Lesson 2: Immigration and Migration to the Coal Camps

Objectives:
- Introduce students to the diverse nature of coal camps and the significance of immigration and migration into the coal camps of southern West Virginia.
- Students will analyze the evolution of the labor movement in southern West Virginia, and the essential role that migration and immigration played in union organizing.

Materials Needed:
- Student Handout 1: *Exile Song* by Stornelli D'Esilio
- Student Handout 2: *One Way Ticket* by Langston Hughes
- Art supplies (paper, markers, colored pencils)

Warm Up/Introduction:
The coal camps of Southern West Virginia were an incredibly diverse mix of people born locally, immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe, and African Americans often from the Deep South. This labor force was created not only because workers came from all over seeking opportunity, it was also encouraged by coal companies who hoped that a workforce that was divided along ethnic, racial, and linguistic lines would have more difficulty organizing and uniting to struggle for better working and living conditions.

Introduce that the class will be discussing "outsiders" and how those who were meant to continue in that role had to play an integral part in the labor movement. It's also a good opportunity to raise the topic of immigrants and why they came to West Virginia to work in poor conditions.

Activity 1: Introduce students to the *Exile Song* by Stornelli D'Esillio:
- What did this song mean to the people who sang it? Why would it have been so popular?
- What themes are being discussed throughout the poem?
- How might this affect how these workers understood their place in the coalfields?
- Is the term "exile" here a good or a bad term?
- How might experiences of immigrants have differed from those miners and their families who were born in the United States?

- Why did so many immigrants come from places in Europe to the coalfields?

Activity 2: Introduce students to Langston Hughes' *One Way Ticket*:
*While this was written after the Mine Wars, the poem captures the forces driving African American migration from the South.

- What forces are driving this migration (push and pull factors?) that are described in the poem?
- How is this similar or different from the factors affecting Southern and Eastern European migration?
- How would these differences make it hard for workers to join together to organize for better wages? What practical difficulties might they face? (language, culture, different treatment?)
- Compare these two sources, what were the similarities and differences? Does this tell us anything about the cultures that created them, and how they might experience and resist the oppressive environment of coal camps?

(Synchronous) Facilitate a class or small group discussion using the student handouts and guiding questions
(Asynchronous) Instruct students to analyze the song and poem, review the guiding questions, and journal some of their answers to present them to the class or submit them to the teacher.

Activity 3: Making Strike Posters!
This activity challenges students to make signs to encourage joining a labor union *without using words.*

Students are directed to make a poster to encourage their fellow workers and families to join the strike! However, remind students that there were real linguistic challenges of organizing in the coalfields because many miners did not speak English, and many could not read.

Therefore, students need to think about ways to communicate the challenges of coal camp life and coal mining by using symbols and pictures.

(You may need to brainstorm what kinds of symbols might be useful for students and then give them supplies to make their own signs.)

Wrap-up questions for further discussion:
- What makes symbols universal?
- What does this activity teach us about organizing in the coalfields?

- How would things have been different if union organizers had not included immigrants or African Americans in organizing the coalfields?
- How do you think the ideas expressed in the poem and song in this unit have affected the ways that people might have tried to organize their communities?

Historical Context/Background Resources:
- (Songs) For an in-depth analysis of music in the coalfields, we recommend [Blair Pathways: A Musical Exploration of America's Largest Labor Uprising](#).
- (Podcast, 31:07) *Black in Appalachia*, Episode 3, [Black Coal Miners and the Great Migration](#)
- (Reading) *[They Came by the Thousands: West Virginia's Immigrants](#)*

For more resources on migration and immigration in southern West Virginia, please visit our website at www.wvminewars.com

WV 8th Grade Curriculum Standards:
SS.8.23: Demonstrate an understanding of major social, political, and economic developments that took place in West Virginia during the second half of the nineteenth century. (Explain the significance of the increased immigration into the United State in the late nineteenth century to West Virginia, including cultural and economic contributions of immigrants, opportunities and struggles experienced by immigrants, increased racial hostility and the effect of racial and ethnic diversity on national identity)
SS.8.24 Demonstrate an understanding of West Virginia's development during the early twentieth century. (Analyze the evolution of the labor movement in West Virginia. Summarize the progressive reform movement in West Virginia.)
SS.8.7 Correlate West Virginia economic conditions with the effects on its citizens (e.g., employment, population, migration, and health).
SS.8.8: Analyze the impact of absentee ownership, renewable and nonrenewable natural resources, labor unionization and the development of infrastructure on the economic growth of West Virginia

Student Handout #1:

Stornelli D'esilio (Exile Songs)
By Pietro Gori (1895), translated into English
by Alessandro Portelli

Italian exiles, we venture on our way with no
regrets or fears

Chorus:
Our homeland is the whole world, our law is
freedom and a rebel thought is in our hearts.

As we raised the throngs of the poor
we were banished from every land

(Chorus)

Wherever the exploited rebel
we will find hosts of brethren

(Chorus)

As we roamed over land and sea
we left our loved ones for an ideal

(Chorus)

We travel through the sorrows of the masses
forerunners of the nation of humankind

(Chorus)

But your exiles, Italy, shall return
to wave the torch of rights (Chorus).

Guiding Questions:

● What did this song mean to the
people who sang it? Why would it
have been so popular?
● What themes are being discussed
throughout the poem?
● How might this affect how these
workers understood their place in
the coalfields?
● Is the term "exile" here a good or a
bad term?
● How might experiences of
immigrants have differed from
those miners and their families
who were born in the United
States?
● Why did so many immigrants come
from places in Europe to the
coalfields?

Student Handout #2

One Way Ticket
By Langston Hughes (1949)

I pick up my life And take it with me And I put it down in Chicago, Detroit,
Buffalo, Scranton, Any place that is
North and East
And not Dixie.
I pick up my life
And take it on the train
To Los Angeles, Bakersfield, Seattle, Oakland, Salt Lake Any place that is
North and West
And not South.
I am fed up
With Jim Crow laws,
People who are cruel
And afraid,
Who lynch and run,
Who are scared of me
And me of them.
I pick up my life
And take it away
On a one-way ticket
Gone up North,
Gone out West,
Gone!

Guiding Questions:
- What forces are driving this migration (push and pull factors?) that are described in the poem?
- How is this similar or different from the factors affecting Southern and Eastern European migration?
- How would these differences make it hard for workers to join together to organize for better wages? What practical difficulties might they face? (language, culture, different treatment?)
- Compare these two sources, what were the similarities and differences? Does this tell us anything about the cultures that created them, and how they might experience and resist the oppressive environment of coal camps?