

Lesson 4 The Changing Nature of Work and the \$5 Day

Big Idea

- The \$5 day pulled workers into accepting a very different kind of work.

Key Concepts

- Changing nature of work
- Language barrier
- \$5 day

Digitized Artifacts

from the Collections of **The Henry Ford**

Lesson 4

The Changing Nature of Work and the \$5 Day

- [Letter to Henry Ford from the Wife of an Assembly Line Worker, 1914](#) ID# THF32100
- [Ford Motor Company Clipping Book, Volume 2, January 6-10, 1914](#) ID# THF80232
- [Crowd of Applicants Outside Highland Park Plant after Five Dollar Day Announcement, January 1914](#) ID# THF67496

Materials

- Computers with Internet, digital projector and screen (preferred); OR printed handouts of digital artifacts and their descriptions
- Sign: What pushes and pulls people into new ways of life?
- Student Activity Sheet 4: The Changing Nature of Work: History and Math
- Scrap paper – a few pieces

Duration 1 class period (45 minutes)

Instructional Sequence

1 The Changing Nature of Work:

Understanding History through Math

Present the history-based math problem “The Changing Nature of Work” to students. If they are not able to solve it themselves, walk them through the steps to solve it.

2 The Changing Nature of Work:

Understanding History through the Arts

Next, perform a dramatic reading of the primary source [Letter to Henry Ford from the Wife of an Assembly Line Worker, 1914](#) ID# THF32100 for your students. You may consider asking a colleague to come perform this role, or you could pretend to be rereading the letter out loud after writing it. After the performance, discuss the following questions with students:

- Why was the writer upset?
- How is her husband treated at work?
Give some examples.
- How much is her husband being paid?
- Who does she seem to be upset with?
How does she seem to feel about Henry Ford?

Continued...

Lesson 4 Continued

3 Language Barriers: Understanding History through Kinesthetic Experiences

Choose four student volunteers, preferably students who are tactile-kinesthetic learners, to help with the experience. Assign one to role-play an English-speaking supervisor and three to each role-play a different non-English speaking assembly line worker.

Tell the rest of the class to observe what the supervisor and workers are doing and to evaluate their interactions and the quality of their product. Tell the supervisor and student-workers they must communicate without talking, in order to simulate not speaking the same language. Ask the supervisor to assign and teach each worker one step in “assembling” (making the folds for) a paper airplane. Limit the time the supervisor has to train the workers. Then have the workers assemble one airplane. Discuss the following questions:

- **For the student-workers:** What was it like to not be able to communicate while you worked? Was it hard to learn your task? Did you feel you were doing as well as you would have had you been able to communicate in your own language?
- **For the supervisor**
What was it like to not be able to communicate in your own language with your workers?
- **For the observers**
How did you notice the language barrier affecting the assembly of the planes?
- **For all**
What if, instead of assembling paper airplanes, the factory was assembling real airplanes?
What new problems might occur because of the language barrier? (Safety would be a concern.)
What problems do you think some assembly line workers at Ford Motor Company encountered?

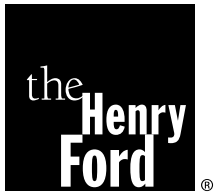
Lastly, the class will be summarizing the problems they see occurring at Ford Motor Company. Break the students into small groups and ask them to consider and list problems faced by immigrant workers, problems faced by workers from rural America and problems shared by both groups. Review the lists as a class and compile them into one class list on the board.

4 The \$5 Day

Explain that the issues of stress, repetitive tasks, accelerated production/assembly lines, language barriers, cultural differences, etc., resulted in a high turnover of workers. Introduce the \$5 day as the way Ford Motor Company dealt with the problem of high turnover. Illustrate this point with the digitized artifacts [Ford Motor Company Clipping Book, Volume 2, January 6-10, 1914 ID# THF80232](#) and [Crowd of Applicants Outside Highland Park Plant after Five Dollar Day Announcement, January 1914 ID# THF67496](#). Have students consider whether Ford’s offer of \$5 for a day’s work was a good way to convince people to work on the assembly line by asking: What are its advantages? What are its disadvantages?

Assessment

Assess students’ participation in the activities and discussions.



Name _____

changing nature of work - History and Math



Some people did not like working on Henry Ford's moving assembly line. This new method of production changed the way that they worked. They were no longer involved in the yearlong process of planting and harvesting or in the whole process of building a car. Workers just completed one small part of the vehicle-assembly process over and over again, every day. This made it easier for Ford to train workers and turn out cars more quickly. However, doing a small task over and over again was boring. Also, workers had to work as fast as the conveyor belt moved parts to their station; if one worker slowed down or got behind, the rest of the process would be held up. In fact, the company had to hire 53,000 people a year just to keep 14,000 jobs filled!

1. How many people quit or were fired at Ford Motor Company each year?

$$\begin{array}{r} 53,000 \\ - 14,000 \\ \hline 39,000 \\ \text{workers} \end{array}$$
