

Lesson 5 A New Language and a New Culture

Big Idea

- Once immigrants had arrived in Michigan and were working at Ford Motor Company, they were pulled to adopt a new way of life by the promise of good pay and United States citizenship.

Key Concepts

- Assimilation
- Ford English School
- Citizenship
- Melting pot

Digitized Artifacts

from the Collections of **The Henry Ford**

Lesson 5

A New Language and a New Culture

- [Ford Motor Company Publication, “Factory Facts From Ford,” 1915 ID# THF80284](#)
- [Ford English School Classroom at the Highland Park Plant, 1914-1915 ID# THF23827](#)
- [Melting Pot Ceremony at Ford English School, July 4, 1917 ID# THF36844](#)

Materials

- Computers with Internet, digital projector and screen (preferred); OR printed handouts of digital artifacts’ images and descriptions
- Sign: What pushes and pulls people into new ways of life?

Duration 1 class period (45 minutes)

Instructional Sequence

1 Engagement

Ask students to share their opinions on this question:

You learned about the new \$5-a-day wage at Ford Motor Company. Do you think Ford should give all workers the same pay? What do you think is fair? Answers will vary; students will have different conceptions of “fair.” They may suggest different amounts for different types of jobs.

2 The \$5 Day

Introduce this part of the lesson by telling your students that earning \$5 a day was not automatic and that different wages were not dependent on the type of job but on the worker’s personal life.

Show them the image [Ford Motor Company Publication, “Factory Facts From Ford,” 1915 ID# THF80284](#). Ford Motor Company thought that if it influenced the behavior of employees at home, the employees would become better workers at the factory. The Ford Motor Company Sociological Department sent investigators out into the community to meet with workers in their homes, instruct them in household habits they considered better and evaluate the quality and healthfulness of the workers’ home lives. If a worker did not conform to company standards, he or she ran the risk of being paid half as much for the same work as his or her co-workers and could eventually lose his or her job.

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Lesson 5 Continued

Discuss the following questions:

Look closely at each photograph.

- Describe what you see in the photographs.
- What do you not know about these photographs that you would like to know?

For example:

- Were they taken in the same house?
- Was the worker earning \$5 a day when the initial photo was taken?
- How did the family get new furniture?
- Who were the family members, and what was the role of each person?
- Was there a person in the family experienced in taking care of a home?
- When this photo was taken, was a family member ill or had a big meal or important family event just taken place?
- What is your definition of your bedroom being clean? What is your parents' definition of your bedroom being clean?

Answers will vary; this question allows students to relate to different views on what constitutes cleanliness.

- Why do you think Ford Motor Company investigators were concerned about a dining room like the one in this photograph?

Answers will vary.

- How do you think a family's culture, traditions or income might affect how they set up their home?

Different cultures, traditions and income result in the setting up of homes in different ways.

- How do you think the family who lived in the home in this photograph felt about the investigator's findings?

They may have felt criticized, judged or misunderstood. They may have felt angry that they were being forced to change habits or sad about losing their old customs. Or, if they wanted to fit into American culture, perhaps they would have welcomed the investigator's explanation of this aspect of American life.

- If you were the family living in the home in this photograph, would you change your home (which would mean making a small change to your culture) in order to be eligible for the \$5 wage?

Answers will vary. As you discuss this, be sure to mention that the \$5 wage was an important pull toward adopting a new lifestyle.

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Lesson 5 Continued

3 Ford English School

Remind students that another aspect of work life is sharing a common language. Show [Ford English School Classroom at the Highland Park Plant, 1914-1915](#) ID# THF23827. Explain that attending Ford’s English School increased immigrants’ chances to earn \$5 per day.

- Why would Ford Motor Company want immigrant workers to learn English?

Learning English could make work go more smoothly and safely on the assembly line.

- Why would immigrant workers want to learn English?

Being able to communicate in English could make their work safer and make it easier for them to participate more fully in American life.

Students may not come up with the following answer, but you should mention that learning English helped them earn the \$5-per-day wage and also helped them become citizens. Speaking English became a requirement for citizenship in 1906.

- Why would workers not want to learn English?

They might not feel it was necessary, if their language was commonly spoken in Detroit. Or they might not want to lose the language that is an important part of their culture.

Show [Melting Pot Ceremony at Ford English School, July 4, 1917](#) ID# THF36844. Explain that it is a picture of the English School graduation ceremony.

- What’s happening in this picture?

In this ceremony, Ford English School graduates would walk into a “melting pot” in traditional ethnic clothing and would walk out in American suits.

- What does a “melting pot” mean?

In the “melting pot,” all groups’ attitudes and customs are melted together, creating a completely new culture that all individuals adopt. This usually means some aspects of the home cultures are lost, but other aspects of the home cultures are brought into the larger American culture.

- What is this ceremony saying about these individuals’ culture?

Their native culture is “melting off” and mixing with American culture, and they are emerging as Americans.

- What does this ceremony show about another reason Ford Motor Company would want immigrant workers to learn English?

To make it more likely that they join the greater American society instead of just keeping within their ethnic group.

- How would you feel if you were the company owner, Henry Ford, watching this ceremony?

Answers will vary, but perhaps Henry Ford felt both paternalistic pride in helping others and relief that his workforce would be more cohesive.

- How would you feel if you were a graduate participating in the ceremony, walking into and out of the melting pot? Do you think the graduates felt pulled to new way of life?

Answers will vary, but it is likely that many graduates did feel regret about leaving some of their native culture behind.

Assessment

Ask students to create an illustration of a metaphor or symbol for American culture – a symbol that they think both immigrants and Americans could agree on. Students should explain why they made their choice in a short class presentation or in a written paragraph.