors led to rapid changes in Chicago's manufacturing, meatpacking, and construction industries? How did skilled workers and artisans respond to their loss of status and autonomy in the workplace?

Core Understandings

Students will understand that production methods in Chicago changed rapidly over the course of the 19th century, displacing small artisan workshops with mechanized factories. They will know that skilled work was eliminated to reduce production costs and that the resulting loss of individual autonomy led to widespread worker unrest.

Knowledge

Students will know the rapidly shifting conditions of labor in Chicago in the 19th century. They will know the reasons behind the change to industrialization and the response of skilled workers to the elimination of their jobs.

Skills

Students will use their language arts and research skills to uncover information about Chicago labor history. They will be able to compare and interpret primary and secondary source materials and use their writing skills to summarize their interpretations.

Common Core ELA Standards

CCSSR1. Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

CCSSR7. Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

CCSSW2. Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

ISBE Social Science Standards

Goal 15: Understand economic systems, with an emphasis on the US.

Goal 16: Understand events, trends, individuals and movements shaping the history of Illinois, the US, and other nations.

Goal 17: Understand world geography and the effects of geography on society, with an emphasis on the US.

Goal 18: Understand social systems, with an emphasis on the US.

In This Lesson

By imagining life through the eyes of a skilled laborer who has been "phased out" of his job, students will gain historical empathy as well as an understanding of the labor issues permeating Chicago and the nation prior to the Haymarket incident of 1886. The story elements of setting and flashback are addressed. This lesson was researched and written by Jackson Potter.



Activity

As a bell-ringer question, ask students how they think the nature of work has changed in Chicago and the United States over time. Write down their responses on the board.

Distribute copies of the *Work in Chicago* handout found at the end of this lesson. Have students read the information and answer in writing and/or discuss the following comprehension questions:

- 1) What were the major industries in Chicago in the 19th century?
- 2) How and why did the nature of work change in Chicago after the Civil War?
- 3) How did employers strip skilled workers of their power in the workplace? (Make sure to give specific examples from the carpentry, meatpacking, and garment-making industries as well as the manufacture of McCormick reapers.)
- 4) Which work system do you think was preferable to the individual worker, pre-Civil War or post-Civil War? Why?

Continue by sharing the *Workplace Scenarios* handout at the end of this lesson, which illustrates the changes in 19th-century production methods. The first engraving shows a shoemaker and his apprentices working in a small artisan shop. The second engraving shows the N. D. Wells & Co. shoe factory. Have students answer the following questions to compare and contrast the two work environments:

- 1) In which scenario does the worker appear to have more power/independence? Why?
- 2) What differences do you observe between the two workplaces?
- 3) How do you think the individual workers felt in each situation?

Next have students to write a one-page diary entry from the point of view of a 19th-century journeyman (or artisan worker) whose job has been eliminated by the new production methods. Ask students to imagine they are now working in a large factory and to describe the new work conditions they face and how they feel about them.

Lesson 1 Home Connection

Distribute individual copies of *His Father's Namesake* to each student in the class.

http://www.chicagohistory.org/greatchicagostories/pdf/story/His_Fathers_Namesake_by_Katherine_San_Fratello.pdf Ask students to read the story and highlight the passages that touch upon the issues discussed in Lesson 1 regarding the changing nature of work.

Materials & Resources

- **Printouts of the Work in Chicago handout** (at end of lesson)
- **Printouts of the Workplace Scenarios handout** (at end of lesson)
- **Printouts of *His Father's Namesake***
http://www.chicagohistory.org/greatchicagostories/pdf/story/His_Fathers_Namesake_by_Katherine_San_Fratello.pdf

Instructional Notes

Consider having students use the Photograph Analysis worksheets from the *Great Chicago Stories* website to guide their close reading of the two contrasting workplace scenarios. Worksheets can be found in the Classroom Activities section under the “Artifact Analysis” tab.
<http://www.chicagohistory.org/greatchicagostories/classroom/artifact.php>

Extension Activities

Locate a labor leader or unionist in your school community and invite him or her to speak to students about the nature of unionism today and why he or she is involved in the union movement.

Handout: Work in Chicago

By David Moberg

Source: *The Electronic Encyclopedia of Chicago* © 2005 by the Chicago Historical Society
(www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/1381.html)

From its early days, Chicago was a place where everything happened fast. The town grew with amazing speed, generating jobs in construction and the manufacture of construction materials, but there was a high priority on doing things quickly and grandly in every other endeavor as well. This emphasis on speed and scale also encouraged businessmen to find faster, simpler ways to get things done, resulting in the standardization of products from grades of grain to sizes of lumber. Chicago's success lay partly in the ability of its businesses to make nature abstract in ways that transformed products of farms and forest more readily into commodities for the market. Chicago's grain merchants turned discrete bags of grain from specific fields into a standard type passing through the city's new grain elevators, financed in part by contracts for future delivery that formed the basis for a new financial services business.

Typical of most early-nineteenth-century American industry, Chicago's earliest manufacturing took place in artisan workshops and manufactories where skilled craftsmen, aided by laborers or apprentices, dominated production. Manufacturers in Chicago, with rail access to abundant southern Illinois coal, turned to steam power for larger factories after the Civil War. As they did, they initiated changes in the nature of factory work and the relationship between those who owned the factories and those who worked there.

Chicago's competitive environment fostered a search for production methods that were faster and less expensive. Anxious to cut costs, businesses sought ways to trim the cost of labor. One important step was elaborating the division of labor. Dividing a job, such as building a house or butchering a pig, that had previously been executed by a master craftsman, made it possible for employers to hire unskilled workers at lower wages. Equally important, it shifted control to the employer, who adopted a variety of strategies to respond to labor market supply, technological opportunities, and worker resistance.

In Chicago, major industries such as construction, meatpacking, garment making, and machinery manufacture followed distinctive courses. Although large contractors rather than master carpenters dominated Chicago building construction as early as the 1840s, carpenters were still

Handout: Work in Chicago (continued)

skilled tradesmen who supplied their own extensive tool chests. In 1833 balloon frame construction opened up the potential for increased reliance on factory mass production of building parts like sashes and doors. Even at the work site, contractors turned to piecework, fragmenting the work into specialties that required little training and offering lower pay tied to output. In meatpacking, the “disassembly line” arrived in Chicago soon after its introduction in Cincinnati. The industry relied on the line to fragment labor-intensive production and to organize meatpacking on a much larger scale than had previously been possible. The scale of operations, combined with the pressures of cost cutting and environmental complaints, fostered the growth of ancillary industries that used what otherwise would have been waste—“everything but the squeal.” In the men’s clothing industry, boosted by Civil War uniform contracts, small contractors would bid for work from “jobbers” who cut the cloth and then turned it over to workers at home or in small shops for different stages of sewing; competition among these workers based on price made for classic sweatshop conditions. There could be up to 150 separate operations divided among many workers in sewing a man’s coat. By the late nineteenth century, major men’s clothing retailers consolidated many sweatshops into larger factories to gain more control over quality, although contractor sweatshops persisted. At the McCormick reaper factory, company president Cyrus McCormick, Jr., in 1886 installed new pneumatic molding machinery to displace the skilled iron molders and their union, thereby securing management control. The machines turned out poor-quality castings, however, and nearly tripled labor costs in the short term.

As the new factory system challenged the craftsman’s control, the foreman—and, to a lesser extent, labor brokers and employment agents—assumed new importance. The foreman—with his arbitrary and discriminatory power over hiring and firing, especially of pro-union workers or blacklisted “troublemakers”—was the key figure in the “drive system” that pushed workers to work faster, continuously, and more dangerously. His power provoked worker rebellions small and large.

Handout: Work in Chicago (continued)

Questions

1. What were the major industries in Chicago in the 19th century?

2. How and why did the nature of work change in Chicago after the Civil War?

Handout: Work in Chicago (continued)

Questions

3. How did employers strip skilled workers of their power in the workplace? (Make sure to give specific examples from the carpentry, meatpacking, and garment-making industries as well as the manufacture of McCormick reapers.)

4. Which work system do you think was preferable to the individual worker, pre-Civil War or post-Civil War? Why?

Handout: Workplace Scenarios



Above: Shoemaker and his apprentices, n.d. Below: N. D. Wells & Co. shoe factory, 1874. Both from *Chicago History* magazine, Volume 1, Number 2 (Summer 1986).

