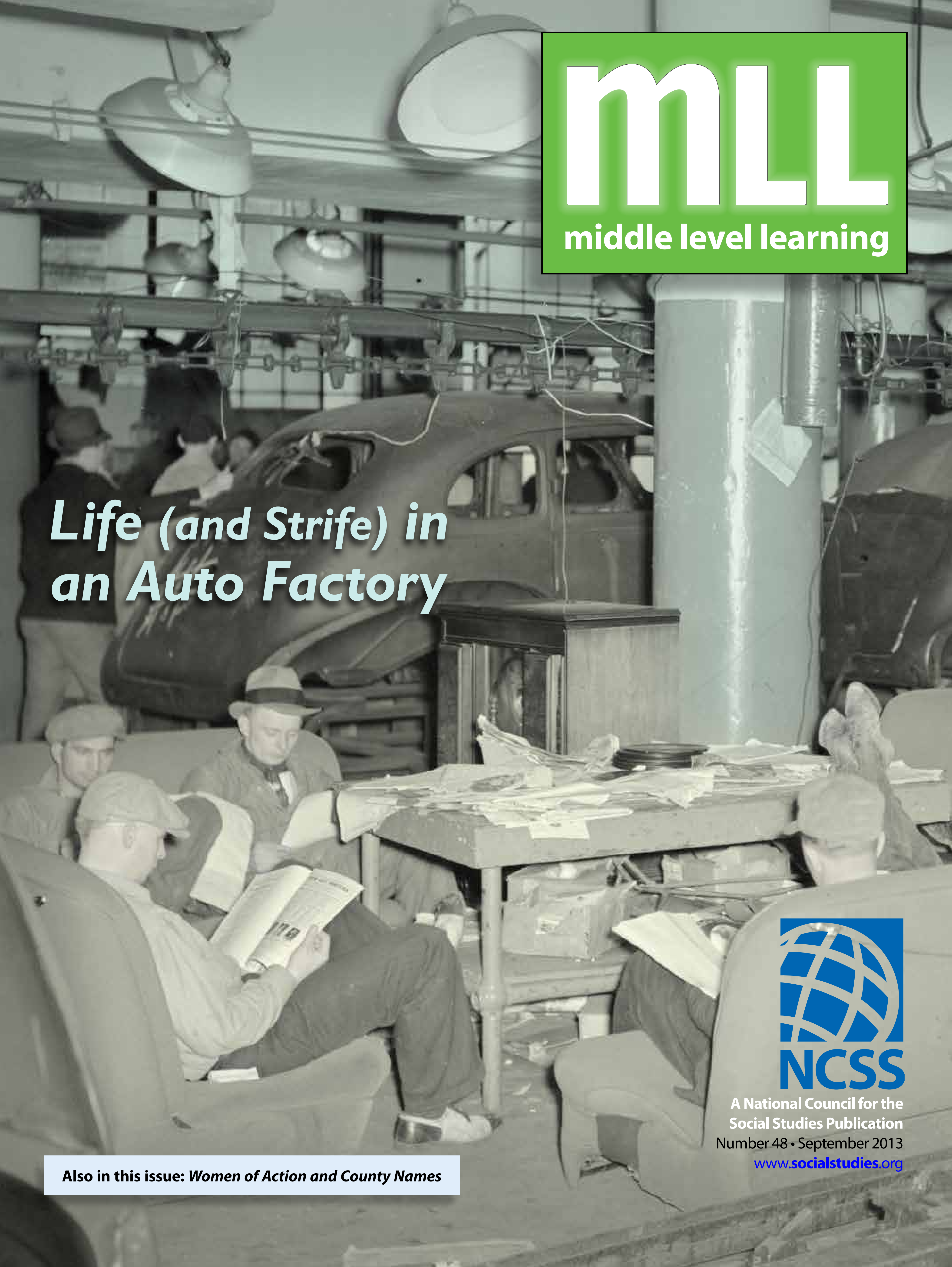

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middle level learning
Life (and Strife) in an Auto Factory
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Also in this issue: *Women of Action and County Names*

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Life in an Auto Factory: Simulating how Labor and Management Interact

Eric B. Freedman

A girl scribbles the words "Fair Wages Now!" on a sheet of paper and waves it in the air. In another class, five students are on strike. Standing atop their desks, they refuse to work until their boss agrees to a higher wage. Other students color in paper car chassis as fast as humanly possible, hoping to please their boss and secure a raise.

These scenes come from a simulation, a lesson I've taught in classes ranging from sixth grade through graduate school. The results are different every time. I have seen bosses offer incentives and cash bonuses for faster production. I have also seen them auction off factory jobs to the lowest bidder. Sometimes, workers cut corners at every opportunity or even steal from their employer. At other times, they develop a fierce sense of company loyalty and strive to outdo their competitors. Often, many of these competing strategies emerge within a single class.

"I love coloring," one girl explained in the simulation debriefing, "so I was happy just to sit there producing cars."

"I'm naturally a nice person," said another, "so I wanted to pay my workers well. But when you told me my investors were getting anxious, I had to start cutting costs and my workers started getting mad at me."

One boy asserted, "The game was rigged from the start, so I stole from people when they weren't looking."

To me, unpredictability is the defining strength of this activity. A role-play achieves its greatest potential when students face meaningful decisions and are free to explore the consequences of choosing one path over another. Experiential learning of this kind helps them develop an empathetic understanding of the reasons people act the way they do.[1]

Setting Up the Simulation

Before class, I arrange the desks in clusters of five, with plenty of space to walk between them. When everyone is seated, I tell the students I have a fun activity planned for today and that for it to work I need their special cooperation:

- All personal items must be under the desks at all times.
- When I turn out the lights, there needs to be complete silence.
- Excitement is okay, but shouting and shoving are prohibited.
- Breaking these rules will result in the loss of credits (see below).

Reviewing these expectations helps to ensure that the energy this activity produces doesn't boil over into chaos.

Next, I distribute the role-play cards (**HANDOUT 1**, p. 6). In a class of 20–30 students, I plan for four-to-six factories consisting of one company executive (or boss) and four workers each. It's vital for the simulation, however, that about a fifth of the workers end up unemployed. Therefore I distribute five times as many worker cards as boss cards.[2] I give students a few minutes to read their cards and to reflect on the three questions posed at the bottom of the sheet. These questions help students take on their designated roles.

I then dim the lights and display the rules of the game (**HANDOUT 2**, p. 7). Here is how it works:

Alfred T. Palmer/Library of Congress

An auto worker places precision-made piston assemblies into cylinders at the White Motor Company in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1941.

Producing and Selling Cars (Rules 1–3)

Workers "manufacture" cars by coloring in paper chassis (**HANDOUT 3**, p. 8) with watercolor markers. Only the chassis itself should be colored. If there is marker on the windows, wheels, bumpers, headlights, or door handle, the car is "defective" and cannot be sold. The coloring should also be smooth and even. Enforcing these rules will slow the rate of production

ON THE COVER: Sitdown strikers in the Fisher body plant factory number three, Flint, Michigan, 1937. (Detail of a photo by Sheldon Dick, USFSA/Library of Congress)

and make it easier to manage the simulation. I like to color in a set of model cars that conform to specifications and distribute one to each factory so that workers know what to do.

The teacher represents the "auto market" and will buy each properly-colored car for 10 "credits." This price is fixed throughout the game. However, the teacher can refuse to buy defective cars—i.e. those that are poorly colored. I usually rip up and recycle these cars and kindly request that the executive keep better tabs on production. Consumers won't buy a defective product.

Wages and Profits (Rules 4–5)

The company executives own the "means of production" (i.e. the watercolor markers and paper chassis), and so only they are allowed to sell cars on the market. Only the workers, however, possess the "skills and training" necessary to manufacture cars. The two parties must therefore strike a deal: in exchange for a piecemeal wage, workers will produce cars for the executives to sell.

I list the starting wage at 3 credits per car produced, but students are free to negotiate any wage they like. Workers can request a raise but executives can fire them for doing so, replacing them with anyone willing to work for less. I have seen wages as low as 1 credit per car and as high as 6 or 7.

After paying the worker, the executive pockets the remainder of the revenue as profit. For example:

10 credits (price of car) – 3 credits (worker's wage) = 7 credits (profit kept by executive).

Unemployment and the Cost of Living (Rules 7–8)

Each company executive possesses four markers, symbolizing the fact that the factory he or she owns is only large enough to employ four workers. This means that some workers will end up unemployed and will have to survive on their own.

Every five minutes or so, I collect "monthly living expenses"—3 credits for workers (whether employed or not) and 6 for executives. If students cannot pay, I sometimes make them "pawn their personal possessions" (watches, bracelets, etc., which I return at the end of class).

Oftentimes, the unemployed will approach company executives and offer to work for less than the going rate. Other times, they wait around doing nothing until living expenses are due.

Sometimes they beg for cash or even steal students' credits. I try to discourage theft through fines or "jail time" (standing in the corner for few minutes), but thievery is part of the simulation and a topic to discuss during the debriefing.

The Goal of the Game (Rule 8)

As in real life, there is no predefined goal in this activity. Students are free to decide whether to maximize their income, engage in philanthropy, or fight for a higher cause. I let students know, however, that at the end of the game we'll record how many credits everyone ended up with. In my experience, most students take this as a cue to maximize income.

The Simulation Begins

After explaining the rules and fielding questions, I raise the lights and ask the workers to stand off to the side. I then invite each company executive to sit at the head of a factory cluster (five chairs in a group) and give each of them four markers and a stack of 30–40 paper car chassis. After making sure that no renegade coloring utensils are floating around the room, I invite the executives to hire workers and begin production. As students settle in at their new jobs, I pass out the starting credits of 5 per worker and 20 per executive.

I let the simulation play out for 10-15 minutes, roaming from factory to factory purchasing cars and encouraging the unemployed to look for work. In a large class, I often hire a student helper at this time, as it can be difficult to buy cars, collect living expenses, and monitor theft all at once.

Enter the UAW

After 15 minutes or so, I don a baseball cap and throw on a union t-shirt. For now, I am not in the market for buying cars—I am a recruiter for the United Auto Workers. I pull one or two unemployed workers aside and offer them a deal: In exchange for a small wage (1 or 2 credits), I will hire them as union organizers, whose job is to help the workers unite for a common cause. Sometimes I suggest going undercover so as not to rouse the boss's suspicion. "If everyone refused to work," I point out, "what could the executives do? I bet all of you could demand 8 or 9 credits per car." Then I shed my union regalia, return to buying cars, and watch as the union organizers start whispering into workers' ears.

The Holiday Break

After about ten more minutes I declare that our "holiday break" has arrived. I pull the executives into the hall for a "managers' conference" and ask them how many credits they've acquired and how much they're paying their workers. If profits are too low or wages too high, I inform them that their investors are getting worried: If they don't start pulling in more cash, then stock prices will fall. (Sometimes I follow through on this threat and confiscate a portion of a boss's credits.)

One reason I call the managers' meeting is to give the workers a chance to confer without their bosses present. Union organizers often state their case for a strike. Workers deliberate their options: Should we join the union and risk losing our jobs? Rat out the organizers? Ignore the labor dispute and quietly go on producing cars?

After the five-minute holiday break, I let the simulation run for another 15 minutes or so. Out of the dozens of times I've led this activity, I've seen an actual strike only once or twice. In response to the organizing drive, executives typically fire the ringleaders, reward loyal workers and informants, or hire scabs from the ranks of the unemployed.

Ending the Simulation

To conclude the activity, I unveil a chart on the wall with students' names along the side and two columns at the top:

"Role (Executive or Worker)" and "Credits in Hand." Starting with the workers and ending with the executives, I ask each student to state their role and the number of credits they ended up with, and I add these data to the chart.

Debriefing the Experience

A common misconception with activities like this one is that enacting the simulation is all that matters. In fact, three components are essential: preparation, enactment, and debriefing. With most role plays, preparation requires the longest amount of time, as students research the information needed to play their roles.[3] In this case, however, preparation time is short, as students need only read their role cards and learn the rules of the game before they're ready to play. Enactment requires at least 30 minutes, or the remainder of a 45-minute period if preparation began at the start of class. This means that the debriefing must often wait until the following day.

Running a simulation without a debriefing is like building a gold mine—hollowing out the tunnels, setting up the rail cars—without ever extracting the gold. Students might have had fun, but what have they learned? The debriefing is your chance to mine the gold that the simulation has exposed. It is students' opportunity to utilize historical and social science concepts to analyze what they just experienced.

I organize the debriefing around four main questions:

1. What was your strategy during the game? How did it pan out?
2. Do you think the game was fair? Why or why not?
3. If you thought it was unfair, what did you do about it? Why did you choose that option?
4. How is this simulation similar to real life? How is it different?

Because the executives are in the minority, I give them the first chance to respond. I also make sure to hear from students who were unemployed, from those who supported or opposed a union, and from those who cooperated with or defied their bosses, and from those who prospered or suffered economically.

Students are often eager to describe their experiences. In doing so, they touch on the very processes that govern economic relations in real life. Initially, I designed the simulation to illustrate the Marxist concept of surplus value: by hoarding the profits, the owners of capital steal the fruits of their workers' labor. Karl Marx predicted that exploitation of this kind would lead to worker protest and mobilization, and finally to the overthrow of the capitalist system, but in reality, company executives have devised several means of placating workers and preventing rebellion.

Over time I realized that the game simulates not only Marx's economic theory, but also the competing view that capitalism fairly rewards hard work and innovation. Students often voice elements of these very theories in the debriefing. Some explain why the rules of the game felt unfair and exploitative, while others express how the executives treated workers equitably. Thus in addition to surplus value, concepts such as collective bargaining, labor unions, fair compensation, and social responsibility often emerge during the debriefing.

The simulation and debriefing enable students to link these concepts to a tangible, memorable experience. The article following this one (pages 9–11) provides handouts on the actual events in the development of autoworker unions during the 1930s. Enacting and debriefing the simulation *before* presenting this material can help students understand the competing options available to the workers and executives of that era, and why they chose the path they ultimately took.

A Caveat

Using a fictional simulation to explain the logic behind historical events, though, can lead to misunderstandings. We risk students coming to believe that the game replicates reality, when in fact it models only a tiny portion of it. For this reason, simulations can become a form of indoctrination—a way of convincing students to believe something without having examined the relevant evidence.[4] This is why the final question from the debriefing is so important:

Teacher: "How is this simulation similar to real life? How is it different?"

Student A: "In real life, other jobs would be available."

Student B: "The executives would have worked hard to get where they are."

Student C: "Working in a real auto factory is much less pleasant than coloring with markers."

Each of these remarks can open further lines of inquiry. For example, students could examine newspaper clippings and other documents to determine whether the auto factory really was the only job provider in town. They could examine biographies of industrialists to tease out personal initiative from inherited wealth. They could consult diaries and photographs to discern how workers experienced life on the factory floor.

By encouraging students to reflect on the simulation's limitations, and helping them fact-check their opinions, we lower the risk of them conflating fact with fiction.

Conclusion

One of our prime tasks as social studies educators is to help students build conceptual models that explain human behavior. Without such models, both the past and the present are incomprehensible.[5] The auto factory role play simulates conditions under which labor and management interact. By participating, students witness firsthand the social phenomena that the model accounts for, such as strikes, income disparity, and merit pay. In debriefing the activity, they reflect on the model's

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utility as well as its limitations. In this way, the simulation and debriefing build students' understanding of the social forces that shape the course of history.

Notes

1. Gert Jan Hofstede, Leon de Caluwe, and Vincent Peters, "Why Simulation Games Work—In Search of the Active Substance: A Synthesis," *Simulation & Gaming* 41, no. 6 (2010): 824–43.
2. In a very large class (35 students or more), you might consider factories of five workers, or in a small class (15 students or less), just three workers. In all cases, be sure that there are more workers than there are markers, so that the unemployment rate remains at 15–20%.
3. For other labor market simulations, see Mike Messner, "Bubblegum and Surplus Value," *Critical Sociology* 6, no. 4 (1976): 51–56; Bill Bigelow and Norm Diamond, "The Organic Goodie Simulation," in *Rethinking Our Classrooms*, ed. Wayne Au, Bill Bigelow, and Stan Karp (Milwaukee, WI: Rethinking Schools, 2007), 100–102. NCSS journals have also published role-plays on other topics; see especially Bruce R. Reichenbach and Sharon H. Reichenbach, "Simulating Latin American Economic Culture," *Social Education* 55, no. 3 (1991): 188–90; Kevin O'Reilly, "What Would You Do? Constructing Decision-Making Guidelines through Historical Problems," *Social Education*. 62, no. 1 (1998): 46–49; Barbara C. Cruz and Shalini A. Murthy, "Breathing Life into History: Using Role-Playing to Engage Students," *Social Studies and the Young Learner* 19, no. 1 (2006): 4–8. See also Bill Bigelow's town hall meeting format for role plays in *Rethinking Our Classrooms*, 130–40.
4. Eric B. Freedman, "Is Teaching for Social Justice Undemocratic?" *Harvard Educational Review* 77, no. 4 (2007): 442–73.
5. Denis Shemilt, "The Devil's Locomotive," *History and Theory* 22, no. 4 (1983): 1–18.

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Labor Unions: Pro and Con

Excerpts from 2012election.procon.org

PRO: The idea that the Bill of Rights does not apply to you when you enter your workplace is an idea that says that you are only free when you are not working. That's not acceptable in America."

—Jill Stein, MD, former professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School and Green Party presidential candidate, January 2012

CON: Too often, unions drive up costs and introduce rigidities that harm competitiveness and frustrate innovation. The statistics tell an unkind story. Studies conducted by non-partisan scholars have shown that labor unions reduce investment and slow job growth.

—Mitt Romney, former Governor of Massachusetts and Republican Party presidential candidate. September 6, 2012

PRO: Labor unions are still mobilizing. Labor unions are still organizing…still fighting to give America's working people a voice in Washington…If a majority of workers want a union, they should get a union."

—Barack Obama, then a senator from Illinois and Democratic Party presidential candidate, April 2, 2008

CON: The only basic problem that I have with unions is the union gives me two workers. One is the worst worker that I've ever seen, the other is the best worker that I've ever had. I can't reward the best, I can't get rid of the worst.

—Gary Johnson, former Governor of New Mexico and Libertarian Party presidential candidate. June 14, 2011

Handout 1

Role-play cards

Company Executive

You inherited a large auto manufacturing company from your father, who in turn inherited it from his father. The company has been your family's pride and joy for as long as you can remember. It allowed you to attend a fancy private school and paved the way to college. You grew up wealthy, live in a wealthy neighborhood, and most of your friends are wealthy.

Your company competes with Ford, General Motors, and the other major auto manufacturers. You're not about to let them drive you out of business. Therefore you must keep profits high and expenses low. Your aging father expects no less. Meanwhile, your teenage daughter has been pestering you with talk of economic justice and a living wage. Your workers are real people, she says, with bills to pay and children to feed.

Before you took over for your father, representatives from the United Auto Workers used to come to the factory hoping to set up a labor union. He responded by firing anyone who supported the union and by promoting allegiance to the company through sporting leagues and holiday bonuses (extra money). He hoped to convince the workers that they benefit most when their company is strong and prosperous. As a result of these measures, none of the efforts to form a union have been successful.

To think about:

- What will be your strategy to keep expenses low and profits high (spend little, make lots)?
- How will you treat your workers? Will you listen to your daughter?
- What will you do if someone tries to form a union at your company?

Auto Worker

You work in a large auto manufacturing company, the same place your mother worked and her father too. Most of the people in your neighborhood also work there. Your spouse waits tables and looks after your children. Together, you're usually just able to make ends meet.

You're not particularly fond of attaching hubcaps for forty hours a week, fifty weeks a year, but there aren't many other jobs available. If you quit, your family could go hungry. Recently, some workers at the factory have lost their jobs and you pray that won't happen to you. Maybe if you work hard, the boss might even give you a raise.

Every once and a while, representatives from the United Auto Workers come to your workplace hoping to set up a labor union. None of their efforts have been successful. Your boss typically responds by firing anyone who supports the union, and by promoting allegiance to the company through sporting leagues and holiday bonuses (extra money). The message is always the same: workers benefit most when their company is strong and prosperous.

To think about:

- How might you try to get a raise?
- How will you avoid losing your job? What's your plan if you get fired?
- What will you do if someone tries to form a union?

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Auto Factory Simulation Rules

1. Company executives (bosses) hire workers to produce cars. Executives cannot produce their own cars.
2. Cars are produced by coloring in the paper chassis. Do not color the windows, tire whitewalls, headlight, or door handles.
3. The teacher represents customers who want to buy cars. Company executives may sell me each **properly-colored** car for 10 credits apiece.
4. Workers **do not** own the cars they produce and **cannot** sell them directly to customers. Instead, their boss pays them a wage in exchange for each car they produce.
5. Workers' wages begin at 3 credits per car, but can rise or fall. Minimum wage is 1 credit per car.
6. Each factory has only enough markers to employ four workers, so some students will end up unemployed.
7. Every five minutes, all workers—even those without a job—must pay 3 credits for food and housing. The boss's cost of living is higher, at 6 credits.
8. Each worker begins the game with 5 credits in hand, and each boss with 20. At the end, we'll see how much everyone has accumulated.

Car Cassis and Credits

Cars: Company executives receive 30–40 paper car chassis, which represent the "raw materials" needed to manufacture cars. Factory workers color in these cars to simulate production.

Credits: I give executives one strip (of 10 credits) for each completed car. The executive then tears off the appropriate number of credits to pay the worker who built it and keeps the rest as profit.

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Handout 3

$1 $1 ONE CREDIT $1 $1	$1 $1 ONE CREDIT $1 $1
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Teaching about the Sit-Down Strikes of 1936–1937

After students have participated in a simulation of an auto factory (as described on the previous pages), they'll be ready to learn about a key event in the history of labor organizing. The sit-down strikes of 1936-37 in Michigan auto factories were a watershed event in the history of labor unions for several reasons:

- The sit-down strikers pioneered a new protest tactic: occupying the workplace itself. Factory owners quickly learned not to send in bullies or try to replace employees with "scabs" because valuable machinery on the factory floor would get damaged during a physical confrontation.
- The strikes brought to the public's attention the many grievances of the workers—and won widespread support across the country for their demands for dignity, basic rights and benefits.
- The strikes increased the legitimacy of organized labor unions as a negotiation partner who could balance the power of factory managers and wealthy owners.

The union contracts that grew out of the strikes brought an end to some of the worst abuses in automobile factories—and worksites all over America. Ask students to examine the photos on **Handout 4** (p. 10), then can take turns reading the testimonials in **Handout 5** (p. 11), discussing the questions at the end. Further lessons or extension projects can draw upon the following resources:

Free Lessons, Teaching Guides, and Resources for Teachers

"No Greater Calling: The Life of Walter P. Reuther," (Walter P. Reuther Library), **reuther100.wayne.edu/index.php**

"Labor History Links," Labor and Working-Class History Association, **www.lawcha.org/wordpress**

"For Teachers," American Labor Studies Center, **www.labor-studies.org**

Kid-friendly Resources for Students

Battle of the Overpass, 1937, **www.hfmgv.org/exhibits/fmc/battle.asp**

Death of Lewis Bradford in 1937, **www.forgottenshow.net/story.html**

UAW History Timeline, **www.uaw.org/page/uaw-history**

Striking Back at General Motors

An excerpt from the Timeline at **www.uaw.org/page/uaw-history**

After the victory at Kelsey-Hayes, Victor Reuther hurried to Flint to join his brother Roy and organizer Bob Travis, where, a day earlier, on Dec. 30, 1936, workers at GM's Fisher Body plants 1 and 2 sat down.

The events in Flint were part of a larger campaign against the world's largest corporation. On Detroit's west side, Walter Reuther was busy meeting with GM workers, and on Jan. 9, 1937, workers sat down at GM's Cadillac plant, followed by workers at the nearby Fleetwood plant on Jan. 12. Though the sit-downers vacated the two west-side plants on Jan. 15, they continued with a conventional strike against the facilities.

January 1937 also saw strikes at GM plants in Pontiac, Mich.; St. Louis; Buffalo; Oakland, Calif.; Anderson, Ind.; Norwood, Ohio; Janesville, Wis., and Oshawa, Ont. By the end of the month, strikes by more than 125,000 workers had closed 50 GM plants.

Source for Handout 5: Excerpts from a 2012 article by Lorene Parshall, *Gaylord* (Mich.) *Herald Times*, and posted at the UAW website **http://www.uaw.org/articles/remembering-iconic-flint-sit-down-strike-1937**.

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Photos from a Sit-Down Strike in 1937

The caption for this 1937 photo reads, "Wives and sweethearts of the striking auto workers. Members of the Ladies Auxiliary. Flint, Michigan."

CREDIT: Sheldon Dick, USFSA/Library of Congress

Sit-down strikers in the Fisher body plant factory number three. Flint, Michigan, 1937.

CREDIT: Sheldon Dick, USFSA/Library of Congress

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Experiences on the Assembly Line, ca. 1937

What was life like in a car factory before the sit-down strikes of 1937? Here are some comments by workers and their families. Take turns reading these testimonials aloud. Then discuss some questions (below) with your classmates.

"My father would come home from work … sit down on the front porch and fall asleep … my mother would take his shoes and socks off and his feet would be bloody."

"Every once in a while you'd hear somebody scream where they was pouring steel … people would get burned … there was nobody to take care of it."

"If you tell 'em you were sick, they'd say 'Die and prove it.'"

"There wasn't a man coming out of that mill without having a couple fingers cut off … no guards or nothing on those saws."

"They just threatened you right and left … if you didn't bring in potatoes and eggs for the foreman (like some of the farmers did) … you just wouldn't work."

"Somebody would work really hard and the guy (boss) had a nephew needed a job … you were out and the nephew was in."

"It was all women in the sewing room … we had blisters on our hands when we first started … you had to stand up all the time you was sewing" [the car seat upholstery]

"At the Fisher Body (Plant) it was all piecework … if you made your money one year, they'd cut you the next … you just couldn't keep up.

"They called us communists … I didn't know anybody who was a communist … we were just fighting for our rights."

"Actually we didn't strike for money … we struck for humane treatment and recognition of the union."

Questions for Discussion

1. What sort of complaints did these workers have? Can you create categories in which to group their concerns? (Example: wages; job safety; …)
2. If you were a reporter, what evidence would you try to gather to prove (or disprove) a worker's statement? Who else would you want to interview in your investigation?
3. Are any of these problems still a concern today in the United States or in other countries? What have you seen or heard in the news about working conditions, labor unions, and labor-management negotiations?

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Women of Action and County Names: Mary Musgrove County—Why Not?

Scott L. Roberts

How did the name of places on our state maps get there? For example, some counties in the United States are named in honor of historical figures. Who do we choose to memorialize in this way, and why? Here is a lesson that can help your students learn about important women in your state's history. It also invites students to think more broadly about history, geography, and the issue of gender discrimination. Students gather evidence and then answer questions about our American culture, U.S. history, and their own values and opinions.

County Names and Historical Women

Although some researchers claim that the status of women has improved in society in general, it can be argued that in state curriculum standards and history textbooks, women are still an underrepresented group.[1] Introduce your students to this current issue by considering the names of counties in the United States. (Lesson Plan, page 14)

There are about 3,141 counties in the United States, according to the U.S. Geological Survey.[2] The total includes parishes (Louisiana), boroughs (Alaska), and independent cities (in which a city has merged with its county). (**Table A**, page 15)

About 61 of these municipalities (roughly 2 percent) were named after a woman, according to a Google webpage.[3] The list of 61 names includes Catholic saints, fictional female characters, and some disputed names.

Most of the historical women who have been memorialized in a county name did not earn the distinction for their own notable actions, but due to a familial relationship (e.g., being the daughter or spouse of a notable man). There appear to be 13 U.S. counties that were named for a historical, American woman based firmly on her own accomplishments. I'm especially interested in those 13 counties, and I've made a list of them to share with students. (**Table B**, page 16)

State History and Curriculum

The State of Georgia where I lived and taught, has 159 counties, 147 of which were named after men. Of the 12 remaining counties, four were named after Native American tribes (Cherokee, Coweta, Muscogee, and Seminole), three were named after Rivers (Chattahoochee, Chattooga, and Oconee) and two were named after concepts (Union and Liberty). There are lone counties named after an agricultural product (Peach) and a church (Rockdale). And Hart County, Georgia, is named after an energetic, patriotic woman, Nancy Hart.

At the second grade level, Georgia Performance Standards list seven Georgians whom students are required to study, the only woman being Mary Musgrove. The eighth grade standards list 45 historic individuals, five of whom are women, including Mary Musgrove and Nancy Hart.[4]

In many states, the curriculum for elementary and middle grades includes the study of notable persons in that state's history. It's likely that there are many notable women who are not written about in national textbooks, but are covered in elementary or middle level state history courses. With your students, take a second look at these notable historical women, and see whether there is a place in your state that is named after them. We had an interesting discussion in my classroom one day about Musgrove and Hart.

Mary Musgrove

Mary Musgrove (ca. 1700–1763) was of the generation that saw people of European ancestry increasing their hold on the New World. She was instrumental in establishing the Colony of Georgia. The daughter of an English trader father and Creek Indian mother, Mary learned English and Creek, as well as the cultural norms of both groups. In 1717, she married an English trader, John Musgrove, and they established a trading post on what became the future site of the city of Savannah. When the English arrived and attempted to establish the colony of Georgia, she served as the translator for James Oglethorpe and Yamacraw Chief Tomochichi and helped to keep the peace. After the colony was established, Musgrove was at the center of Indian affairs in Georgia for almost 30 years.

In her senior years, Musgrove had a dispute with the colony over a land grant. In a show of force, she brought 200 Creek Indians to Savannah to support her claim and later brought the case to an English court. Eventually, she settled with Royal Governor Henry Ellis and received St. Catherine's Island and cash to relinquish her claims. She died on the island of natural causes in 1763.[5]

Nancy Hart

Nancy Hart (ca. 1735–1830) was of the next generation, the one that fought for American Independence. She served as a patriot spy during the Revolutionary War and is rumored to have fought in the Battle of Kettle Creek. Hart has been described as being a six-foot-tall, cross-eyed "war woman" with fiery red hair.

http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/nge/Article.jsp?id=h-2876

Painting of Nancy Hart by Louis S. Glanzman (*The New Georgia Encyclopedia* online)

A famous incident involved Hart defending her home from British troops with muskets that the soldiers had carelessly placed in the corner. She often disguised herself as a simple-minded man and wandered into Tory camps and British garrisons to gather information, which she subsequently passed along to patriot authorities.[6] The State of Georgia has honored Nancy Hart in many ways, naming a town and lake (Hartwell) after her, as well as a Georgia highway. Hart County was created and named in her honor in 1853.

In Praise of Women's Contributions

Three years ago, one of my students raised her hand and asked "If Mary Musgrove was so great, how come she doesn't have a county named after her, like Nancy Hart? Was it because she was a Native American?" Surprised, I admitted that I didn't know, but that she'd brought up a great point. Was this apparent "omission" because Musgrove was a Native American? Because she was a woman? Was it due to the fact that Musgrove had a conflict with the colonial government?

In any event, the student, along with most of her classmates, argued that Mary Musgrove ought to have a county named after her. Then they volunteered several counties in the state that could be petitioned to change their names for this purpose, including Bacon, Coffee, and Union counties. The most popular choice for a name change: Peach County.

After reflecting on this "teachable moment," I created a historical inquiry[7] that would challenge students to consider some of the interesting facts and critical questions that had arisen during this single discussion.[8] The lesson plan with two handouts follows; teachers will need to create other handouts that apply to their state.

"Mary Musgrove County" in the title of this article refers to a place that exists only in our minds, as there is no county of that name. With only slight alterations, the lesson might be used in the upper elementary or middle grades in any of the 50 states. You can use it to invite students to think about notable figures in your state's history—and to contemplate how we decide who to remember, and what strivings we value.

Notes

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2. U.S. Geographic Survey, "How Many Counties are in the United States?" (Washington, DC: US Department of the Interior, 2012), **http://gallery.usgs.gov/audios/124**; "U.S. Counties," **http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/County_(United_States)**.
3. "U.S. Counties Named After Women," **http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_U.S._counties_ named_after_women**; Voice of America, "In US, Few Places Named for Women," **http://www.voanews.com/content/in-us-few-places-named-for-women/1491396.html**. Totals vary slightly from year to year.
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8. Heather Lattimer, "Challenging History: Essential Questions in the Social Studies Classroom," *Social Education* 72, no.6 (2008): 326.

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County Names and Notable Women: A Historical Inquiry Lesson Plan

Scott L. Roberts

Materials

(Only Table A and B are included here; the teacher must create the other handouts, which will be specific for your state.)

HANDOUT 1: Your state map with counties labeled

HANDOUT 2: "Counties Named After American Women" (**Table A**, page 15).

HANDOUT 3: "Counties in the U.S. that Commemorate American *Women of Action*" (**Table B**, page 16).

HANDOUT 4: A one-page biography of a notable woman in your state's history, one who is not honored with a county name .

HANDOUT 5: Biography of a person (a man, if there is no woman) for whom a county was named in your state.

Essential Questions (Inquiry)

Open the lesson by posing these questions for your students:

- What personal actions do we find commendable and notable?
- Do we value some people's contributions more because of their gender or ethnicity?
- Who chooses the names of public spaces, like a county, a library, or a park? How do they select the winners?

DAY 1 Activating Strategy (Gathering Evidence)

Ask students if they think that there are more counties named in honor of men or women in your state?

Distribute **HANDOUT 1**, which is a state map, and ask students to tally the total number of counties, and then to locate and tally counties that appear to be named for notable men, and for notable women. (This could be a quick task for students in Delaware, which has three counties. In Texas, which has 254 counties, groups of students could each research one quadrant of the state.)

Then ask students if they think that there are more counties named in honor of men or women in the country as a whole?

Distribute **HANDOUT 2**: "Counties Named After American Women" (**Table A**) and invite students to fill in the third row with data that they find about their own state.

Define the term "women of action" and discuss how recognizing them might be different from commemorating a woman due to her being a daughter or spouse of a famous man. (Keep in mind that many women, e.g., a number of First Ladies, are famous for both their own accomplishments as well as for their relationships.)

Distribute **HANDOUT 3** (**Table B**), and show students how to complete one row, using an Internet search engine and key words such as "history," [the name of the historical figure], and [the name of the state]. Assign small groups of students to complete four or five rows—working on the task for ten minutes or as homework. The whole table (18 rows) can be completed the next day when the groups share what they have found.

DAY 2 Activating Strategy (Analyzing)

Tell students that today they are going to learn about an important woman from your state's history, one who does not have a county named after her. Distribute **HANDOUT 4**.

After they've read about and discussed this notable person, students can receive **HANDOUT 5** and read about a different notable person (a man or woman) who is, in fact, memorialized in a county name in your state.

Differentiation (Communicating Conclusions)

Compare these two historical figures. Ask students why one person has been memorialized in a county name, and another has not. (There may be no clear answer to this question.)

Ask students to select counties that—in their opinion—could have their names changed to recognize the "unsung" hero. Who (do students think) should decide how a place is named?

Extension:

Have students read the biographies of two different historical figures in your state, then discuss or write about which one would be more deserving of a place name, and why.

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Table A

Counties Named After Women*

Enter the total number of counties in your state in row 3, column B. Then write down counties that were named for women (column C) and their total number. Then calculate the percent of counties in you state that are named for women (column D).**

Include counties that have been named for American women, or fictional female characters, or historical figures generally (such as Catholic saints who were women).

A Geographic Unit	B Total Counties	C Counties Named for a Woman	D Percent Named for a Woman
1. United States	3,141	61	1.9% which rounds to 2%
2. State of Georgia	159	1 Hart County	0.6% which rounds to 1%
3. Name of your state			%

Notes

* The term "counties" includes parishes, boroughs, and independent cities. See "U.S. Counties Named After Women," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_U.S._counties_ named_after_women. National totals vary slightly from year to year.

** Datum in column C (counties commemorating a woman) divided by datum in column B (all counties in that geographic area).

Here is a map of the 254 counties in Texas, to give you an idea of what county borders look like. But not every state has a lot of counties. Delaware has only three counties. (**Source**: http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/maps/texas_map.html

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Table B

U.S. Counties that Commemorate American Women of Action

Compiled by Scott L. Roberts

Research the biographies of these notatble women, then fill in the third column. Cite your sources. States and counties often have history webpages.

Name of County and State (or parish, borough, etc.)	The Notable Woman (birth-death dates)	Her Notable Actions and Accomplishments (source of information)
1. Angelina County, Texas	Angelina (n.d. 1600s)	
2. Barton County, Kansas	Clara Barton (1821–1912)	
3. Bremer County, Iowa	Fredrika Bremer (1801–1865)	
4. Doña Ana County, New Mexico	Doña Ana Robledo (1604–1680)	
5. Florence County, Wisconsin	Florence Julst (n.d. 1800s)	
6. Haines Borough, Alaska	Francina E. Haines (1819–1886)	
* EXAMPLE * 7. Hart County, Georgia	Nancy Hart (ca. 1735–1830)	Patriot, spy, and armed resister during the American Revolution. Source: www.georgiaencyclopedia.org
8. Josephine County, Oregon	Virginia Josephine Rollins Ort (1800s)	
9. Louisa County, Iowa	Louisa Massey (n.d., 1800s)	
10. Marinette County, Wisconsin	Marinette Marie Antoinette Chevalier (1784–1865)	
11. Montour County, Pennsylvania	Madame Montour (ca. 1667 or 1685–ca. 1753)	
12. Pocahontas County, Iowa	Pocahontas (ca. 1595–1617)	
13. Pocahontas County, West Virginia	Pocahontas (ca. 1595–1617)	

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