



## Lesson Plan: Examine Labor Practices in the Garment Industry

### OVERVIEW:

This lesson plan is designed to be used in conjunction with the film *Made in L.A.*, a film that follows the struggle of three Latina immigrants working for fair labor conditions in Los Angeles's garment factories. Note: This film has bilingual subtitles throughout and is fully accessible to English and Spanish speakers. This lesson compares current conditions in the garment industry with those at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

**Note: The filmmaker's version of *Made in L.A.* contains one incidence of strong profanity about 12 minutes into the film that may be inappropriate for classroom use. To avoid such content, be sure to record the PBS broadcast version off-air or request the "broadcast version" of the film from the P.O.V. lending library.**

P.O.V. documentaries can be recorded off-air and used for educational purposes for up to one year from the initial broadcast. In addition, P.O.V. offers a lending library of DVDs and VHS tapes that you can borrow anytime during the school year — FOR FREE!

### OBJECTIVES:

By the end of this lesson, students will:

- Work in cooperative learning groups to study various topics related to fair labor practices in the garment industry, both in historic and modern times.
- Take a quiz to measure their knowledge about the topics studied.

**GRADE LEVELS:** 6-12

**SUBJECTS:** Current Events, U.S. History, Civics, Economics, Geography

### MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Equipment for showing online video clips to the class (method varies by school)
- Computers with access to the Internet
- Handout: [Garment Industry Labor Quiz](#) (PDF file)

**ESTIMATED TIME NEEDED:** One 50-minute class

### SUGGESTED CLIPS:

Clip 1: María (Length: 02:05)

The clip begins just after the film's title at 02:05 with the shot of the exterior of María's home. It ends at 06:20 with a close-up of a spinning sewing machine wheel.

Clip 2: Pyramid of Power (Length: 01:02)

The clip begins at 55:45 with Lupe saying, "I built a pyramid of power..." It ends at 56:47 with "...really, we are very powerful."

Clip 3: Who Is Responsible? (Length: 01:19)

The clip begins at 20:51 with “Latino workers announce a lawsuit against a garment company...” It ends at 22:10 with “...have an incredible impact on the industry as a whole.”

Clip 4: Modern Sweatshop (Length: 03:02)

The clip begins at 15:38 with “So we want to hear your problems.” It ends at 18:40 with “So we all decided to start the lawsuit against Forever 21.”

Clip 5: Lupe visits Ellis Island (Length: 01:08)

The clip begins at 38:50 with a shot of the Statue of Liberty. It ends at 39:58 with a close-up shot of a photo from the Ellis Island Museum of Immigration.

**BACKGROUND:**

In 2001, garment workers from different factories in Los Angeles joined forces with the Garment Worker Center to file wage claims against retailer Forever 21, who subcontracted with manufacturers to produce inventory for its retail shops. Forever 21 said it wasn’t responsible for the workers’ complaints because the workers were employees of the subcontractors, and not Forever 21. Through unity and persistence, the workers were able to eventually negotiate a labor settlement with Forever 21 that improved labor conditions.

Such struggles for better working conditions are not new in the United States. The term “sweatshop” was coined in the late 1800s to describe factories with poor working conditions, low wages, long hours and the supervisor’s arbitrary power over the workers. With the help of legislation and union organizing, working conditions in the garment industry have gradually improved. Sweatshop conditions continue to exist in many U.S. factories, however, indicating that there is still progress to be made.

**ACTIVITY:**

Explore past and present labor issues in the garment industry by conducting the following Jigsaw activity:

1. Divide the class into “Home” groups of five students each. Explain that each group is going to be exploring past and current struggles for fair working conditions in the garment industry. Each member of a Home group will become an “Expert” on a specific topic and will then be responsible for teaching the members of his or her Home group about that topic. At the end of the activity, students will take a quiz on ALL of the topics, so it is important for each Expert to do a good job of both learning the material and teaching it to the members of his or her Home group.
2. Next, have a representative from each Home group form temporary Expert groups composed of others assigned to the same topic. Expert groups should study the subjects below, discuss the main points and guiding questions, and then practice how they will teach their “Home” group about their assigned topic.

**Expert Group 1**

Topic: What Is a Sweatshop?

Resource: Lower East Side Tenement Museum: Levine Apartment

[http://www.tenement.org/Virtual\\_Tour/vt\\_levine.html](http://www.tenement.org/Virtual_Tour/vt_levine.html)

Guiding Questions: Who were the Levines and why did they open a garment shop in their home? What are the characteristics commonly attributed to sweatshops? Why

would the Levines' shop likely have qualified as a sweatshop? What ultimately spelled the end of apartment-based garment factories in New York at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century?

### **Expert Group 2**

Topic: Worker Strikes Before 1911

Resource: Cornell University Online Exhibit: The Triangle Factory Fire

<http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/trianglefire/>

Eleanor Roosevelt National Historic Site

<http://www.nps.gov/archive/elro/glossary/ilqwu.htm>

See the section "Sweatshops and Strikes Before 1911", Guiding Questions: What type of worker is often willing to work in sweatshop labor conditions? What important gains did "The Uprising" achieve?

### **Expert Group 3**

Topic: Triangle Factory Fire

Resource: Cornell University Online Exhibit: The Triangle Factory Fire

<http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/trianglefire/>

See the sections "Mourning and Protest," and "Investigation, Trial, and Reform," and Fire!

Guiding Questions: What factors led to the tragic deaths in the Triangle Factory fire? What happened as a result of this fire?

### **Expert Group 4**

Topic: The Garment Industry in Modern Times

Resources: "María" and "Pyramid of Power" video clips from *Made in L.A.*

The Garment Worker Center article, "The Fight Against Forever 21: Low-Wage Immigrant Worker Organizing for Fairness and Dignity"

[http://www.garmentworkercenter.org/media/f21/Campaign\\_Messaging\\_on\\_Forever\\_21.pdf](http://www.garmentworkercenter.org/media/f21/Campaign_Messaging_on_Forever_21.pdf) (PDF file)

Guiding Questions: What have modern working conditions been like in many of Los Angeles's garment factories? Why do people like María tolerate such conditions? What kind of power do factory workers have when they organize themselves?

### **Expert Group 5**

Topic: Systemic Issues Affecting Worker Conditions

Resources: Filmmaker Interview (pbs.org/pov/pov2007/madeinla/behind.html) "Who Is Responsible?" and "Modern Sweatshop" video clips from *Made in L.A.*

Guiding Questions: Why didn't the retailer Forever 21 believe that they were responsible for the workers' complaints about unfair working conditions? How can low price points set by retailers affect the wages of those who manufacture the product?

3. Give students about 20 minutes to work in their Expert groups. Then, have each Expert return to his or her Home group and teach the members about the topic. Encourage group members to ask questions for clarification.

4. At the end of the activity, use the quiz in the "Assessment Suggestions" section (or create one of your own) to find out what students have learned.

## **ASSESSMENT SUGGESTIONS**

Students can be assessed on:

- Their participation in the Home and Expert groups,
- Their scores on the provided quiz for this activity.
- Answer Key: [1) B; 2) A; 3) D; 4) C; 5) D; 6) C; 7) C; 8) A; 9) B; 10) C.]

## EXTENSIONS & ADAPTATIONS

- Watch the film, *Made in L.A.* in its entirety. Then, explore one or more of the following topics in an open classroom discussion:
  - How did Lupe, María, and Maura change over the course of the Forever 21 campaign? How did these changes impact their personal lives and outlooks for the future?
  - Create a chart that shows the strategies and outcomes of the Garment Worker Center's Forever 21 campaign. What were the risks of the campaign? Why do students think the workers would speak out despite these risks? Why was the campaign ultimately successful? The [Film Synopsis](#) on the P.O.V. website summarizes this campaign, as do the Garment Worker Center's archived documents on the [Forever 21 Campaign](#) (<http://www.garmentworkercenter.org/forever21.php>).
  - Consider the economic struggles and personal sacrifices of Lupe, María, and Maura as they work to earn a living for themselves and/or their families. Please see the *Waging a Living* Lesson Plan for more ideas: <http://www.pbs.org/pov/pov2006/wagingaliving/for.html>
- Read what [four activists](#) on today's front lines of immigration and sweatshop reform have to say about *Made in L.A.* What strategies did each of these activists use to bring about positive social change? How do their experiences and thinking compare with those of Lupe, Maria, and Maura? What can students learn from these activists to help them address issues in your community? Brainstorm with students some issues they see in your community and create a classroom action plan based on their research and comments.
- Increase students' knowledge of workers' movements in the United States by having them listen to P.O.V.'s *Waging a Living* podcast featuring Amy Goodman's conversation with Howard Zinn, author of *A People's History of the United States*. Visit: [http://www-tc.pbs.org/pov/rss/media/pov\\_wagingaliving\\_zinn.mp3](http://www-tc.pbs.org/pov/rss/media/pov_wagingaliving_zinn.mp3). A transcript of the conversation is also available at: [http://www.pbs.org/pov/pov2006/wagingaliving/special\\_goodman\\_zinn.html](http://www.pbs.org/pov/pov2006/wagingaliving/special_goodman_zinn.html) Ask students to research workers' movements in foreign countries and compare/contrast their findings with Howard Zinn's comments.
- Check out other P.O.V. films that address immigration and/or labor themes like those raised in *Made in L.A.*: [Maquilapolis](#), [Waging a Living](#), [Farmingville](#), [Discovering Domingo](#) and [The Sixth Section](#).
- Have students go through their clothing at home and make a list of the countries where their clothes were produced. Find these countries on a world map. Discuss the pros and cons of producing clothing in these different countries for consumers, manufacturers and workers. How do consumer choices influence how companies do business? Visit Co-Op America's [Responsible Shopper](#) website (<http://coopamerica.org/programs/rs/companies.cfm#clothing>) to

see reports on how well popular clothing companies address the rights of workers in their supply chains.

- Illustrate the concept of “piecework” for students by taking an old article of clothing, such as a T-shirt or a simple skirt, and cutting along its seams to separate it into its individual pieces. Or take a sewing pattern and lay out each part for students to see. Describe (or have someone experienced in sewing come in to explain) briefly how clothing is constructed. Tell students that workers in garment factories are sometimes paid a piecework rate for each piece of clothing produced, or for each part of a garment that they complete in an assembly line. Explain that unscrupulous factory managers would try to minimize labor costs by switching fast workers to an hourly rate and paying slower workers by the piece.

## **RESOURCES:**

### **The Jigsaw Classroom: A Cooperative Learning Technique**

<http://www.jigsaw.org>

This resource provides tips on successfully implementing a jigsaw activity and includes articles and books related to the technique.

## **STANDARDS:**

These standards are drawn from "Content Knowledge," a compilation of content standards and benchmarks for K-12 curriculum by McRel (Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning) at <http://www.mcrel.org/standards-benchmarks/>.

### **Behavioral Studies**

Standard 4: Understands conflict, cooperation and interdependence among individuals, groups and institutions.

### **Civics**

Standard 3: Understands the sources, purposes and functions of law and the importance of the rule of law for the protection of individual rights and the common good.

Standard 13: Understands the character of American political and social conflict and factors that tend to prevent or lower its intensity.

Standard 25: Understands issues regarding personal, political and economic rights.

Standard 28: Understands how participation in civic and political life can help citizens attain individual and public goals.

### **Economics**

Standard 2: Understands characteristics of different economic systems, economic institutions and economic incentives.

Standard 3: Understands the concept of prices and the interaction of supply and demand in a market economy.

Standard 5: Understands unemployment, income, and income distribution in a market economy.

**Geography**

Standard 11: Understands the patterns and networks of interdependence on Earth's surface.

**Language Arts**

Standard 4: Gathers and uses information for research purposes.

Standard 9: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media.

**U.S. History**

Standard 17: Understands massive immigration after 1870 and how new social patterns, conflicts and ideas of national unity developed amid growing cultural diversity.

Standard 31: Understands economic, social and cultural developments in the contemporary United States.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:**

Cari Ladd, M.Ed., is an educational writer with a background in broadcast journalism, secondary education, and media development. Previously, she served as PBS Interactive's director of education, overseeing the development of curricular resources tied to PBS programs, the PBS TeacherSource website (now PBS Teachers), and online teacher professional development services. She has also taught in Maryland and northern Virginia.

**BACKGROUND SOURCES:**

**Cornell University Online Exhibit: The Triangle Factory Fire**

<http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/trianglefire/>

**Garment Worker Center: Forever 21 Campaign**

<http://www.garmentworkercenter.org/forever21.php>