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Document-Based Activities on Progressivism and the Age of Reform

Using Primary Sources and the Internet

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Table of Contents

<i>Teacher Introduction</i>	v
<i>Overview: The Progressive Era</i>	vii
LESSONS	
1. <i>How The Other Half Lives</i>	
<i>Teacher Page</i>	1
<i>Student Worksheet</i>	3
2. <i>Jane Addams and the Settlement House Movement</i>	
<i>Teacher Page</i>	7
<i>Student Worksheet</i>	9
3. <i>The Populist Party</i>	
<i>Teacher Page</i>	13
<i>Student Worksheet</i>	15
4. <i>The Jungle</i>	
<i>Teacher Page</i>	19
<i>Student Worksheet</i>	21
5. <i>Trusts</i>	
<i>Teacher Page</i>	25
<i>Student Worksheet</i>	27
Culminating Activities	31
Appendix	33
<i>Answer Key</i>	35
<i>Rubrics</i>	43
<i>Related Web Sites</i>	49

DOCUMENT-BASED ACTIVITIES ON PROGRESSIVISM AND THE AGE OF REFORM TEACHER INTRODUCTION

Description:

In this unit, students learn about the legislation and social reform movements of the Progressive Era. Students will investigate the issues and conditions that concerned the Progressives, and assess the goals that the Progressives tried to accomplish. Students will analyze a variety of sources, including first-person accounts, pictures, and other documents.

Unit Objectives:

Knowledge: students will

- understand the social, political, and economic issues that led to the problems addressed by the Progressives
- analyze the goals, methods, and members of Progressive-era groups assess the effectiveness of these groups

Skills: students will

- analyze, evaluate, and interpret primary source documents
- discuss and debate ideas use evidence to draw conclusions

Prior Knowledge Required:

Students should have studied the Progressive era and its ramifications. They should also be familiar with the history of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Lesson Format:

Each lesson consists of two parts: a teacher page containing an introduction, objectives, URL(s) used in the lesson, teaching strategies, wrap-up questions, and an extension activity; as well as a reproducible student page with a brief introduction which sets the context for the lesson, URL (s) used, and questions to be answered about the source.

Assessment:

Based on the time available, you may want to select which answers you want to assess in each activity. Most questions on the student handouts are short-answer questions for which a suggested answer key can be found in the appendix. Other questions require anywhere from a couple of paragraphs to a page or more in response.

Suggested rubrics are in the appendix.

Additional Sources:

The appendix contains answer keys, an annotated list of Web sites on the Progressive era, rubrics, and supplemental materials available from <http://www.socialstudies.com>.

OVERVIEW: THE PROGRESSIVE ERA

“Let the watchwords of all our people be the old familiar watchwords of honesty, decency, fair-dealing, and commonsense...We must treat each man on his worth and merits as a man. We must see that each is given a square deal, because he is entitled to no more and should receive no less.”

“The welfare of each of us is dependent fundamentally upon the welfare of all of us.”

—Theodore Roosevelt

New York State Fair, Syracuse, September 7, 1903

These words by President Theodore Roosevelt effectively summarize the goals of the Progressive movement, and the “Square Deal” became the phrase by which his administration would be nicknamed. Were these goals realistic? Were they met? Did the leaders of the movement actually have the “welfare of all of us” in mind?

“Progressivism” was not really a single concept or movement; in reality, it took several different forms. Some Progressives sought to expand the democratic process, to take political power away from the big city political machines and bosses and give it to the voter through reforms such as the direct primary, initiative, referendum, and recall, and by extending the right of suffrage to women. Others worked to fight abuses in the workplace such as child labor and unfair labor practices against women. Others saw moral reform as a primary goal: for example, the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union promoted prohibition of alcohol. Reformers such as Jane Addams, Florence Kelley, and Jacob Riis felt that only by changing conditions in the slums and tenements could real progressive change take place.

Political leaders like Governor Robert M. LaFollette of Wisconsin sought to reduce the influence of large corporations such as railroads, which had been enjoying huge political and economic benefits from state governments at the expense of the common citizen. Still other political and social reform leaders, such as Kelley, Josephine Goldmark, and Louis D. Brandeis, were able to convince legislators that laws protecting the rights of women workers were needed, and they were able to successfully convince the United States Supreme Court to uphold those laws in cases such as *Muller v. Oregon*. Not only did these reformers tackle issues such as child labor and the rights of women in the workplace, but they were also able to effect changes for male workers as well, including reducing the workday for employees to 10 hours per day.

Political reform was another issue tackled by the Progressives. Reformers championed the “Australian ballot,” which kept political bosses and machines from knowing which candidates individual voters selected. Other states adopted political reforms such as initiative, which allowed the voters to propose bills that a state legislature had to consider; referendum, in which the voters could approve or reject bills a legislature had passed; and recall, which provided voters with a mechanism to remove an officeholder whom they felt had lost the confidence of the people. Still another political reform victory was passage of the Seventeenth Amendment, which allowed for the direct election of U.S. senators (they had previously been selected by state legislatures).

Women were instrumental in effecting change in both politics and society. Susan B. Anthony led the fight for women's right to vote. Carrie Nation led the anti-alcohol effort. Jane Addams sought to protect women from abuse in Chicago. Women also began to enroll in higher education at an increasing rate.

Investigative reporters, known as "muckrakers," exposed corruption and shoddy business practices. Upton Sinclair's book *The Jungle* exposed the unsafe conditions in the meat-packing industry. Ida Tarbell exposed corruption in the Standard Oil Trust. In *How The Other Half Lives*, Jacob Riis wrote about conditions in the slums and tenements in major cities.

On the national scene, Progressive reform was embraced by the era's presidents. Theodore Roosevelt and William Howard Taft sought to break up large corporations which had formed monopolies called "trusts." Woodrow Wilson strengthened antitrust legislation passed by his predecessors, created the Federal Trade Commission to protect the rights of consumers, and created the Federal Reserve banking system and instituted a federal income tax. Women received the right to vote in 1920.

By the start of Wilson's second term as president, however, Progressive reform dwindled. American attention became increasingly focused on the impending war in Europe and how to keep the United States from being drawn into that war. While progressive reforms were still enacted during this era, the real legacy of Progressivism would not be realized until the 1930s and the advent of the New Deal.

How The Other Half Lives Teacher Page

Overview:

Jacob Riis, an immigrant himself, became a police reporter and photographer for the *New York Tribune*. In the 1880s, he became a crusader for reform and wrote an exposé of conditions in New York tenements called *How The Other Half Lives*.

As a reporter, photographer and reformer, Riis achieved national attention and acclaim.

Theodore Roosevelt noted that Riis was “the most useful citizen of New York.”

Objectives:

Students will:

- read and investigate an eyewitness account of conditions in New York slums
- make inferences as to the author’s intent and purpose of writing
- make conclusions as to the impact of the work

Web Sites Used in the Lesson:

All Web links for this lesson can be found at: <http://www.socialstudies.com/uslinks.html>

Students will look at one chapter of Riis’s book, which is located at:
http://www.socialstudies.com/article.html?article@riis_problemchildren
This chapter is titled “The Problem of the Children.”

The table of contents for the entire online version of *How The Other Half Lives* can be found at <http://www.socialstudies.com/uslinks.html>.

Strategies:

Introduce the lesson with an overview of conditions in American urban society during the late 1800s. Be sure to note particular social and economic conditions that led to the rise of slums in this period, including the rise of political machines as well as an increase in immigration from east, central, and southern Europe. In addition to reading selections from *How The Other Half Lives*, you may want to have students view some examples of Riis’s photographic work.

Next, have students complete the worksheets.

Answers to most questions will range from three to five sentences, although some can be as long as a paragraph to a full page, depending on the depth of answer desired and the amount of time allotted for students to answer the questions.

Wrap-Up:

After students have completed the questions, lead them in a discussion as to the effectiveness of the work of Jacob Riis and other muckraking reporters of the period. Ask students to speculate whether conditions in other American cities were similar to New York, or if New York's slums were the exception rather than the norm.

Extension Activity:

While *How The Other Half Lives* influenced policymakers and social reformers in the late 19th century, Michael Harrington's *The Other America* was a wake-up call to many about the state of poverty in America in the early 1960s. Ask students to look at excerpts from Harrington's book and compare them with Jacob Riis's work. Students can then write essays comparing and contrasting the state of poverty in America in Riis's time to that of Harrington's time.

Name:

Period:

How The Other Half Lives **Student Worksheet**

Introduction:

During the Progressive era, crusading journalists called muckrakers wrote about social, political, and economic wrongs in the United States, hoping to draw attention to them in order to achieve social reform. Jacob Riis, a New York reporter and photographer, was especially sensitive to the needs of people living in New York tenements and slums. His work *How The Other Half Lives* exposed conditions that affected those slum residents.

All Web links for this lesson can be found at: <http://www.socialstudies.com/uslinks.html>

Directions:

“The Problem of the Children”

http://www.socialstudies.com/article.html?article@riis_problemchildren

Read the selection, then answer the questions below.

1. How does Riis try to convince readers to support efforts to improve conditions for children living in the New York City slums?
2. How many children does Riis claim were living in specific tenement buildings? What does he note about the area of the “yard” in these tenements?
3. In the first paragraph of the chapter, what does Riis report about the children who have been killed in the tenement? What does he report about the schooling of children?

