Information for Teachers: The Haymarket Affair

Learning Objectives: As a result of participating in these activities related to the Haymarket Affair, students will gain knowledge about the causes of the riot, the resulting trial, and the pardon issued by Governor Peter Altgeld. In addition, students will gain skill in writing persuasive essays on the issues involved.

Anticipation Guide for The Haymarket Affair: For each of this unit’s student pages, you may choose to have students complete an Anticipation Guide and conduct a follow-up whole-class discussion prior to beginning work on the student page activities.

Video Clip from City of the Century (PBS, The American Experience): The railroad strike of 1877 is described in a 6-minute clip beginning at approximately 1:48 to 1:54 (Part 2). The Haymarket Affair is described in a 20-minute clip beginning at approximately 2:20 to 2:40 (Part 2). Note: You may want to wait to show this clip until after students have completed the following activities.

Student Activities for the Haymarket Affair

First, students will work independently to obtain information on Chicago inventors and businessmen. Each student will use the information found to complete an I Chart (“Made in Chicago”). The last column asks students to make a judgment about whether the person would have been a good employer. This last column should be the basis of a whole-class follow-up discussion.

To gain an overview of the Haymarket Affair, students will read the Chicago Historical Society’s “Haymarket Affair Chronology.” You may want to ask small groups to construct a timeline depicting the sequence of events.

Students will read Albert Parsons’ autobiography independently. Before they begin reading, you should remind them that Parsons had a goal in writing this autobiography and that his presentation of his life may differ from the way it would be depicted in an encyclopedia. Students should be asked to try to determine Parsons’ goal. They should record this in their Learning Logs and complete the National Archives Document Analysis worksheet. Finally, students should write a paragraph in their Learning Logs to respond to the question, “Did Parsons achieve his goal?”

Next, each student will discuss Parsons with a partner and develop a list of four questions they would ask Parsons if they were newspaper reporters who were allowed to interview him. These questions should be recorded in the students’ Learning Logs.

Students will continue to work with their partners to explore the “Dramas of Haymarket” (Chicago Historical Society). You should ask them to pay special attention to the testimony of Police Inspector John Bonfield and Mayor Carter Harrison. After reading, the partners should complete the Discussion Web on the verdict. To do this, they must develop a list of reasons the verdict was just and a list of reasons it was unjust.
The whole class will debate the verdict based on the partners’ Discussion Webs. (You may want to ask the students to participate in a formal debate on this question.)

The writing task for this part of the unit is a persuasive essay. Each student will read Governor Peter Altgeld’s 1893 “Statement of Pardon,” which explains why he pardoned the defendants who were still living. The students will use a Persuasive Essay Graphic Organizer to plan their essays that will respond to the question, “Was Altgeld right or wrong in issuing this pardon?”

The final activity of this part of the unit is an analysis of a political cartoon published in the Chicago Tribune, “The Friend of Mad Dogs.” Students will complete the National Archives Cartoon Analysis worksheet. A follow-up whole-class discussion will focus on the assumptions about people revealed by the cartoon.

Assessment: The primary assessment for this part of the unit is the development of the arguments contained in students’ essays regarding Governor Altgeld’s pardon. An adapted Spandel Informational rubric or an ISBE rubric for persuasive writing should be used.