

# **The Great Railroad Strike of 1886**

*A view into the struggle of laborer vs. boss of the late 1800's*

Grade Level: 11<sup>th</sup> Grade

Developed for Teaching with Primary Sources from the Library of Congress:  
“Not Just Flyover Country: Exploring Kansas History through Primary Sources”, 2016

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## **Overview**

The late 1800's was filled with turmoil between people in charge and the laborers. Dubbed the “Gilded Age,” this was a time when the “common worker” banded together to show their bosses that they stood together for better work conditions and pay. This lesson focuses on the Great Railroad Strike of 1886 and how it not only affected the nation but Kansas as well. It also puts it all in context of the mood of the time period.

## **Standards**

### **Kansas History, Government and Social Studies**

Standard 1 – Choices of consequences.

Benchmark 1.3 – The student will investigate examples of causes and consequences of particular choices and connect those choices with contemporary issues.

Standard 2 – Individuals have rights and responsibilities.

Benchmark 2.4 – The student will use his/her understanding of rights and responsibilities to address contemporary issues.

### **Kansas College and Career Ready Standards**

Reading Standards for History 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade

RH. 11-12.2 – Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.

Writing Standards for History 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade

WHST. 11-12.2 – Write informative/explanatory texts, including the narration of historical events, scientific procedures/experiments, or technical processes.

Speaking and Listening Standards

SL. 11-12.4 – Present information, finding, and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective, such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning, alternative or opposing perspectives, are appropriate to purpose, audience, and a range of formal and informal tasks.

## **Objectives**

### **Content**

- The student will summarize how the railroad strike of 1886 effected the nation and the state of Kansas

### **Skills**

- The students will categorize documents by chronological order to see the flow of events of the strike

## **Compelling Questions**

1. What issues had laborers wanting to strike?
2. How did the Great Railroad Strike of 1886 effect Kansas?
3. What issues of today are similar to the issues of the late 1800's?

## Resource Chart

Image	Description	Citation	URL
<p data-bbox="186 302 326 331"><b>Image #1</b></p> 	<p data-bbox="435 302 886 443">1886 Railroad Strike Picture -Shows military force protecting train from the railroad workers union.</p>	<p data-bbox="914 302 1224 913"><i>Nebinger, G. J., Artist. The great railway strike-- attempt to start a freight train, under a guard of United States marshals, at East St. Louis, Illinois / from a sketch by G. J. Nebinger. 1886. Image. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <a href="https://www.loc.gov/item/90707123/">https://www.loc.gov/item/90707123/</a>. (Accessed July 20, 2016.)</i></p>	<p data-bbox="1247 302 1395 443"><a href="https://www.loc.gov/item/90707123/">https://www.loc.gov/item/90707123/</a></p>
<p data-bbox="186 926 363 989"><b>Newspaper Article #1</b></p>	<p data-bbox="435 926 886 1024">Wichita, Kansas newspaper from March 12, 1886. Article on the railroad strike of 1886.</p>	<p data-bbox="914 926 1224 1178"><i>Wichita daily eagle. (Wichita, Kan.), 12 March 1886. Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers. Lib. of Congress.</i></p>	<p data-bbox="1247 926 1395 1213"><a href="http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045789/1886-03-12/ed-1/seq-1/#">http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045789/1886-03-12/ed-1/seq-1/#</a></p>
<p data-bbox="186 1220 363 1283"><b>Newspaper Article #2</b></p>	<p data-bbox="435 1220 886 1360">Wheeling, West Virginia newspaper from March 20, 1886. Article on the railroad strike of 1886.</p>	<p data-bbox="914 1220 1224 1535"><i>The Wheeling daily intelligencer. (Wheeling, W. Va.), 20 March 1886. Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers. Lib. of Congress.</i></p>	<p data-bbox="1247 1220 1395 1507"><a href="http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84026844/1886-03-20/ed-1/seq-1/">http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84026844/1886-03-20/ed-1/seq-1/</a></p>
<p data-bbox="186 1547 363 1610"><b>Newspaper Article #3</b></p>	<p data-bbox="435 1547 886 1688">New York City, New York newspaper from March 28, 1886. Article on the railroad strike of 1886.</p>	<p data-bbox="914 1547 1224 1799"><i>The sun. (New York [N. Y.]), 28 March 1886. Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers. Lib. of Congress.</i></p>	<p data-bbox="1247 1547 1395 1835"><a href="http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030272/1886-03-28/ed-1/seq-1/">http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030272/1886-03-28/ed-1/seq-1/</a></p>

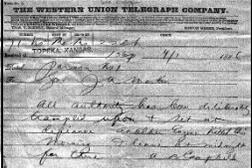
Image	Description	Citation	URL
<b>Newspaper Article #4</b>	WaKeeney, Kansas newspaper from April 3, 1886. Article on the railroad strike of 1886.	<i>Western Kansas world. (WaKeeney, Kan.), 03 April 1886. Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers. Lib. of Congress.</i>	<a href="http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82015485/1886-04-03/ed-1/seq-3/">http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82015485/1886-04-03/ed-1/seq-3/</a>
<b>Newspaper Article #5</b>	WaKeeney, Kansas newspaper from April 10, 1886. Article on the railroad strike of 1886.	<i>Western Kansas world. (WaKeeney, Kan.), 10 April 1886. Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers. Lib. of Congress.</i>	<a href="http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82015485/1886-04-10/ed-1/seq-3/">http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82015485/1886-04-10/ed-1/seq-3/</a>
<b>Video Clip #1</b>	Clip about striking workers at Homestead Steel Mill in Pennsylvania. This clip does not deal with the 1886 railroad strike, but does show relations between labor and boss during this time period.	<i>History Channel</i>  <i>TV Show: Men Who Built America</i>	<a href="http://www.history.com/topics/andrew-carnegie/videos/homestead-strike">http://www.history.com/topics/andrew-carnegie/videos/homestead-strike</a>
	A.B. Campbell, Kansas Adjutant General, of Parsons, telegrams Kansas Governor John Martin, of Topeka, stating that another railroad engine has been killed and that he is leaving to investigate. This is in response to the local authority's request for National Guard troops during the railroad strike in the three state area.	<i>Kansas State Historical Society</i> <b>Item Number: 211280</b>	<a href="http://www.kansasmemory.org/item/211280">http://www.kansasmemory.org/item/211280</a>

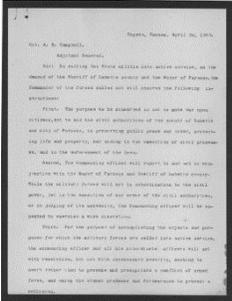
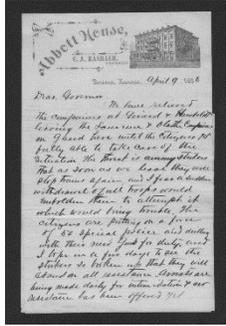
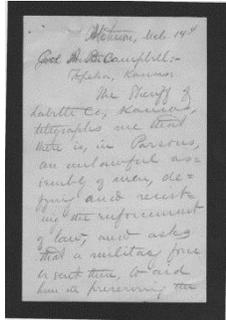
Image	Description	Citation	URL
<p data-bbox="186 233 391 264"><b>Document #4</b></p> 	<p data-bbox="435 233 894 1060">Kansas Governor John Martin of Topeka writes to the adjutant general with detailed instructions on how to proceed when calling the state militia into active service. The Sheriff of Labette County and the Mayor of Parsons, Kansas, requested the militia presence in response to striking railroad workers. The governor had been notified of disturbances in Parsons related to the 1886 railroad strike which the governor believed to be settled. In this letter, the governor clearly states "The purpose to be subserved is not to make war upon citizens, but to aid the civil authorities of the county of Labette and the city of Parsons, in preserving peace and order?"</p>	<p data-bbox="917 233 1187 331"><i>Kansas State Historical Society</i> Item Number: 211986</p>	<p data-bbox="1247 233 1403 415"><a href="http://www.kansasmemory.org/item/211986">http://www.kansasmemory.org/item/211986</a></p>
<p data-bbox="186 1073 391 1104"><b>Document #5</b></p> 	<p data-bbox="435 1073 894 1539">The Kansas adjutant general at Parsons sends a telegram to Governor John Martin of Topeka asking the governor for permission to furnish the mayor of Parsons with one hundred guns to preserve peace in the city. A strike of railroad workers on the Missouri Pacific Railroad at Parsons led company and city officials to ask the governor to arm citizens and for call out the militia.</p>	<p data-bbox="917 1073 1187 1171"><i>Kansas State Historical Society</i> Item Number: 211993</p>	<p data-bbox="1247 1073 1403 1255"><a href="http://www.kansasmemory.org/item/211993">http://www.kansasmemory.org/item/211993</a></p>

Image	Description	Citation	URL
<p data-bbox="186 233 412 264"><b>Document #6</b></p> 	<p data-bbox="435 233 889 699">Adjutant General Colonel A. B. Campbell of Parsons, Kansas, writes Kansas Governor John Martin of Topeka. He informs the governor that citizens are putting together a force of fifty special police to respond to striking railroad workers. Railroad employees at Parsons were striking and the governor granted permission to provide citizens with arms to keep the peace.</p>	<p data-bbox="917 233 1224 331"><i>Kansas State Historical Society</i> Item Number: 213040</p>	<p data-bbox="1247 233 1403 411"><a href="http://www.kansasmemory.org/item/213040">http://www.kansasmemory.org/item/213040</a></p>
<p data-bbox="186 711 412 743"><b>Document #7</b></p> 	<p data-bbox="435 711 889 1392">In this letter, Kansas Governor John Martin is asking Colonel Campbell to travel to Parsons, Kansas, to determine if military support is necessary to control unrest related to the railroad strike. Governor Martin has been sympathetic with the strikers and urges the Colonel to find a peaceful settlement. In February 1885, railroad shop workers walked off the job because of a cut in pay and reduced hours of work. Governor Martin was able to negotiate a settlement to the strike but problems continued throughout Kansas, Missouri, and Texas.</p>	<p data-bbox="917 711 1224 810"><i>Kansas State Historical Society</i> Item Number: 211915</p>	<p data-bbox="1247 711 1403 890"><a href="http://www.kansasmemory.org/item/211915">http://www.kansasmemory.org/item/211915</a></p>

## Lesson Procedure

### Day 1

1. Have projected onto your projector screen **Image #1 1886 Railroad Strike** and do not have the title of the picture on the screen. Do not tell the students what the picture is. On a piece of paper, have each student write down five descriptive things they see in the picture. If they need help, ask questions such as “What are the people doing?” “Are there a couple different groups of people?” “What are the people holding?” And other questions that help them dissect the picture to figure out what is happening.

2. After they find the descriptive things in the picture, then have the students pair with one other person (team of 2) and have them write a paragraph, only 5-7 sentences, on the story that is going on. They can be as creative as possible. See what they come up with.
3. Have them share. Then explain the picture. (Read the description on the **Image #1 1886 Railroad Strike** in resource chart and on the Library of Congress webpage.)
4. Discuss how they can read “between the lines” in a picture to figure out what is going on. Also discuss the troubles going on between the boss and laborers during this time. (This lesson should go into your “Gilded Age” section, so the students should already have a background of this.)
5. Have the students now split the students evenly into 5 groups. If the students have laptops or other devices, give them one of the URL’s to one of the **Newspaper Articles**. (Each group has a different article.) Have them read the newspaper to find the information about the railroad strike. The URL is to the correct page for them to read. Each student needs to pull up the **newspaper article** on their own computer in each group so they are all looking for the information. (If students don’t have technology, then you can print out the newspaper.)
6. Once they find out the information, have them write a Tweet of what they read. Let the students use internet grammar and the 140 character limit. Also ask if the students could find a political bent in the article. (Is the article portraying a side in a better view?)
7. Have the groups share what they read. Then on the board, put a timeline of each paper so the students can follow which event went first; let them follow the action.
8. To close out the day, have the students go back to their original seats and ask them what events are happening in today’s world that seem similar to the articles that they read. Is there something to learn from what they read?

## Day 2

1. Take the first five minutes to remind them what they discussed yesterday.
2. Have the **Video Clip #1 Men Who Built America** ready to show. Explain to the students that the video clip they are about to watch isn’t about the 1886 railroad strike, but is all about what happens when relations between boss and laborers come to a dangerous conclusion. Have them watch the 4 minute video.
3. Ask the students if there are any instances today that are similar to labor strikes of the late 1800’s.
4. Break students up into seven even groups.
5. Give each group a copy of one of the **documents** from the Kansas State Historical Society. (Each group has a different **document**.) Have them read it together. Have them underline or highlight the information they think is surprising or important to the overall story of the strike.
6. On the board, the students will now create a timeline of events to see the flow of the story. Have them figure out which **document** came first in chronological order. Write the date of the **document** then a sentence summarizing each one

underneath it. When the group goes up to write the date, also have them explain what the **document** is to the class.

7. Now take a vote of the class to ask which **document** is the most surprising to them and why.
8. Now after looking at **Image #1 1886 Railroad Strike**, reading the **newspaper articles**, watching **Video Clip #1 Men Who Built America**, and analyzing the **documents**, write these three names on the board: LABORERS, BOSS, and CITIZENS. Have each student go up to the board, one at a time, and have them vote for who they think was affected the most by the strikes. Not only this strike, but during this time in general. Have them give just a brief explanation why.
9. To close the lesson, have each student analyze the lesson by having them write down two key things that we should take from this lesson and use it in today's world. Also have them write what rights were being violated during this time of the events that they read.

### **Assessment**

After day 1, the assessment is to see if they can connect the issues from then with today's world. Do that by just informal conversation, try to get everyone involved.

After day 2, the lesson should be complete. The assessment is similar to the end of day 1, but you are now having them write out their thoughts.

To assess that they learned this lesson, the teacher could put some of the things on the lesson onto the test. You could have some questions based on the lesson or have them write down what they remember from the lesson.

### **For the Teacher**

#### **Materials Needed**

Copies of **Documents #1 – #7**. It might be a good idea to laminate each document to decrease waste. When students need to mark on them, just have them use a white board marker so they can erase after.