



INTERNATIONAL
STORYTELLING CENTER

Curriculum Guide for Freedom Stories Discussion
“Profit and Power: Company Towns and the Exploitation of Appalachia”

Notes about this guide:

First, it is just that—a guide. It is meant to offer suggestions for how you might approach these important yet sensitive topics in your classroom, as well as ideas for how you might augment existing curriculum in your classroom. Please adapt it as necessary to fit your classroom’s needs.

Second, while it is aimed for 10th grade, many of the activities can easily be adapted both for lower and higher grades, and we encourage you to do so.

Third, since the International Storytelling Center is based in Tennessee, we have used the Tennessee state academic standards for Social Studies as our guide, but have also included Common Core standards where appropriate in an attempt to provide some reciprocity between and among state curriculums. Please feel free to use your own state standards in place of Tennessee’s or Common Core’s.

Fourth, our collective understanding of the subject matter covered in this and the other Freedom Stories Curriculum Guides is ever-evolving as we unearth forgotten narratives and seek out more complete truths. As such, there may be instances where certain instructional approaches are no longer useful, or where certain resources are no longer applicable. We encourage you to keep this in mind as you use this guide and adapt activities with new information as it becomes available.

Last, we welcome your feedback about this guide and its role in your classroom. Please reach out to us at FreedomStories@StorytellingCenter.net with comments, questions, and suggestions.

Lesson Title	Profit and Power: Company Towns and the Exploitation of Appalachia
Grade Band	10th Grade
Standard(s)	<p><u>Tennessee Social Studies Standards SSP.02:</u></p> <p>Critically examine a primary or secondary source in order to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extract and paraphrase significant ideas • Discern differences between evidence and assertion • Draw inferences and conclusions • Recognize author’s purpose, point of view, and potential bias • Assess the strengths and limitations of arguments <p><u>Tennessee Social Studies Standards SSP.05:</u></p> <p>Develop historical awareness by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognizing how and why historical accounts change over time • Perceiving and presenting past events and issues as they might have been experienced by the people of the time, with historical empathy rather than present-mindedness • Evaluating how unique circumstances of time and place create context and contribute to action and reaction

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifying patterns of continuity and change over time, making connections to the present <p><u>Tennessee Social Studies Standards AAH.51:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analyze the impact of immigration and migration on the lives of African Americans in the contemporary U.S. <p><u>Tennessee Social Studies Standards CI.20:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Compare and contrast folk and/or traditional culture with popular culture, and analyze efforts to preserve folk culture amid the spread of popular culture. <p><u>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.1</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
Lesson Objective(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify company towns, describe their positives and negatives, and discern how companies wielded power and how workers resisted or tried to gain power over their own labor Explore Appalachian songs, stories, and folklore about industrial labor, production, and exploitation Describe African American experiences with segregation and desegregation in company towns
Essential Understanding/ Essential Question	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How have natural resources and labor, in particular African American laborers, been exploited in the Appalachian region in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries? The history of exploitation and racism in the Appalachian region shape experiences of African American people from company towns today.
Lesson Activities	<p><i>This lesson provides history about company towns in the Appalachian region. The discussion includes musical performances about John Henry and John Hardy. Then there is a discussion about company towns from the perspectives of scholars who grew up in different company towns.</i></p> <p>Introductory activity</p> <p>Students will take five to ten minutes to write about their hometown, or a place they feel they belong to. Students may describe the place and their connection to that place. They could also answer these prompts: Describe the environment. Are any natural resources in your hometown utilized for producing goods or services? How do people work and socialize? Who has power or authority in the community? The teacher may ask students to volunteer to share their writings with the entire group and list examples of environments, economies, social institutions, power arrangements, and meanings of community on the board.</p> <p>Activity 1: The Appalachian Region</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> The teacher may ask the class if any of the homeplaces they described in the introductory activity are located in the Appalachian

region. Because this lesson is about Appalachian company towns, it is recommended that the students have a sense of what “Appalachia” means. The teacher may note that there are many ideas about what and where Appalachia is. One important definition is by the Federal agency, the Appalachian Regional Commission. The teacher may use an [Appalachian Regional Commission map](#) or click to the second slide of the International Storytelling Center’s [Freedom Stories Story Map](#) for a graphic of the counties that federally comprise the Appalachian Region.

Activity 2: Overview of Company Towns in Appalachia, late 1800s-early 1900s

It may be helpful to define the industrialization process as building and operating factories and businesses in a city, region, or country, for example. Before industrialization, the Appalachian region subsisted mainly on family farming and was known for its pristine forests. In the late nineteenth century, businessmen, mostly from the north and outside the region, began buying land in the Appalachian region to build businesses and profit from its natural resources like timber and coal.

1. Begin the Freedom Stories video, [Profit and Power: Company Towns and the Exploitation of Appalachia - International Storytelling Center](#), which starts with a PowerPoint presentation about the rise of industrialization and company towns in the Appalachian region. Students will take notes during the PowerPoint.
2. The teacher may briefly pause the video to give time for students to write two notes about each slide: their biggest takeaway and a follow-up question about the material. Stop the video after the last PowerPoint slide.
3. Pair the students or ask them to partner with a nearby neighbor. Give them about ten minutes to take turns sharing with each other their takeaways and follow-up questions from the PowerPoint. Students may add to their own notes and discuss each other’s follow-up questions. Then, ask them to brainstorm and write down answers the following questions, giving about 15-20 minutes for this activity:
 - a. What types of industries emerged in the Appalachian region?
 - b. What transportation methods were needed to extract and move natural resources?
 - c. Who provided the labor for these industries to grow?
 - d. What would you say was the ultimate goal of a business that built a company town in the early industrial era? How did companies maintain power in company towns? Regulate race relations?
 - e. How did laborers fight to gain more power over their lives?

Activity 3: Labor Songs

1. Restart the Freedom Stories video at the beginning again, and this time ask students to listen to the songs that accompany the PowerPoint. Distribute the lyrics for students to read along and have students write down any moments or images that strike them as powerful. Here is the song list:

- f. [“Nine Pound Hammer”](#), lyrics by Merle Travis, sung by Tennessee Ernie Ford (1956)
 - g. [“16 Tons”](#) (same)
 - h. [“Dark as a Dungeon”](#) (same)
 - i. [“Paradise”](#), by John Prine (1971)
2. The teacher can ask students to share their thoughts about the songs and what we can learn from songs about the experiences of industrial labor.

Activity 4: Primary Source Analysis

1. In this activity, students will examine photographs of company towns. They may use the photographs in the PowerPoint, and also explore photographs in a digital collection such as the [Library of Congress](#). (If using the Library of Congress photographs, ensure the company town is within the Appalachian region.)
2. Students should examine about ten photographs of company towns in at least four different places and write down responses to the following questions:
 - a. Describe the physical environments each photograph depicts. Where and when were the photographs made? What are the subjects of the photographs?
 - b. Choose the photograph that is most striking to you. How so?
 - c. What kind of life do you imagine for people living and working in a company town in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries? Students will be asked to support their answers using evidence from the photographs, the PowerPoint, and the songs. The teacher may ask students to share with a nearby neighbor and then the larger group. The teacher can collect these responses and provide feedback.
3. This section explores folklore about the importance of African American industrial labor in the Appalachian region. Ask if students have heard about the story of John Henry. Then, students will read one version of the story, found [here](#). Students should read the first two sections: “Workers’ Folk Heroes” and “John Henry: A Match-up of Man vs. Machine.”
4. Then, distribute John Henry ballad lyrics to the students (find lyrics and more discussion questions [here](#)). Students may use the lyrics as they watch Sparky and Rhonda Rucker perform “The Ballad of John Henry” in the Freedom Stories video, [Profit and Power: Company Towns and the Exploitation of Appalachia - International Storytelling Center](#). Their performance begins at timestamp 12:30. Pause the video at 18:36 for a discussion.
5. In a large-group, ask prompts such as:
 - a. What story is this song telling?
 - b. Who was John Henry?
 - c. What is the “big idea” story behind this song?
 - d. Why do you think the story of John Henry came to be sung again and again by both white and African American workers?

6. Next, the class will explore the story of another African American laborer, John Hardy. One version of the lyrics and story is available [here](#).
7. Watch Sparky and Rhonda Rucker introduce and perform “The Ballad of John Hardy,” in the Freedom Stories video, timestamp 18:36 through 23:47. Students should take notes about Sparky Rucker’s version of the story. As Sparky Rucker referenced, [here is the photograph](#) of John Hardy wearing a suit at his public execution.
8. Then lead a large-group discussion with these questions:
 - a. What story is this song telling?
 - b. What kind of man was John Hardy?
 - c. What is the “big idea” story behind this song?
 - d. Is John Hardy a folk hero? How or how not?
 - e. Why do you think this story came to be sung again and again?
9. Then, students will briefly compare and contrast John Henry and John Hardy. Ask them to contextualize both stories in time and space. When and where were John Henry and John Hardy working? How do these ballads connect to the issues of profit, power, and segregation in the Appalachian region as discussed earlier in the lesson?
10. Students will discuss folk culture and traditions more broadly. People like Sparky and Rhonda Rucker and organizations such as the International Storytelling Center work to preserve and celebrate folk traditions. Discuss as a class why it is important that people and institutions preserve folk cultures. Then break into groups of four to compare and contrast aspects of folk culture with popular culture. Brainstorm or search online resources to discover other people and institutions that preserve folk culture today.

Activity 5: African American experiences in company towns, mid-20th century and today

1. Play the Freedom Stories video, watching timestamp 23:48 through 1:07:13.* Ask students to take notes as they listen, providing them with the following guiding questions for them to pay attention to while taking notes:
 - a. What company towns are the speakers from?
 - b. According to the speakers, what were the positives and negatives of living in these company towns?
 - c. Name 2-3 inequities in company towns from segregation and racism
 - d. Name 2-3 problems caused by desegregation processes and racism

(*Note: At timestamp 45:46, Dr. Turner says a quote with the word “ass” in it.)

2. Pair the students to take turns discussing the guiding questions using their notes. In a large group, the teacher will lead a discussion with prompts such as these:
 - a. What does Sparky Rucker tell us about the real John Henry and how does he know what he knows?
 - b. What do the speakers say about problems with segregation in company towns?
 - c. How much did African Americans gain and lose with desegregation?

3. Return to the Freedom Stories video, watching the rest of the video (timestamp 1:07:14 through 1:29:21). Ask students to use the following guiding questions to write notes:
 - a. What dangers and risks did coal miners encounter?
 - b. What happened in Lynch, Kentucky when the company left?
 - c. What advice do the speakers have for young Appalachians today?
4. Return to partners and again take turns discussing the guiding questions using their notes. The teacher will ask groups to share their responses with the class for discussion. The teacher may close this discussion with follow-up questions such as:
 - a. Why did Dr. Turley ask the panelists to give advice to young Black Appalachians about remaining in the region?
 - b. Overall, how have natural resources and labor, in particular African American laborers, been exploited in the Appalachian region in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries?
 - c. What are the legacies of such exploitation?

Concluding Activity

1. Distribute the following short article, "[Company Towns, Then and Now](#)" from *Smithsonian Magazine* to provide students with a broader understanding of company towns across America in the early industrial era and what some "iconic" towns are like today. Include the text for slide four of the article's gallery, which describes Lynch, Kentucky.
2. Give the students about 10 minutes to read the article and write down their main takeaway. Then, ask students to act as though they were magazine staff, tasked with editing the article's text about Lynch, Kentucky (slide four in the article's gallery). What three pieces of historical evidence (from any of the materials used in this lesson) would you include that are not in the text (for example, what did the author miss by not centering Freedom Stories)? Be sure that at least two pieces of evidence are about race or African American lives. Students may use their notes, taking about 5-6 minutes to write their responses. The teacher will ask students to share their takeaway from the article and what they would add to the article.

Extensions

Toward the end of the Freedom Stories video, Dr. William (Bill) Turner lists many resources for Black Appalachian youth. Students may research one or two organizations and identify the purpose and vision of the organization(s). Students will write a reflection about how the organizations address problems that are identified in the Freedom Stories video. Students may also write about how these issues and visions relate to their own lives. The teacher will collect the reflection.

Further Reading/Resources

- Related Freedom Stories discussions:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Jim Crow Appalachia: Slavery by Another Name - International Storytelling Center ○ Out-Migration: Spreading Appalachia Abroad - International Storytelling Center ● Industrialization of Appalachia from Appalachia State University ● “The Mine Wars: The Coal Town System,” PBS LearningMedia ● For more about African American and European immigrant labor in the coal mines, watch “The Mine Wars: Who Worked in the West Virginia Coal Mines?” from PBS LearningMedia ● More information about chain gangs from PBS ● Article about John Henry in the Library of Congress
Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Freedom Stories Discussion: Profit and Power: Company Towns and the Exploitation of Appalachia - International Storytelling Center, which includes a PowerPoint about the rise of industrialism and company towns in the Appalachian region. The PowerPoint is also available for download on the same webpage. ● Computer and projector with internet and sound ● Paper and pencils for students to take notes and write reflections ● Links are provided within the lesson plan for song lyrics and articles ● A dry-erase board or worksheet to post guiding questions for note-taking
Accommodations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Students may download the PowerPoint or watch the discussion on their own or at home if they have internet and computer. ● The teacher may press “pause” during the video for students to write notes. ● The teacher may also provide hard copies of the PowerPoint, song lyrics, or transcript of the Freedom Stories discussion. ● The teacher may also adjust any time allotments and make changes to the curriculum as needed.