Steel and Struggle

Industrial growth and the workers who powered it

6-12.US1.51 "Evaluate the impact of industrialization and laissez-faire policies on labor."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two ways industrial growth changed workers' lives, circle two effects of limited workplace rules, and number one detail that helps you judge whether laissez-faire protected workers.

Who Benefited from the Steel Boom?

1. In the 1880s, a worker entering a Pittsburgh steel mill might hear giant machines rolling hot metal into rails. Railroads and new machines helped mills produce far more steel than before. Mills hired thousands of people, including immigrants, and offered wages that drew families to industrial towns. But the pace was punishing. Furnaces stayed hot around the clock, so workers often faced long shifts and sudden injuries. As more people sought jobs, an owner could replace workers who demanded better pay. Industrial growth created jobs, yet many workers had little power to make those jobs safe or secure.

2. Many business leaders argued for laissez-faire, the idea that government should interfere as little as possible with business. With few strong workplace rules, mill owners could set hours and wages and decide how to handle dangerous equipment. This freedom could help owners expand production without paying for new safety measures. For workers, it also meant that a cut in pay or an injury might bring little protection. Government did not simply stay out of labor conflicts: officials sometimes sent police or troops to keep order, and courts sometimes issued orders against strikes. Workers often faced both company power and government power.

3. In 1892, this imbalance became clear at Carnegie Steel's Homestead plant near Pittsburgh. When managers proposed lower wages for some skilled workers, their union refused the new terms. The company locked workers out and brought in private guards. Fighting broke out, leaving people dead on both sides. Pennsylvania's governor then sent state militia to restore order, and the plant reopened with replacement workers. The union lost the struggle and its influence at Homestead weakened sharply. The conflict showed a limit of industrial prosperity: even as steel production grew, workers who challenged company decisions could lose both bargaining power and their jobs.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did industrial growth both help and hurt steelworkers? Give one effect of each kind.

2. Why might mill owners favor limited workplace rules while workers opposed them?

3. What does the government's response at Homestead show about how labor conflicts could affect workers' power?

4. If owners had been required to add safety equipment, what might have changed for workers and for owners? Use the passage to explain.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine an 1895 shoe factory installs a machine that doubles output but eliminates ten jobs. In five or six sentences, advise a state lawmaker whether to require machine guards and limit shifts to ten hours. Explain how industrial growth and laissez-faire would affect workers, and weigh one benefit and one cost of your plan.

ANSWER KEY

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GRADES 6-12 · 6-12.US1.51

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two ways industrial growth changed workers' lives, circle two effects of limited workplace rules, and number one detail that helps you judge whether laissez-faire protected workers. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did industrial growth both help and hurt steelworkers? Give one effect of each kind.	**Growing mills offered jobs and wages, but workers often faced long shifts, injuries, or the threat of replacement.**
2	Why might mill owners favor limited workplace rules while workers opposed them?	**Owners could set hours and wages and avoid safety costs, which could help them expand. Workers had little protection from pay cuts or injuries.**
3	What does the government's response at Homestead show about how labor conflicts could affect workers' power?	**After the governor sent militia, the plant reopened with replacement workers. The union lost, weakening workers' bargaining power.**
4	If owners had been required to add safety equipment, what might have changed for workers and for owners? Use the passage to explain.	**Safety equipment might have reduced workers' risk of injury, but paying for it could have raised owners' costs.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The new machine could make more shoes, but ten workers would lose their jobs. If officials follow laissez-faire, the owner could choose whether to add guards or shorten shifts. Workers near the machine might face injuries and long hours. I would require guards and ten-hour shifts to reduce those risks. These rules could cost the owner money and slow production. Even so, safer work is worth that cost because workers should not have to risk injury to keep a job.

Accept other supported judgments about the proposed rules. Look for a clear distinction between the effects of industrial growth and the effects of limited government rules.