

Monongah Remembered:
A Guide for Teachers

OVERVIEW

This teaching guide for use with *Monongah Remembered* is intended to help students learn more details about the history of coal mining and to better understand the impact of the December 6th Monongah mine disaster on West Virginia, the United States, and the world. The teaching guide targets students in two age groups – grades 4-8 and grades 9-12 – but can be tailored by the educator to suit younger students and/or students at the college level. Although it will inherently appeal greatly to students in West Virginia, the teachers guide can be used by students in other geographical areas due to the universality of the human-interest themes that are explored in the film.

In addition to activities tied to *Monongah Remembered*, this teaching guide also includes links to other web-based curricula, historical sites, and a bibliography of books and audio-video resources dealing with coal mining history. This information is meant to assist teachers interested in using the film as an entry into a more detailed classroom study of coal and mining history.

OBJECTIVES

When using this teaching guide in conjunction with *Monongah Remembered*, the student will....

1. Learn the details of the 1907 Monongah Mine Disaster, the worst mining accident in American history and its impact on American history.

2. Appreciate the day-to-day working lives of coal miners at the turn of the 20th century, including the schedules that they kept, the tools they used, and the many dangers they faced.

3. Learn about the widespread immigration to the United States and the formation of the hundreds of multicultural mining towns in the coal producing areas of the country, as well as the ongoing ethnic identities of people living in these areas and the folklore practices that they maintained through the generations.

4. Realize the ongoing importance of coal mining to the historical development of West Virginia and the United States and its impact on changing the nature of occupational safety in the industrial workplace.

5. Appreciate how the 1907 Monongah Mine disaster has been remembered and commemorated locally and internationally, and how historical events can have a lasting and relevant impact on the present and future.

6. Learn basic concepts of conducting historical research on a topic occurring one hundred years ago, including learning to use primary and secondary sources, how to differentiate fact from fiction, and conduct oral history interviews.

PRELIMINARY ACTIVITY

Prior to watching *Monongah Remembered*, have students complete a short assignment to establish any pre-existing knowledge of coal mining and any personal connections to the subject matter. First, ask them to pair up with a classmate. Next, give each student pair five minutes to answer the following two questions. They should write their responses on a shared piece of paper.

1. What words come to mind when you think of the word **coal**?

2. Has anyone in your family – past or present – worked as a coal miner? Explain.

After they have discussed and written their responses, ask the class to share some of their impressions of the word coal and their family connections to the coal mining industry. Place relevant responses on the board. Use the student responses as a jumping off point to share with them some of the key themes of the film they are about to watch, such as **industrialization, energy, immigration, invention, urbanization, and unionization**. If any student has a family connection to coal mining, use the opportunity to tell them how history can be autobiographical. Talk about oral history and how we can listen to and record the stories of people in order to learn about the past.

After this exercise, inform the students that the film they are about to watch explores one of the most important events in the history of American coal mining and that it happened in West Virginia. Then, distribute a copy of the **viewing guide** to each student. The **viewing guide** is a document that will help students stay focused on the film and on the important elements of the narrative. It is not imperative that students answer all of these questions. If desired, students can team up with a classmate after the film viewing in order to compare answers and fill in answers they missed.

Monongah Remembered

A Viewing Guide

1. The disaster at Monongah occurred in the year _____. This year is important because it was the peak year for immigrants coming through the procession station at _____, the major point of entry for immigration to the United States in this period.
2. The coal company that operated the mines at Monongah was named _____, which also was the name of a larger town near the scene of the disaster.
3. Many miners were killed by the force of the explosions. Other miners and some rescuers were killed by _____, a lethal combination of gases including carbon monoxide that is emitted after a mine explosion occurs.
4. Both men and boys were killed in the disaster. Some of the victims were as young as ____ years of age.
5. One of the few survivors of the Monongah mine disaster was _____, a Polish immigrant who later perished in the same mine many years later.
6. Of all the immigrants who died in the Monongah mine disaster, the most were from _____.
7. An Italian priest named _____ lost his brother in the mine explosion, yet still worked tirelessly to provide support to the community in time of need.
8. The disaster at Monongah, coupled with other mine disasters elsewhere in that same month prompted Congress to create the _____ in the year _____.
9. Many women were widowed by the Monongah mine disaster. An Italian immigrant woman named _____ built a 300 ton coal pile in memory of her deceased husband.

10. A Catholic priest named _____ helped to preserve the memory of the Monongah mine disaster. He erected a statue of Saint _____, the patron saint of miners outside of a local nursing home.

11. More recently, another statue dedicated to _____ was built in Monongah with financial assistance for the region of _____ in Italy.

12. Another region of Italy named _____ dedicated a bell to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the mine disaster. The bell was forged in the town of _____, the official foundry of the Vatican.

13. According to some family stories detailed in the film, one widow was only able to identify her husband's body because of the fact that he wore different colored _____.

14. Some miners did not go to work on December 6 because they were celebrating the Feast of _____ and therefore escaped the disaster unscathed.

15. West Virginia Governor Joe Machin has ties to the coal mining history in the region. His uncle was killed in the _____ mine disaster in 1968.

Monongah Remembered

Viewing Guide Answer Key

1. 1907, Ellis Island

2. Fairmont Coal Company

3. After-Damp

4. Twelve

5. Peter Urban

6. Italy

7. Father Joseph D'Andrea

8. Bureau of Mines, 1910

9. Caterina Davia

10. Father Briggs, Barbara

11. Widows, Calabria

12. Molise, Agnone

13. Socks

14. Saint Nicholas

15. Farmington

STUDENT ACTIVITIES

The following list of activities can be used in conjunction with the film *Monongah Remembered* in order to further explore the historical importance of coal mining in West Virginia and the United States at large. The activities are arranged in four major sections, each indicative of general subjects explored in the film. Each section contains specific content information for the teacher followed by a list of related classroom activities and the intended grade level for each.

THE DAILY LIFE OF A COAL MINER

In 1907, coal mining was tedious, dirty, and back-breaking work. Miners entered the work place early in the morning and left late in the day. In dark, winter months such as December, they only saw daylight on Sundays – their one day off. Inside the mine, the temperatures were cool and damp. Ceiling heights were very low, making it necessary to walk hunched over throughout most of the day. Using pickaxes or, in later years, machinery, mine workers undercut coal seams, detonated black powder or dynamite in the facings to loosen the coal, and then hand-loaded the fallen coal into a wagon. The wagons were then hauled to the mine tippie and weighed. Miners received payment based on the amount of clean coal they loaded. Much of their pay came in the form of company scrip – currency redeemable only at the company-owned store. Unlike workers today, miners were not given the equipment they needed to perform their daily tasks. Rather, they had to purchase equipment such as tools, dynamite, lighting sources, and other supplies at the company store, sometimes at inflated prices.

Miners performed a wide variety of specialized tasks in the mines, each essential to the success of the mining company. The following is a list of some of the common jobs in the coal mines and the name of the person who performed each task.

Cutter: A miner who operated a mechanical cutting machine, which was used to undercut the coal. These machines would cut away the lower portion of a wall of coal. Then, men would use explosives to detonate the top face of coal causing it to fall to the floor.

Shooter: A miner who was responsible for detonating the blast of black powder of dynamite that would free the coal after a face had been undercut. The action was known as “shooting” coal. Training was key to this job. Improper technique and carelessness in shooting coal was blamed as the cause of many mine explosions, including Monongah.

Loader: The coal loader used a broad billed shovel to load the fallen coal into a mine wagon, which was then identified with the worker’s check number and brought out of the mine to the tipple, where it was weighed. Coal loaders received pay based on the amount of coal they loaded.

Weigh Boss: The weigh boss was in charge of weighing each wagonload of coal as it came to the tipple. The miner’s check identified the loader of each wagon, and payment was credited to that miner’s account. The tipple was a large tower outside of the mine, usually above a railroad track or river. After weighing, coal was sifted and transported by rail or barge to markets.

Greaser: The greaser was usually a boy miner whose job was to keep the wheels and axles of mine wagons greased to ensure ease of movement. An estimated 45,000 boys under the age of 18 were working in the United States coal industry in 1920, many as greasers and in other less physically demanding positions.

Brattice man: In order to provide a breathable environment for miners, large fans blew fresh air into the mines. Canvas sheets, known as brattices, were used to close off unused corridors, thereby ensuring that fresh air would travel to the operating areas of the mine. The brattice man was charged with building brattices

Trapper Boy: A job commonly done by children, the trapper boy would open and close ventilation doors in the mine in order to allow mules, horses, and mine wagons to pass through the doorways. Many boys who started as trappers then moved up through the ranks to other positions.

Fire Boss: The fire boss used a device known as a safety lamp to enter the mine before the other employees and determine if areas were safe and free of gas. The safety lamp would allow him to check for methane, or fire damp, a combustible gas blamed for many mine explosions.

Motorman: With time, electrical conveyances replaced mule driven wagons as the means of transporting men and materials in and around the mines. These machines were operated by a miner known as a motorman.

In addition to men and machinery, mines also needed the force of mules and draft horses in order to perform a wide variety of tasks. Mules commonly pulled mine wagons loaded with coal out of the mines where they were weighed at the tipple and sent to market. So many animals were needed in the mines, the stables were kept. One common job for young boys was to work as stable boys to keep the stalls clean and animals fed. When a mine accident occurred, the working animals were among the victims, though statistics as to their deaths were rarely maintained.

As men toiled underground, women played a significant, though often overlooked, role in the coal mining family. Their domestic work raising families was often supplanted with contributions to the family income through gardening, home crafts, and the housing of borders. This fact shows that women were not only concerned with domestic work but also found ways to add money to the family economy. However, due to the social mores of the time, women were also charged with the task of keeping house. They prepared the family meals, cleaned and cared for the home, and oversaw the rearing of children. Though patriarchal in nature, the typical mining family of this period can

better be described as father-dominated, mother-centered, due to the fact that women were the heart of the home and played a key role in all of the family's activities.

Many miners lived in small patch towns such as Monongah, which were built by the mine company specifically to house its work force. The homes were small dwellings, usually clapboard in construction, and arranged in a linear layout near the mine entrance and close to the company store. Each home usually maintained a backyard garden so the family could grow an array of products not available in the company store. Mining towns also commonly spawned religious institutions to serve the miners and their families. Today, many of the mining towns are still in existence, though the industry that built them has long since disappeared.

Activities

1. Begin by explain to students the general process of mining coal by hand in 1907, specifically the dark, cramped spaces in which they toiled underground. In order to provide students with the "feel" for working in a mine, tie a 10 – 20 foot rope between two heavy items in the classroom (chairs/desk). Drape the rope with opaque blankets. Dim the lights in the room. Provide each student with a flashlight or headlamp and have them crawl through the makeshift mine tunnel. Ask them to express how it felt to them to be in such an area. Ask them how they would feel having to work in such a place every day. (Grades 4-8)

2. Describe and write on the board the above list of the many jobs available in the coal mines. Ask each student to choose the job that they would like to do and have them explain why they would do this job. Ask them to discuss how the coal miners had to rely on one another in the mine. (i.e. the work of the Fire Boss detecting presence of gas was important to the shot firers, who came in afterwards to ignite dynamite.) Ask them to explain why they think people would do a job like coal mining if they knew it was

dangerous. Ask them what jobs today necessitate a person asking that same question... ie police officers, soldiers, fire fighters, etc. (grades 4-8)

3. Develop a list of retired coal miners in your community, preferably ones who have been involved in the industry for more than one generation. Such contacts can usually be made through local senior citizens organizations. Have students develop a list of 3 – 5 questions that they would like to ask a coal miner about their work. Invite the coal miner into the classroom. Arrange the students in a circle, and place yourself and the guest in the center. Begin an interview of the guest, with a series of open ended questions about the person's life and work. Then, once the rapport has been established, invite the students to ask questions as well. This will expose them to the historical research technique of **oral history**, and afford a first person account of life as a miner. (grades 4-8)

4. Have students conduct one-on-one oral history interviews with senior citizens who worked in the mines. Begin by asking them to develop an interview question set that seeks to obtain both general and specific answers to key questions. Then, ask them to find an oral history subject on their own. For some, this may be a relative. For others, the contact may come through networking or a visit to a local senior citizen's organization. Have the student conduct the interview, if possible using any recording device. After the interview is completed, have each student extrapolate three key quotes that sum up the oral history subject's life history and experience in the mines. Have each person share what they learned with the class. (grades 9-12)

COMING TO AMERICA: IMMIGRATION IN 1907

The year of the Monongah Mine disaster, 1907, coincided with the peak year of admissions to the United States through Ellis Island. In 1907 alone, more than 1.5 million immigrants passed through the immigrant processing station located there – more than any other year in its history. Many went on to live and work in the coal fields of the

United States, forever changing the country's already unique, multicultural landscape. Many of the coal miners who were killed in the Monongah mine disaster were immigrants who came to the United States through Ellis Island. Many of the native-born victims, meanwhile, had parents or grandparents who were immigrants.

Situated in New York Bay, Ellis Island served as the main immigrant processing station for the United States between 1892 and 1954. Prior to 1890, immigrants gained admittance to New York via Castle Garden, an immigration facility located in Battery Park at the southern tip of Manhattan. Between 1855 and 1890, as many as eight million immigrants entered New York through Castle Garden, the majority coming from northern and western European countries such as Ireland, Germany, and the Scandinavian nations. By the mid-1880s, immigration rates had increased substantially thereby rendering the Castle Garden facility incapable of handling the increased number of arrivals. In 1890, the federal government began constructing a new immigrant processing station on Ellis Island. It opened two years later, in 1892.

In June of 1897, the first Ellis Island Immigration Station was destroyed by fire and immediately replaced by a second immigration center. Between 1892 and 1954, an estimated seventeen million immigrants entered the United States through Ellis Island. Unlike earlier years, the majority of immigrants who came during this period hailed from eastern and southern European countries. However, immigrants from elsewhere in Europe continued to arrive in droves, drawn by the prospect of work.

Upon arrival in New York, immigrants disembarked at the Hudson or East River piers and passed through customs. First and second-class passengers were processed onboard the ships and then allowed to enter the United States immediately. Third class, or steerage passengers took ferries to Ellis Island where they underwent a series of inspections and examinations designed to keep out unhealthy and undesirable immigrants. The first stage in the screening process involved doctors examining immigrants to identify physical handicaps, mental illness, or contagious and infectious diseases such as trachoma, tuberculosis, or leprosy. Immigrants diagnosed with such disorders were quarantined or,

in some cases, sent back to their native country. After passing medical examinations, immigrants proceeded on to the registration division where they were interrogated and registered in the facility record books. If papers were in order and further examinations deemed unnecessary, an immigrant could pass through the station in as little time as several hours. Others had to remain in the facility for days before finally being granted passage to the American mainland. In a single workday, Ellis Island officials could process more than 5,000 arriving immigrants.

In the 1920s, the federal government passed a series of acts that restricted immigration to the United States and therefore lessened the importance of Ellis Island. These acts officially ended the period of widespread and unregulated immigration to the United States. Instead, official quotas would regulate the numbers of immigrants allowed to enter. By the 1930s, immigration inspectors had begun to inspect and process immigrants on the arriving ships, rather than on Ellis Island, and the facility itself was used only for holding detained immigrants, potential deportees, and refugees. In 1953, the federal government closed the facility and transferred its activities to offices in Manhattan. In 1965, Ellis Island became part of the Statue of Liberty National Monument and, eleven years later, was opened to sightseers by the National Park Service. After an extensive renovation in the 1980s, the complex reopened in 1990 as the Ellis Island Immigration Museum. It is now one of the leading museums documenting American immigration history.

Activities

1. Divide the students into two or more groups. Have them share with each other their ethnic background. If a student has multiple ancestries, have them list them all. Ask them to list any cultural practices tied to their ethnicity that they continue to practice. Once completed, have a representative share the results and place them on the board. Use the various ethnicities represented to talk about **immigration** to the United States and how it

has changed over the years. Many students will have multiple ethnicities in their heritage use this to talk about **Assimilation** and the American **melting pot**. (grades 4-8)

2. Ask students to think about what it must have been like to travel as an immigrant to the United States at the turn of the 20th century. Then, ask them to place themselves in the position of an immigrant. Ask them to compile a list of three things that they would take with them if they were leaving for another country and would not be back for many years, if ever. Use the exercise to talk about the emotional difficulties of leaving one's own country for another, emphasizing the differences in language, culture, dress, and lifestyles between the Old World and the New. (grades 4-8)

3. Have students access the Ellis Island passenger list database, located at <http://www.ellislandrecords.org/>. The Ellis Island site offers a free search engine allowing a site visitor to search the names of individuals who passed through Ellis Island during their immigration to the United States. Have students do a search by their own last name, either to find a relative or to see if any one by that name ever went through Ellis Island. Then, using the list of miners killed in the Monongah mine disaster, which run as credits at end of the *Monongah Remembered* film, have students select one or more names on the list and try to find them on the Ellis Island database. Use this exercise to expose them to this unique interactive research site and an important **primary source** for historical research. If they can't find the names, share with them the inherent difficulties of using official records because of name changes, language differences, and lost records, as well as the possibility of arrival at a port other than Ellis Island. (grades 9-12)

4. Have students visit the interactive website for the most recent census, the Census of 2000, at <http://factfinder.census.gov>. Using the search engine provided, have the students search the category of "Ancestry," located under the "People" section of the search engine. Have them search by the state of West Virginia, and or the name of their specific town. Other states can also be searched. When completed, their search will reveal a table of all the ancestries represented in that specific geographic locale in the year 2000. Use

the activity to expose students to this accessible **primary source**, the census, and to discuss the multicultural make-up of their home. (grades 9-12)

MINE DISASTERS OF 1907: CAUSES AND EFFECTS

The Monongah Mine disaster occurred on December 6, 1907. At the turn of the 20th century, it was one of many mine disasters that were regularly occurring in what was perhaps the most dangerous American industry. Between 1900 and 1910, more than 20,000 coal miners died on the job. By 1930, the mines had claimed over 70,000 total lives – more than all American battle deaths in the First World War. The month of December 1907 – the month that Monongah exploded – proved the most costly. On December 1, an explosion at the Naomi Mine in Fayette City, Pennsylvania, killed 34 unsuspecting miners. The single worst coal mining calamity in American history occurred only a few short days later, at Monongah, West Virginia, which claimed the lives of 362 miners. The state of Alabama suffered next, when a December 16 explosion at the Yolande Mine – perceived to be one of the safest in the county – killed 58. Then, on December 19, the Darr Mine near Jacob’s Creek brought tragedy back to Western Pennsylvania. The calamitous month ended with a small blast in Carthage, New Mexico, which left eleven dead. By the end of December 1907, over 700 coal miners had perished across the nation. Ironically, miners working in the United States – most of European immigrant ancestry – were three to four times more likely to die than their counterparts who stayed to work in the mines of Europe.

By the time of the Monongah Mine Disaster, the American coal industry had expanded precipitously and the global demand for coal reached immense proportions. It was burned to heat homes, run railroads, power ships, operate lighting, run industrial machinery, and manufacture coke – the high-energy material needed to make iron and steel. The Pittsburgh Coal Seam, a rich bituminous vein covering northern West Virginia and Southwestern Pennsylvania, became one of the most important coal deposits in the

world. The growing demand for coal, in turn, necessitated a demand for immigrant labor. In 1907 alone, over 1.5 million immigrants entered the United States – more than in any other year of the Ellis Island era. Despite the inherent dangers of the industry, immigrants came in droves to work in coal mines in order to escape the desperation of their lives in impoverished European countries. In order to meet demand, many coal companies actively solicited immigrant laborers, despite the 1885 passage of the Foran Act which forbade the practice of contracting immigrant laborers. Instead, companies employed a padrone – an immigrant who would return to his native country and recruit immigrants to work in the mines.

When the Monongah mine exploded, immediate attention was placed on finding survivors. Volunteers from Monongah and the neighboring towns of Fairmont and Clarksburg began rescue operations within two hours of the explosion and worked around the clock to reach any survivors. Though volunteer efforts began in earnest immediately after the explosion, an official rescue operation was put into place on the morning of December 7 under the leadership of James Paul, Chief Mine Inspector of West Virginia. Mine inspectors from neighboring states including Pennsylvania and Ohio were also involved in the efforts at Monongah. As word of the disaster spread, between 10,000 and 25,000 curious onlookers from West Virginia, Maryland, and Pennsylvania also converged on the town to view the disaster first hand. Several entrepreneurs even sold postcards picturing scenes of the mine disaster which were marketed on site and in the local newspaper. Only a handful of miners made it out alive, and rescue operations soon turned to recovery of the bodies.

Mine inspectors soon learned that two interconnected mines covering a total of 700 acres bore the brunt of the explosion. According to one eye witness account, No. 8 exploded first followed by a second explosion in No. 6. Standing next to the entrance to No. 8 when it exploded, an African-American miner named Joe Newton was critically injured from the timbers, debris, and machinery fragments blown from the mine entrance. He was one of several miners working outside the mine who sustained serious injury. Another was William Bryce, an engineer who was working in the fan house at the time of

the blast. Two modern ventilating fans ensured the presence of enough fresh air in the Monongah mines to allow miners to descend far into the depths of the earth. At No. 8, the force of the explosion splintered the monstrous piece of machinery, blowing part of it across the West Fork River and scattering metal fragments as far as a half-mile away. Bryce was stuck by the flying debris and later died in the hospital. Many of those killed in the mine were injured by the force of the explosion. Other died from the post-explosion gases known as after-damp.

Much debate surrounded the actual number of miners killed at Monongah. Although official accounts stated that 362 miners were killed, some suggested that the number was actually much more. Initial newspaper reports indicated that nearly 500 workers had checked in that morning – leaving a vast discrepancy between the official number of dead and the number who may have actually been in the mine. Furthermore, it was common practice for boys to accompany their fathers into the mines. Since these young helpers were not subject to the mine check-in system, it is impossible to determine an exact death count. Debate also surrounded the reason for the explosion. According to some accounts, a coal wagon broke free from its couplings and careened into the mine, igniting a spark that caused the blast. According to other sources, an improperly rigged explosive charge by a shot firer inside the mine was the culprit. It was also debated as to whether methane or coal dust, or a combination of the two, was the combustible material that led to the explosion.

The miners killed in the explosion at Monongah left behind 250 widows and 1,000 children. The Company paid for funeral expenses and contributed approximately 150 dollars to each surviving family. They also invested in a general relief fund, to which many industrial magnates nationwide including Andrew Carnegie also contributed. The Monongah Relief Commission then performed the task of distributing relief to the families of the victims. Many of the victims supported family members such as a spouse and children in Monongah, or a mother and father still residing in Europe. Since some of the next of kin still lived in Europe or returned to their ancestral homeland after the death of their spouses, the assistance of the local consulates was needed to facilitate the

process. It was very difficult for the widows to cope with the loss of a loved one, as evidenced by the tragic story of Caterina Davia who erected a monumental pile of coal in her backyard over a span of thirty years as a tribute to her deceased husband.

The Monongah Mine Disaster was the single worst industrial accident in American history. It occurred in the year 1907 – a time when the United States government was just beginning to recognize and take action on the inherent dangers of working in coal mines, steel mills, and in other American industries. In the aftermath of Monongah and the other mine disasters of December 1907, the United States government created the Bureau of Mines. Up until that point, mine issues had been the purview of the individual states. The creation of a national body dealing with the issue of mine safety was an important step in the right direction, but ongoing mine disasters illustrated that the problem of mine safety would still be a lasting problem in the United States.

Today, many communities are making the effort to commemorate the history of coal mining in their area through various programs, including the creation of museums, the dedication of statues, and other public programs such as oral history projects and documentary films. These active efforts to preserve the past illustrate how history continues to be meaningful and relevant to the world that we live in today.

Activities

1. Explain to students the process by which towns such as Monongah that experienced a mining disaster sometimes become sacred ground to later generations, and that active efforts have taken place to prevent these historical events from being forgotten. Ask students to think about their plans to commemorate the history of a mine disaster if they were a mayor of such a town. Have them draw a picture of the statue that would help people to remember the legacy of the coal miners and their families in that town. Have them list the activities (parade, exhibit, festival) that they would hold in their town on the anniversary. (grades 4-8)

2. Much misinformation appeared in the newspapers following the Monongah mine disaster, and there was much discussion and debate over many issues, including number of survivors, the causes of the explosion, and the actual number of people killed. To show how false information can be spread through word of mouth, have students play a gossip game. They should stand or sit in a circle. Give the first student a written piece of paper with information on it, which he or she will then convey orally to the next student. Have the information travel the full circle and see how it has changed at the end. The information can be that “342 men died. Someone said there were 4 or 5 survivors. 3 men died on the way to the hospital. 5 rescuers died.” The facts should be complicated enough to ensure that they are altered during the transition from student to student. (grades 4-8)

3. Have the students place themselves in the position of a coal miner in 1907. Ask them each to write a letter to the government of the United States at the time – President Theodore Roosevelt – asking for better working conditions in the mines. The student’s letters should be formal and specific, requesting certain things (higher wages, increased safety inspections, better child labor laws) rather than just a general request. Have students then share their letters to the class. (grades 9-12)

4. Ask students to research area newspapers or use an internet news compilation site such as Google News for articles dealing with a recent mining accident. Have them choose one recent accident and compile the background information on that incident, including where and when it happened, the rescue operations, and the causes of the accident. Have them pay specific attention to the debates over the cause, if any, as well as any similarities to the Monongah Mine Disaster of 1907. Have each student present his or her incident. Use the exercise to talk about the dangers of the mine industry today. Discuss how mine safety has improved over the last 100 years and have students point out the areas that they feel still need to be addressed. (grades 9-12)

ITALY AND MONONGAH – TRANSNATIONAL CONNECTIONS

One of the dominant themes in *Monongah Remembered* is the ongoing connection between a small West Virginia mining community and a country in southern Europe. At Monongah, immigrants from Italy constituted a large proportion of the miners who were killed. According to official accounts, 171 Italians died. Of these, 87 came from the region of Molise, a mountainous area located in south central Italy on the Adriatic Coast. At the time of the mine disaster, Molise as an official region did not exist but was part of a larger area referred to as Abruzzi. In the 1960s, the area was divided into two distinct regions – Abruzzo and Molise. Of the Molisani (people from Molise) killed at Monongah, 36 came from the tiny village of Duronia. The second largest number of Italian immigrant deaths came from Calabria, the region situated at the “toe” of the Italian peninsula. Many of the miners with Calabria roots hailed from the town of San Giovanni in Fiore.

It is not surprising that so many Italian immigrants from specific towns in Italy were killed. At the turn of the 20th century, Italian immigrants came to the United States through the process of chain migration. In other words, one immigrant would come to the New World, find a job and place to live, and then send for relatives and friends living in their home town in Italy. Many even traveled back and forth with regularity in order to spread word of the opportunities in America for work. As a result of these kinship and community networks, the young male population of entire towns like Duronia and San Giovanni in Fiore were transplanted to mining towns throughout America. After young, working-age males settled in the United States, women began to follow as single men returned to Italy to wed and returned with their new brides.

Because of this close transnational connection between immigrants in the United States and Italy, news of the Monongah mining disaster traveled rapidly overseas and deeply affected those still living in Europe. In some cases, miners killed at Monongah had been working to support their parents in Italy. In the aftermath of the mine disaster, the local Italian Consul in West Virginia helped to contact the families of the mine victims to

insure that they received compensation from the Monongah Relief Fund. Some widows returned to Italy after the disaster to grieve, never to return to the United States.

The strong ties between Italy and Monongah lessened in the aftermath of the passage of the Johnson Reed Immigration Act in 1924 – an act which ended the mass immigration of the earlier Ellis Island era. After the passage of this seminal act, each foreign country was assigned an annual quota for the number of emigrants it could send to America. Far fewer immigrants from Italy were allowed to enter the United States than in years prior.

Assimilation in the United States also played an important role. As immigrants became Americanized, many lost their personal connections with relatives living abroad. With the passage of generations, these personal contacts with the Old Country further disappeared. Despite assimilation, however, people of Italian descent remained proud of their ethnic identity and continued to maintain important aspects of their culture, namely foodways and other cultural traditions. In Italy, many people who had remained behind during the widespread emigration of the turn of the 20th century likewise lost touch with family and friends who went to America.

By the early 1960s, Italy had experienced a remarkable turnaround known as the “economic miracle.” Seemingly overnight, it was transformed from a struggling nation that was losing much of its population to emigration into a nation with one of the stronger economies in the world. Then, in the 1980s, the economy boomed again. As prosperity arrived, the period of widespread emigration of its population ended. However, immigration still impacted the country, albeit in a different way. Rather than being the country that sent its people elsewhere due to economic necessity, Italy became a host nation for immigrants fleeing destitution and poverty elsewhere in the world. In recent years, immigrants from the Baltic countries, Africa, and elsewhere in the world have come to Italy in great numbers in search of work and opportunity.

As Italy experiences this new influx of peoples, undergoes a multicultural transformation, and begins to debate the many political issues surrounding immigration, the Italian people have demonstrated a renewed interest in the people who left one hundred years

ago. Throughout the county, communities have held immigration history conferences and discussed the prospect of opening immigration museums in different parts of the country. In San Giovanni in Fiore, a statue to the miners who were killed at Monongah was erected in the town square to commemorate the immigrant miners. On the eve of the Monongah 100th anniversary in December of 2007, the Italian regional governments of Molise and Calabria were actively involved in helping the State of West Virginia to commemorate the Monongah explosion. The region of Calabria donated money to help the state and private individuals build a statue called the Monongah Heroine in memory of the widows of the disaster. The region of Molise, meanwhile, donated a large bell in the memory of the fallen miners. On the actual anniversary, December 6, 2007, hundreds of Italian officials traveled to Monongah to participate in the commemoration. The monuments now decorate a small park in Monongah, a permanent tribute to the mine disaster and a testament to the transnational connections between Europe and the United States.

Activities

1. Discuss the process of chain migration and role of family networks in bringing Italians to Monongah. Ask students to make a list of ways that family can be important to immigrants when they come to a new country (contributions to family income, sharing tasks, childcare, sharing housing, love and emotional support). Ask them if there are any negatives to a tight knit family (limits assimilation, limits need to learn the English language, perpetuates stereotypes of them as outsiders) Have them share their answers with the class. (grades 4-8)

2. Explain to students that immigrants had to adapt quickly to life in the United States. Ask them to write a list what might be different for an immigrant coming here at the turn of the 20th century (language, communication, money, clothing, foods, transportation, holidays, cultural practices). Use this exercise to talk about recent immigration and that new immigrants face the same types of challenges today. Talk about how immigrants

going into Italy today would experience similar challenges as those coming to America.
(grades 4-8)

3. Discuss the process of assimilation in American. Have students pair up with a classmate and develop a list of the many elements that can influence the assimilation to the American way of life and the loss of an ethnic identity (intermarriage, loss of contact with native country, media images, changing American values, movement out of ethnic neighborhoods and towns, education, etc.). Have them share their answers with the class. Ask students to discuss their own ethnic heritage and whether they have become Americanized. (grades 9-12)

4. Have students pair up and develop a list of reasons why immigrants leave their native country. Have them discuss and list examples of groups throughout history who have left for these reasons. Examples include:

-Religious freedom – English Quakers, Jewish immigrants

-Escape War-torn nations – Vietnamese after Vietnam War

-Economic motives – Italians at turn of 20th century, Mexican immigrants

Discuss the importance of the economic motive for Italian immigrants who came to Monongah. Ask the students to discuss what immigrant groups are coming today and the types of jobs that they are doing. Use this to explain the ongoing economic nature of immigration, that there will always be people coming to a prosperous country to do the difficult work that others don't want to do, and how history has continued to repeat itself.
(grades 9-12)

INTERNET RESOURCES

Thurmond, West Virginia – An NPS Teaching with Historic Places lesson plan

<http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/twhp/wwwlps/lessons/28thurmond/28thurmond.htm>

This site hosts a detailed lesson plan using the town of Thurmond, West Virginia to teach about the significance of coal and the coal mining industry in the United States. Part of

the National Park Service's New River Gorge Site. Though tied to a specific town, the lesson plan teaches universal themes about coal.

American Coal Foundation, selected lesson plans for students

<http://www.teachcoal.org/>

A comprehensive website of potential lesson plans for use in teaching the history and significance of coal and coal mining in the United States. The site provides lessons in two categories – Elementary School and Middle/High School – as well as an extensive list of additional resources.

Coal Mining in Pennsylvania lesson plans

<http://www.explorepahistory.com/>

The ExplorePAhistory website contains numerous classroom activities designed to help students teach the history of coal mining. Though tied to Pennsylvania places, the lesson plans can be incorporated to suit other states. The site allows for key word searches of all available lesson plans. The most relevant for coal mining are “Life in a Coal Patch” and “Working Where the Sun Never Shines.” These can be tailored for students in other states.

Beckley Exhibition Coal Mine, Beckley, West Virginia

<http://www.beckleymine.com/>

Located in southern West Virginia, the Beckley Exhibition Coal Mine provides a living history experience by letting visitors to experience the inside of a coal mine and a mining village. An excellent field trip opportunity for students and teachers studying coal.

Kentucky Coal Mining Museum, Benham, Kentucky

<http://www.kingdomcome.org/museum/>

Housed in an old commissary building, the Kentucky Coal Mining Museum presents mining history through artifacts, historical photographs, and multi-media displays. The museum's interactive website contains several media presentations.

Tour-Ed Mine and Museum, Tarentum, Pennsylvania

<http://www.tour-edmine.com/>

Located just north of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, the Tour-Ed Mine and Museum provides students with the opportunity to travel into a historical coal mine that has ceased operation. A museum of mining artifacts is also available.

The National Coal Mining Museum for England, Overton, England

<http://www.ncm.org.uk/>

This museum chronicles the impact of the coal mining industry on England and the experience of European coal miners. The website provides a virtual tour of the museum that allows site visitors to experience the museum in great detail.

West Virginia University, Regional History Collection, Morgantown, West Virginia

<http://www.libraries.wvu.edu/wvconline/>

Part of West Virginia University Libraries, the West Virginia and Regional History Collections contains one of the most preeminent collections of primary and secondary source materials on coal mining in West Virginia. The collection includes original photographs of the Monongah mine disaster and the records of the Monongah Relief Commission, which distributed funds to the victims' families.

Coal and Coke Heritage Center, Uniontown, Pennsylvania

<http://www.coalandcokepsu.org/>

Part of Penn State University, the Coal and Coke Heritage Center is an archival repository containing primary and secondary resource material on coal mining in Pennsylvania. Also houses an extensive oral history collection with coal miners.

The Farmington Mine Disaster, An account from the USMRA

<http://www.usmra.com/saxsewell/farmington.htm>

A detailed historical account of the 1968 Farmington Mine Disaster from the United States Mine Rescue Association, which contains information on the accident itself and the ensuing rescue and recovery operations. The USMRA website has information on many of the other major mine accidents in American history, including Monongah.

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Books

Bartoletti, Susan Campbell. **A Coal Miner's Bride: The Diary of Anethka Kaminsky**. New York: Scholastic, Inc. 2000. 221 pages.

The dramatic story of a Polish immigrant woman who must travel to the coal fields of Pennsylvania to marry by arrangement, set in the context of the coal industry and its dominance in this part of the country.

_____. **Growing Up in Coal County**. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999. 132 pages.

A photographic look at turn of the 20th century mining in Pennsylvania's Anthracite mining industry which incorporates oral history and archival documents. Written with specific sympathies for the plight of the children in coal mining towns, the author explores the day to day lives in the coal mining towns.

_____. **Kids on Strike**. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1998. 208 pages.

A portrayal of the working conditions of children at the turn of the 20th century, containing numerous photographs illustrating the industrialization and urbanization of the period and its impact on kids.

Brown, Elizabeth Ferguson. **Coal County Christmas**. Honesdale, PA: Boyd's Mill Press, 2003. 32 pages.

Written for a younger reader of ages 4 -8, this book explores life in the Pennsylvania Appalachian coal fields and the hardships faced by miners living there. Contrasts the warmth of a Christmas gathering with the tragedies faced by miners in the coal regions.

Casto, James E. **Southern West Virginia Coal Country**. Charleston, SC: Arcadia, 2004. 128 pages.

This pictorial collection of historic postcards chronicles the history of the coal mining industry in southern West Virginia, illustrating the role that the coal industry played in transforming the state's economy and landscape. Part of the Arcadia Postcards of America series.

Cohen, Stan. **King Coal: A Pictorial Heritage of West Virginia Coal Mining**. Quarrier Press, 1984. 146 pages.

This photographic history book explores pictorially the history of underground coal mining in West Virginia, both the good and the bad, and show how this mineral has affected the history and development of the state.

Dillon, Lacy. **They Died in Darkness**. Coal Books, 1991. 280 pages.

Though out of print, this book is one of the most thorough comprehensive books on mine disasters in the United States. Organized by specific mine disasters, the book talks about the details of each and includes a chapter on Monongah.

Easton, Richard. **A Real American**. New York: Clarion Books, 2002. 160 pages.

A historical novel about a farming child in southwestern Pennsylvania who meets a young Italian immigrant, whose family was drawn to the region by the coal industry. The book follows the labor history of the period and examines the discrimination faced by immigrants in coal country.

Freedman, Russell. **Kids at Work: Lewis Hine and the Crusade Against Child Labor.** New York: Clarion Books, 1998. 112 pages.

This photographic history explores the working lives of children in American industries in the first half of the 20th century using evocative photographs by Lewis Hine, who photographed kids at work over a ten year period from 1908-1918.

Harris, James V. **Coal People: Contemporary Images of Northern Appalachia.**

Sykesville, PA: Nupp Printing Company, 1995. 136 pages.

This book is a photographic collection that bridges the past with the present by showing images from contemporary Appalachia, specifically some of the mining communities locating therein.

Hovanec, Evelyn A. **Common Lives of Uncommon Strength: The Women of the Coal and Coke Area of Southwestern Pennsylvania, 1880-1970.** Uniontown, PA: Penn State Fayette, 2001. 227 pages.

Based on in-depth oral history interviews, this book explores the women of coal country and the role that they played in a typical mining family from the turn of the 20th century through the decline of the Big Coal era. Published in conjunction with the Coal and Coke Heritage Center at Penn State Fayette.

Jackson, Carlton. **The Dreadful Month.** Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Press, 1982. 161 pages.

This book was the first chronicled the historical significance of the month of December 1907 as the most dreadful in American history. Geared to a more advanced reader, college-level reader, the book details Monongah, as well as the Naomi, Yolande, Darr, and Carthage explosions also in December 1907.

Kraft, Betsy Harvey. **Mother Jones: One Woman's Fight for Labor**. New York: Clarion Books, 1995. 116 pages.

This brief biography explores the life and times of labor leader and coal miner sympathizer Mother Jones. An Irish immigrant, Jones brought passion and high color to her career, whether she was organizing unions, delivering fiery speeches around the country or aiding impoverished and brutalized strikers.

McAteer, Davitt. **Monongah: The Tragic Story of the 1907 Monongah Mine Disaster, the Worst Industrial Accident in American History**. Morgantown, WV: WVU Press, 2007. 331 pages.

For the advanced reader, this recent volume is the most thorough research study of the Monongah mine disaster to date. Exploring the details of the explosion itself, its causes, and the effort to provide relief to the victims of the families, the book is a must for the in-depth study of both Monongah and the *American coal mining industry*.

Morgan, Sally. **The Pros and Cons of Coal, Gas, and Oil**. New York: Rosen Central, 2007. 48 pages.

Succinct account that lays out the environmental and energy debates over the three most important fuel resources today, provides an opportunity to introduce the environmental angle of the coal industry today.

Perez, N.A. **Breaker**. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2002. 216 pages.
Set in northeastern Pennsylvania, *Breaker* is the story of fourteen-year-old Pat McFarlane, his rebellious older brother Cal, his ambitious sister Annie, and of Mam, whose fierce pride holds the family together. Most of all, it is the story of the mine, which rules their days, attempts to rob their pride, and takes the life of Pat's father.

Williams, William G. **The Coal King's Slaves**. Shippensburg, PA: Burd Street Press, 2002. 208 pages.

In *The Coal King's Slaves*, a father and his three sons face blackness, filth, hardships, and extreme danger in the anthracite coal mines of eastern Pennsylvania while the woman of their home struggles to keep her family alive. *The Coal King's Slaves*, a historical novel set in the late 1800s, looks back on family life, living conditions, social barriers, industrial greed, violent confrontations, and death and destruction in the coal pits.

Audio/Visual Resources

Coal Digging Blues: Songs of West Virginia Miners. Audio recording. 2006
Produced by West Virginia University, this compact disk contains an array of songs commonly heard in the coal camps of West Virginia. Comes with illustrated booklet with song details and historical information. The songs were collected by folklorist George Korson when he traveled to mining communities in West Virginia in the 1940s.

Matewan. Feature film. Director: John Sayles. 1987.
Historically-accurate PG-13 rated feature film account of the labor struggles between coal miners and the company in Matewan, West Virginia, in 1920. African and Italian American miners were brought in to break the strike, stimulating racial tensions in the coal fields and a common practice in the mines of West Virginia.

Music of Coal: Songs from the Appalachian Coal Fields. Audio recording, 2007

A two compact disk box set by Full Lights studio containing over 40 songs from the Appalachian mine country, complete with detailed liner notes with additional information and historical photographs.

Songs and Ballads of the Anthracite Miners. Audio recording, 1996.

A compilation of songs collected from the Anthracite mining communities in Eastern Pennsylvania. Anthracite, a hard coal unique to the region, is different from bituminous or soft coal, found in western Pennsylvania and West Virginia as well as elsewhere in Appalachia.

Songs and Ballads of the Bituminous Miners. Audio recording, 2002.

An audio compilation featuring 1940 field recordings recorded in Alabama, Kentucky, Ohio, Pennsylvania and West Virginia by George Korson. All tracks have been digitally remastered for this compilation.