



# LESSON PLAN

WEST VIRGINIA MINE WARS MUSEUM

[wvminewars.org](http://wvminewars.org)

401 Mate Street Matewan, West Virginia 25678

---

## ***Company Towns in West Virginia***

In the early 1900s, most West Virginia coal miners and their families lived in “company towns.” Company towns were built and owned by the coal companies, which meant that the company owned the houses, the store, and even the churches.

In the late 1800s, the United States changed from a nation of mostly farms and small towns to a nation of factories, trains, and large cities. The factories and trains burned coal to fuel their engines, and people in cities burned coal to heat their homes. Companies searched for new underground seams of coal and found them in the mountains of West Virginia. The companies then had to build new houses to give the miners and their families a place to live and a “company store” to give them a place to buy food, clothes, and the tools they needed to mine coal.

Because miners had to buy their tools from the company, many owed money to the company before they started mining coal. Companies gave miners what was called scrip. Scrip were coins that the company made that could only be spent at the company store. Some companies had a rule that miners and their families had to buy everything at the company store.

In the early 1900s, companies dug more coal than the trains and factories needed. Companies lowered their prices and hoped the trains and factories would buy their coal. As they lowered their prices, they lowered the wages they paid to the miners. This meant miners had less and less money for food and clothes. Miners got paid for each full cart of coal they brought out of the mine. Because the company paid them less for each cart, they had to dig more and more coal. Companies made less money selling coal and raised prices on food and clothing at the store to make up the difference.

The miners in southern West Virginia joined together to form a union to demand higher wages. The name of the union was the United Mine Workers of America. The mine bosses decided to keep them from joining the union. The mine bosses told miners and their families that if they joined the unions that they would have to leave their houses and could not shop in the company store. Miners and their families had hard choices to make. Should they keep working longer hours for less money, or should they join the union and be thrown out of their house?

Owning the workers’ houses gave the companies more power over their employees.



# LESSON PLAN

WEST VIRGINIA MINE WARS MUSEUM

wvminewars.org

401 Mate Street Matewan, West Virginia 25678

---

## ***Company Town Primary Source***

In 1913, Mrs. Inez L. Smith testified in the United States Senate about the hard times that miners and their families were having in the company towns.

Senator MARTINE. Now, you keep house and you have a family; what is your experience with reference to household commodities that you are obliged to buy for your supplies? Where do you buy them?

Mrs. SMITH. We have to buy them at the company's store.

Senator MARTINE. Why?

Mrs. SMITH. Because they don't allow us to buy from any other store.

Senator MARTINE. Was there any other store there?

Mrs. SMITH. Yes, sir; I could go to Eskdale, go on the 7 o'clock train, and back on the 11, and buy anything I wanted, and it only cost me 15 cents down there and 15 cents back.

Senator MARTINE. How far is that?

Mrs. SMITH. About 5 miles.

Senator MARTINE. So there was no other alternative for you to supply your home necessities practically except to buy from the company's store. Of course, there are farmers around there who raise potatoes and sweet corn and things like that?

Mrs. SMITH. They don't allow us to buy from the wagons.

Senator MARTINE. Couldn't a peddler come in?

Mrs. SMITH. He could come along the country road, but they don't allow you to get things from them if they know it.

Senator MARTINE. Then it is the rule, is it, that the farmers could bring their commodities in and sell to the store, but you must buy them from the store and not from the farmers?

Mrs. SMITH. Yes, sir.

Senator MARTINE. And that is true with reference to peddlers?

Mrs. SMITH. Yes, sir.

Senator MARTINE. Now, madam, in comparison with the prices at the other stores, the independent stores, how much difference do you find in the price of commodities—of flour, if you choose?

Mrs. SMITH. Well, we paid \$1 a sack at the company's store.

Senator MARTINE. That is 24 pounds?

Mrs. SMITH. Yes, sir; and 75 cents at the individual stores.

Senator MARTINE. What character of flour; both alike?

Mrs. SMITH. Yes, sir; just the same—

Senator MARTINE. The same brand?

Mrs. SMITH. Yes, sir.



# LESSON PLAN

WEST VIRGINIA MINE WARS MUSEUM

wvminewars.org

401 Mate Street Matewan, West Virginia 25678



New camp top of mountain, Kaymoor Mine No. 1, January 1920. Source: Sharon Brown, *Kay Moor: Historic Resource Study* (1990), p. 157.



Source: Leifur Magnusson, *Housing by Employers in the United States*, p. 72.

FIG. 27.—THREE-ROOM COTTAGE IN A MINING TOWN IN KENTUCKY.

Cost in 1912-13, \$425 (33 built at one time). Rent, \$8 per month. Heated by grate. Hydrant water. No modern improvements.





# LESSON PLAN

WEST VIRGINIA MINE WARS MUSEUM

wvminewars.org

401 Mate Street Matewan, West Virginia 25678



FIG. 18.—GROUP OF HOUSES IN BITUMINOUS COAL REGION OF PENNSYLVANIA.

Note the placing of houses in rows on hillside and the uniformity of architecture; also, all houses are painted red with white trim. Single houses are placed in one row, double houses in another. The larger out-building in the foreground is an outside bathhouse and laundry, but has no modern equipment in it. Each family has 4 rooms in both double and single houses, 2 rooms upstairs and 2 downstairs. Double houses rent for \$8 per month for each family; single houses about \$8.50.



Company Store Scrip

NR&P Stores scrip for Kay Moor, Fayette County, West Virginia



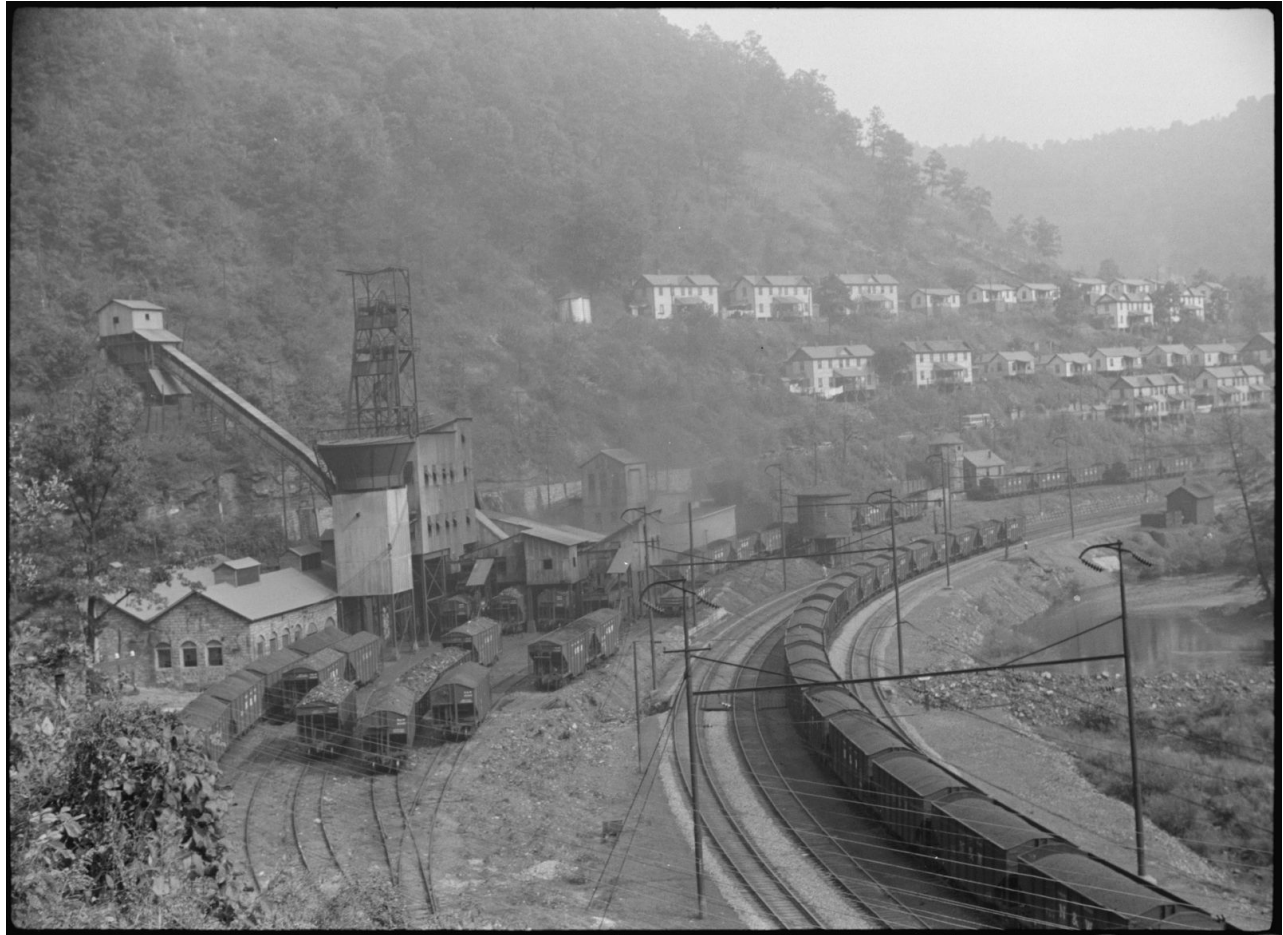
# LESSON PLAN

WEST VIRGINIA MINE WARS MUSEUM

[wwminewars.org](http://wwminewars.org)

401 Mate Street      Matewan, West Virginia      25678

---



1938 photograph of Caples, McDowell County, West Virginia, by Marion Post Wolcott. Library of Congress.



# LESSON PLAN

WEST VIRGINIA MINE WARS MUSEUM

wvminewars.org

401 Mate Street Matewan, West Virginia 25678

---

Writing Exercise: Think about what you have learned about the coal company towns of the early 1900s in West Virginia by reading about them, reading testimony from a woman who lived in a company town, and looking at the photographs and artifacts from that time. For this exercise, you will use what you have learned to complete sentences. Here is an example:

Companies looked for coal in West Virginia because the new factories and trains used more coal than the old mines in other states could supply.

The companies built the coal towns because \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_.

The companies built the coal towns but \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_.

The companies built the coal towns so \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_.

Miners and their families had a tough time because \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_.

Miners and their families had a tough time but \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_.

Miners and their families had a tough time so \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_.

Miners did not like the company store because \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_.

Miners did not like the company store but \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_.

Miners did not like the company store so \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_.



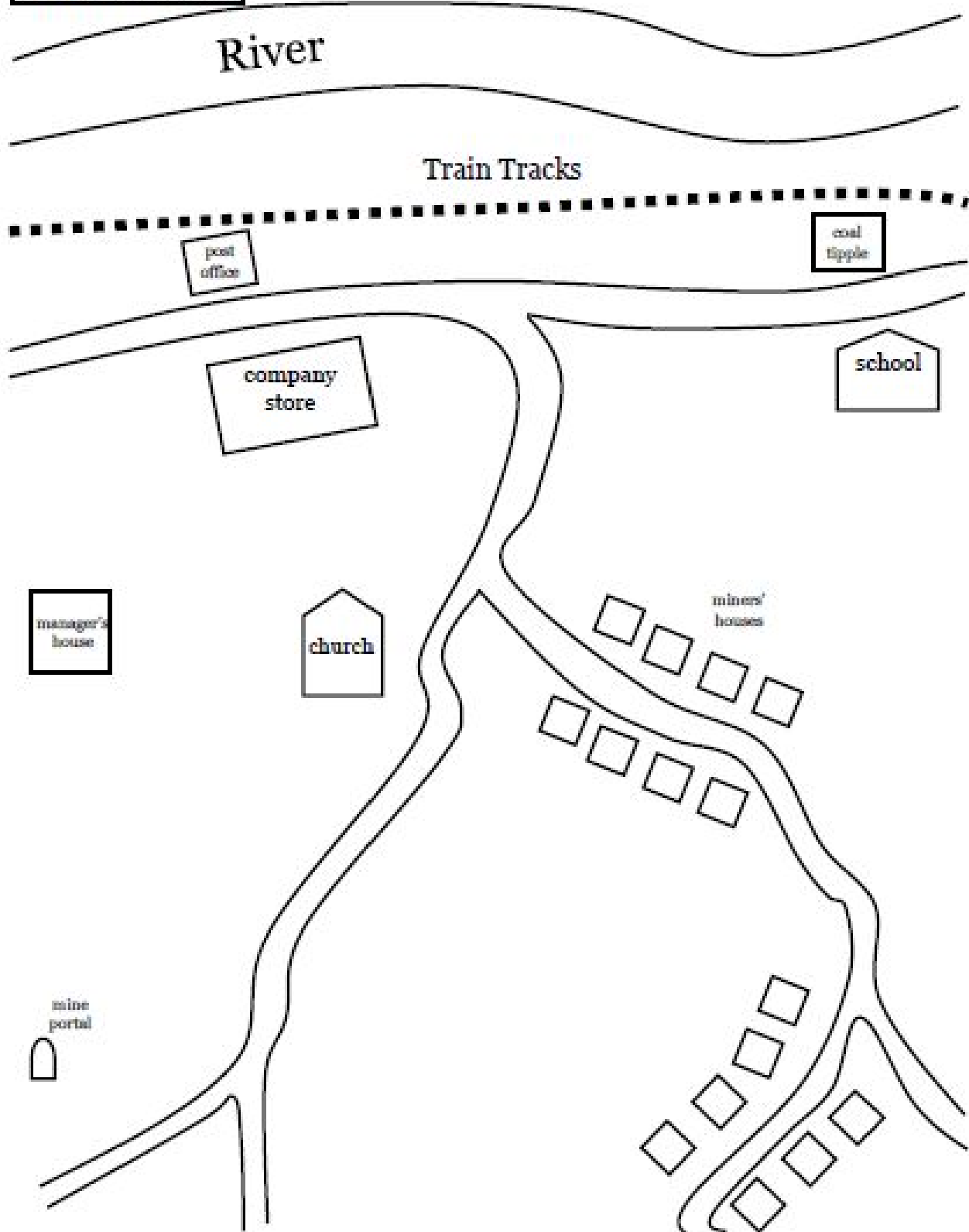
# LESSON PLAN

WEST VIRGINIA MINE WARS MUSEUM

[wvminewars.org](http://wvminewars.org)

401 Mate Street Matewan, West Virginia 25678

## Company Town Map





# LESSON PLAN

WEST VIRGINIA MINE WARS MUSEUM

[wwminewars.org](http://wwminewars.org)

401 Mate Street Matewan, West Virginia 25678

---

Company Town Map Exercise: Look at the map on the previous page. Imagine what life in this town was like.

Where did the miners go on most days? Where did the miners' wives go on most days? Where did the miners' children go on most days? Where did the manager go on most days?

Trains passed the town several times a day. Why? What did the trains carry?

Now imagine you became the president of the coal company. What would you change about the town?

Use a pencil to make changes to the town map. What would you add? What would the miners like to be in their town? What would the miners' wives like? What would the children like? What is missing?





# LESSON PLAN

WEST VIRGINIA MINE WARS MUSEUM

wvminewars.org

401 Mate Street Matewan, West Virginia 25678

---

## **Optional Historical Background/Context Resources**

- e-WV “As Mining Boomed, Small Coal Camps Became Company Towns”: <https://www.wvencyclopedia.org/media/29154>
- e-WV “A Woman’s Life in a Company Coal Town was Hard”: <https://www.wvencyclopedia.org/media/29155>
- PBS, The Mine Wars: “The Coal Town System”: [The Mine Wars: The Coal Town System](#)

## **West Virginia Content Standards (4th Grade):**

### *West Virginia History*

**SS.4.17:** Analyze the impact of West Virginia’s geography on transportation, settlement, jobs, clothing, food, shelter, services, and interaction with others outside the state.

**SS.4.19:** Pose, research, and answer student-generated questions relating to West Virginia (e.g. primary source documents, magazines, online resources, etc.)

### *Geography*

**SS 4.11:** Plan and construct maps to demonstrate the effect of geographic conditions on historical processes, practices, and events

**SS 4.19:** Compare and contrast the physical, economic and political changes to America caused by geographic conditions and human interventions (transportation and railroad).

## **Sources:**

United States. Congress. Senate. Committee on Education and Labor. *Conditions in the Paint Creek district, West Virginia*. Part 1. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1913.

Page 657. Accessed at:

[https://www.google.com/books/edition/Conditions\\_in\\_the\\_Paint\\_Creek\\_District\\_W/HQM9AAAAYAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0](https://www.google.com/books/edition/Conditions_in_the_Paint_Creek_District_W/HQM9AAAAYAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0)

Photograph of Kay Moor scrip, National Parks Service, New River Gorge National Park website, accessed at:

<https://www.nps.gov/media/photo/gallery-item.htm?pg=6342271&id=C725B0D3-155D-451F-6784DC3DC26AD1AB&gid=C3F7F6E7-155D-451F-6787298A742C4106>

e-WV, “Company Towns”: <https://www.wvencyclopedia.org/articles/1491>

Source: Housing by Employers in the United States, By Leifur Magnusson. Accessed at:

<https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=REkAAAAAYAAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PA7&dq=west+virginia+company+town+layout&ots=Edwwne3Fng&sig=9IzzAOjsCII4qh8I8TG3iRf9afQ#v=onepage&q>



# LESSON PLAN

WEST VIRGINIA MINE WARS MUSEUM

[wwminewars.org](http://wwminewars.org)

401 Mate Street Matewan, West Virginia 25678

---

Marion Post Wolcott, Caples, West Virginia, photograph, 1938, Library of Congress.  
Accessed at: <https://www.loc.gov/item/2017752554/>