

Sources: Labor Unions in the Garment Industry

SUBMITTED BY: Lee Jackson

SUBJECT(S): Management

GRADE LEVEL(S): 9, 10, 11, 12

≡ OVERVIEW:

In this lesson, students will understand the significance of labor unions in a highly unregulated industry. They will also learn about conditions in sweatshops and brainstorm solutions for poor working conditions in the garment industry. Students will view a portion of the documentary “Made in LA” to consider workers’ perspectives.

≡ NBEA STANDARD(S):

- Management, XI. Operations Management

≡ WHARTON GLOBAL YOUTH PROGRAM ARTICLE:

- [“A Conversation on Trade and Manufacturing”](#)

Common Core Standard(s):

- Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.
- Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

Objectives/Purposes: Following this lesson, students will be able to describe the role of organized labor and its influence on government and business.

Knowledge@Wharton Article: “[Labor Pains: Is Industrial Unrest Growing or Slowing?](#)”

Other Resources/Materials:

- Made in LA video (8 mins): <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iyOPBygHZWY&feature=related>
- Made in LA video (3 mins): <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=loMIKbK-kZc&feature=related>

Have students read the article (10 mins) and discuss (5 mins) the key takeaway from it.

Key Takeaway from the article:

- How did workers react to Air India’s bankruptcy claim?
(Possible answer: They went on strike or threatened to strike. This was “fair” because their pay had been delayed for two weeks. Some workers may have also attempted to sabotage a helicopter owned by Anil Ambani in resistance. In another case, fired workers clubbed to death Lalit Kishore Chaudhary, CEO of Graziano Transmission India.

Key Terms: Review key terms, pausing to answer questions. (5 mins)

- **Labor Union** – An organized association of workers, often in a trade or profession, formed to protect and further their rights and interests.
- **Living wage** – A theoretical wage level that allows the earner to afford adequate shelter, food and the other necessities of life. The living wage should be substantial enough to ensure that no more than 30% of it needs to be spent on housing. The goal of the living wage is to allow employees to earn enough income for a satisfactory standard of living.

Tying It All Together:

Background: The garment industry is one that has seen much unrest because of workers’ protests over low wages and poor working conditions. National companies contract to employ

thousands of workers both in the United States and overseas. Many of these countries do not share standards similar to those of the U.S.

Activity: (15 mins) Have students view clips from “Made in L.A.,” a documentary about three women in the garment industry in the United States.

Discuss the reactions to the clips. (10 mins)

Next, ask students to act as union representatives to create a plan for improving conditions for the workers. (15 mins)

Some topics to consider are:

- What are some major concerns of workers in the garment industry?
- According to the women workers, what has been the response of management to their concerns?
- What are some of the safety issues noted in the clips?
- Create a pyramid representing how clothing is made, such as the one shown in the clip. What are the implications of subcontracting? How does it impact: 1) costs for the corporation? 2) wages for the workers? 3) costs for consumers?

Practice Outside of the Classroom: Ask students: What is a sweatshop? Do they still exist? If so, where? What can we do about them?

- A *sweatshop* is a factory or workshop, especially in the clothing industry, where manual workers are employed at very low wages for long hours and under poor conditions. Sweatshops are widespread in Asia, China and Latin America, where young children often work alongside their mothers in cramped, dangerous conditions. However, there are also sweatshops in Europe and the United States, where people work long hours for poor pay and are denied the right to join a union. The odds are that you regularly wear clothes made in sweatshops. It is widely known that garments from sportswear companies like Nike and high-street shops like Gap are made in sweatshops.
- So should we stop buying (boycott) clothes from companies that use sweatshops? The problem is that this could actually hurt the workers we want to help. If a boycott succeeds and less people buy clothes made in sweatshops, workers will be laid off. Instead, campaigners in the UK are trying to create links between trade unions in different countries with the aim of ensuring that everyone has the right to expect reasonable working conditions.

What Worked and What I Would Do Differently: Students really connected with the women in the video. I would have liked to view the video gradually in parts to get a more in-depth range of their lives.

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