

Lesson Plan: Labor Day



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ENGLISH

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Labor Day

[1] Labor Day is a national holiday in the United States. It takes place on the first Monday in September. On this day, Americans **honor** the people whose work—or **labor**—makes the country strong.

[2] Americans celebrate Labor Day because of the **labor movement** that shaped the country during the 1800s. At that time, many workers had hard lives. They faced low pay, long hours, and unsafe work, often in factories.

[3] Workers joined together to ask for better conditions. They wanted **rights** like fair pay, safer workplaces, and time off for rest and recreation.

[4] Before **the labor movement**, many workers worked six or seven days a week. Today, many American workers have two days off each week, usually during the weekend. The labor movement helped Americans win the right to have time off. This is one way the labor movement changed American workers' lives.

[5] The **labor movement** didn't just make life better for workers. It helped businesses grow. When people had safer jobs, fair pay, and time to rest, they became healthier and more **productive**.

They worked more quickly and made fewer mistakes. This **productive** labor force helped the United States become an exceptional place to live, work and do business.

[6] Today, Labor Day is a time to honor workers and enjoy the **recreation** the **labor movement** stood for. Many cities hold parades or picnics where community leaders give speeches about the value of labor. Because Labor Day is always on a Monday, many workers enjoy a three-day weekend.

[7] In fact, many Americans refer to the holiday as "Labor Day Weekend." Some families travel. Others enjoy cookouts, picnics, or trips to the beach. Labor Day also marks the end of summer and the beginning of fall and the school year.

[8] The U.S. government made Labor Day a national holiday in 1894. Over 130 years later, Americans continue to honor workers and the impact they make. Whether they are building homes, farming, teaching children, or creating new technology, workers strengthen communities and the country.

Overview

This 90-minute lesson introduces students to the U.S. holiday of Labor Day through activities that encourage the development of both language skills and analytical skills.

Goals

Students will:

- Practice reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills.
- Strengthen collaboration, communication, creativity, and critical thinking skills.
- Learn about Labor Day holiday traditions in the context of U.S. culture
- Make connections between American Labor Day traditions and their own culture or community

Lesson Materials

1. Printed or projected copy of the photo page at the beginning of this lesson.
2. Printed or projected copy of the “Labor Day” article included with this lesson.
3. Paper, pens, and markers for students to create thank you cards.

Preparation

1. Read through this lesson in its entirety.
2. Review the **Labor Day** article and the **Vocabulary from the Reading** list below.
3. Consider traditions in your own country around honoring or celebrating workers.
4. Determine whether you will need to activate prior knowledge, pre-teach, or otherwise provide scaffolding, or support, for your students beyond the suggestions in the Procedures section.

Vocabulary from the Reading

- **labor** (noun) – Work, especially physical or hard work; all workers as a group.
- **honor** (verb) – To show respect and say that something or someone is important. For example, Americans *honor* workers by giving them a special holiday.



- **movement** (noun) – A group of people working together to change something in society. The *labor movement* was a group of workers who wanted to improve life for workers.
- **rights** (plural noun) – Things that people should have or be able to do. Workers asked for *rights* like fair pay and safe workplaces.
- **recreation** (noun) – Activities that people do for fun or relaxation when they are not working.
- **productive** (adjective) – Able to complete a large amount of work in a short period of time.

Procedures

Introduction: See, Feel, Wonder (5 minutes)

1. Show students the image on the first page of this lesson.
2. Ask students to write down their responses to the following questions:
 - When you look at this image:
 - What do you see?
 - What do you feel?
 - What do you wonder?
 - You may wish to share the following sentence starters with students.
 - When I look at this picture, I see . . .
 - This picture makes me feel . . .
 - This picture makes me wonder . . .

Reading Activity: Labor Day (25 minutes)

1. Introduce the vocabulary from the reading. Explain that some of the words may be familiar to students, but three of the words have specific meanings in the article they will read: *labor*, *movement*, and *rights*.
2. Ask students to read paragraphs 2 to 6 of the Labor Day article. They may work individually, in pairs, or in groups.
3. Lead a Think-Pair-Share discussion, where each student thinks about the questions, works with their partner to respond to the questions, and then shares their responses with the full group. Encourage students to underline parts of the reading that could help them respond to the questions. Ask students to discuss these questions

- Why do Americans celebrate Labor Day?
- What was the labor movement?
- What do we do in our country to honor workers?

Speaking and Writing Activity: Workers in Our Community (30-40 minutes)

1. Ask students: What jobs do people in your community do?
2. Write their responses on the board. Keep the focus on jobs done by local people.
3. Ask follow-up questions:
 - Which jobs are most common in our community?
 - What do these workers do?
 - How does their work help others?
4. Put students in small groups. Ask each group to pick one job from the board to discuss. At least one student in the group should know someone who does this job. You may use these questions to prompt discussion:
 - What tasks does a person with this job do?
 - What might be difficult about this job?
 - What would someone learn by doing this job?
 - What skills or tools are needed for this job?
 - How does this person help our community by doing their job?
5. Groups may share the ideas they discussed with the whole class.

Writing and Creativity Activity: Thank You Cards for Workers (15-25 minutes)

1. Explain that students will create a thank you card for a worker they know. They can use the ideas from their small group discussion to help them make the card.
2. Show students an example thank you card message:
Dear Pedro, Thank you for being a baker. I love the smell of fresh bread. You work hard so people have good things to eat. Sincerely, Sara
3. Remind students that their card should express thanks and explain how the person's work helps others (the student, the community, or both).
4. Provide sentence starters if needed (e.g., "Thank you for...", "Your work helps...")
5. Give students time to write and decorate their cards.
6. Ask a few students to read their cards aloud.
7. Place the cards on tables in the classroom. Students can walk around to view the thank you cards.
8. Encourage students to take their card home and give it to the worker they know.

Closing Activity: See, Feel, Wonder, Reflect (5 minutes)

1. Ask students to review what they wrote in the Introduction activity.
2. Show them the same image from the first page of this lesson plan.
3. Students may work in pairs to discuss the following questions:
 - Do you notice anything different about the image now?
 - How does the image make you feel now?
 - What new questions do you have about the image?

Variations and Extensions

Interviewing a Worker

This lesson is designed to be completed within one 90-minute class session. However, you may wish to extend the lesson over two days in order to incorporate the Interviewing a Worker activity, which students may complete as homework.

The Interviewing a Worker activity can be used instead of, or in addition to, the Speaking and Writing Activity: Workers in Our Community.

1. Assign students to interview a person they know about their job.
2. Ask them to find out:
 - What tasks the person does in their job
 - What skills or tools are used in their job
 - What's difficult about the job
 - Something they have learned doing the job
 - How their work benefits the community
3. When students return to class, they can use the information they gathered in their interviews to create a 2 to 3-minute presentation about the worker and their job, which they may share with the whole class or in a small group.

Cinquain Poem Guessing Game

This poetry writing activity can be used instead of, or in addition to, the thank you card activity.

1. Introduce the cinquain poem format using this example:



Farmers
Sweaty, hot
Planting, watering, harvesting
They work hard and pray for good weather.
Gardeners

2. Explain the structure of the poem:
 - Line 1: A noun (job title)
 - Line 2: Two adjectives that describe the job
 - Line 3: Three action verbs related to the job
 - Line 4: A sentence or phrase about the job
 - Line 5: A noun related to the job title
3. Ask students to write their own cinquain poem about a job or type of worker. Remind them they can use their interview or group discussion activity to help them shape their poems.
4. When students finish their poems, ask them to conceal the job names on the first and last lines. Students take turns reading their middle three lines aloud while classmates guess the occupation.
5. Once someone guesses correctly (or after a few tries), the student reveals the full poem.
6. You may display finished poems on a class board or wall.