



Narrative Flow of the Unit

Narrative Flow, Teachers' Background

Progressivism was a U.S. reform movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Newspaper journalists, artists of various mediums, historians, health care professionals, and middle class citizens were some of the participants. They acted on the belief that society could make progress against the abuses of the Industrial Revolution. Urban poverty and slums, child labor, dangerous working conditions and low wages, unsanitary factory food processing, and immigrant ghetto conditions were several of the most prominent concerns.

Seeking root causes for these issues, progressives often identified trusts or monopolies. Because they controlled markets and held great influence over government, business monopolies of the late 1800's also easily controlled wages, hours, and working conditions in factories, almost universally to the detriment of the workers. Reform business, believed many progressives, and you would solve other issues, many related to inequitable treatment of workers.

Ultimately, politicians, labor unions and social reformers changed the nature of the U.S. government's role in business regulation – during the progressive era the government began to referee and assume a more powerful regulatory role over big business. Essentially, in response to the enormous and growing power of big business, the federal government was spurred to increase its own power in order to secure a more level playing field for all citizens.

Narrative Guide

(This “script” is for teacher reference, to enhance visualization of the unit flow and provide ideas for setting the unit up as a mystery. The mystery is “Why was the progressive era called progressive?” The clues are books, primary source documents, photos and other readings.)

During this unit, we're going to explore some of the things that were happening in the United States 100 years ago. We'll be history detectives -- newspaper reports and photographs will be some of our clues as we piece together the story of the Progressive era in American history. Let's begin with a definition of “progressive”. (Written on board.) Anyone want to take a stab at it? Random House dictionary gives us this for a definition: “Progressing, advancing, improving.” So if we have an era in American history called the Progressive era, what do you think the story of that era may be about? All right – let's dive in and see what we find out.



You have already studied some of the pieces of this progressive era puzzle when you learned about immigration and industrialization. What do you remember about those units? **(Brainstorm questions -- Activity 1.)**

Activity 2

If we're going to understand progressive history, we need to learn some more about our business system, about the type of economy we have in the U.S. Does anyone want to offer a definition for "economy"? Random House again: "the prosperity or earnings of a place." So our national economy is our national wealth, how we manage money as a nation. Did you know there are various systems for managing a country's wealth? Have you ever heard words like socialism or communism or capitalism? We're going to focus on capitalism today, since it's our nation's economic system and since it's an important piece of the Progressive era story.

Long, long, long ago, in many places in the world the most common form of government was an aristocracy, or rule by a king. Under this government system the king owned and controlled almost everything and told everyone in the kingdom what he or she could and couldn't do. A few nobles (other so-called royal people) supported the king for the privileges of land ownership and social standing they enjoyed. Kings and noblemen were royalty by birth; because their parents were royalty, they were also royal. Rulers were not chosen because they were wise or just. They were simply born into a ruling family.

Most people during these long ago times were poor and did not have many rights. Many people grew tired of this system and sought a change. Choosing rulers who were wise and just made more sense to the people that questioned the royal system, and so they formed democracies. Now they could elect their leaders, own land, form businesses and enjoy some personal freedoms.

Democracy is a political system in which citizens vote to choose their leaders. The economic system that usually accompanies Democracy is called capitalism. In the United States our government is a democracy and our economic system is capitalism.

Capitalism has several main parts. We're going to learn about some of those in this unit.

There are many differences in capitalist companies but there is one great similarity: they almost all are owned by private businesses and not by the government. There are a few exceptions: the government owns a few industries, such as the U.S. postal service and the TVA, a corporation that uses river dams to produce electricity. But overall, a main trait of capitalism is private ownership of property; in this case, property means businesses.

(As an example display a picture of Henry Ford and an old Ford car.)

- ❖ What company did Ford own?
- ❖ Why do people own factories? (Children may answer, to make money. If not, guide them toward this concept.) This is called profit. In order to make a profit you must sell a product for more than it costs to make it. So if a candy bar costs 40 cents to make, you need to sell it for _____? That's right – 41 cents or more. This is why people get into business -- to make a profit. **(You may write this formula on board: Price you charge for a product - the cost to make it = profit. Candy bar example: 60¢ price - 40¢ cost = 20¢ profit.)**
- ❖ What determines the cost to make a product? **(Children guess. Construct a cost pictograph using symbols for: raw materials, people's labor, and factories and machines used to make a product.)**

There is another part of capitalism called competition. What is competition? (Students may talk about playing sports, etc.) In business, companies compete with other companies that sell similar products. Customers may choose to buy Brand-X because it is higher quality and has unique features, or they may buy Brand-Y because it is cheaper.

Competition helps determine price, how much a company charges for its product. Let's look at the companies on the board and see which ones are in competition with one another. They all sell things you may want such as toys or need to have such as food. And you sometimes choose between getting a toy or a piece of candy, or between a baseball or a Happy Meal™. But you also make choices between products that are in direct competition; for example: fast food items are in direct competition with one another.

Do you think competition makes prices go up or down? If there was only one restaurant in town, do you think it would charge more or less than it does now?

Competition between companies even affects workers. The wage that workers are paid is partially determined by the number of other people available who also want or need a job. When many people are unemployed and available to do a job, the company employer can pay lower wages because there are almost always some people willing to work for low pay in order to work at all. Similarly, jobs that require no special skills pay less than jobs requiring workers with specialized skills. This is because almost anyone can do an unskilled job, but a limited number of people exist with the specific skills to do a specialized job.

- ❖ So, what happens if there is only one company in an area that provides a good or service, like our restaurant example? (Students may answer the price goes up. You might also lead them to see that quality may go down.)

- ❖ What happens if there is only one company providing jobs? (Students may be able to answer the wages will go down, workers may have to work longer hours or under bad or dangerous working conditions. This point could be illustrated by a brief role play. Ask for five student volunteers. Tell them you need the board cleaned and will pay in miniature candy bars. Tell the students the usual wage is 5 bars. Then one at a time ask the students what wages, or how many candy bars, they require to do the job. The students may begin underbidding one another. Or they may try to collectively bargain. Head-off collective action for now – explain it was illegal during the progressive era. But you may wish later to return to this activity to illustrate collective action. This activity could include another teacher employer, if possible, to illustrate better wages when there is competition. The second employer would share the same pool of five employees and this may keep wages higher.)

When there only one company provides a good or service and there is no competition, this is called a **Monopoly**™. Monopolies happened in the period of time that we are going to study. During the period we are studying, the Progressive Era, government did not referee business activities. Government leaders thought competition would create the best situation for everyone. Unfortunately, business leaders knew competition limited how rich they could get. So some businessmen schemed to put their competitors out of business. They created monopolies by lowering sale prices until they put small, local companies out of business. Then they could raise prices high and pay low wages because they were the only provider of a particular good or service.

So far we've got some background knowledge on capitalism and monopolies. Now let's become history detectives and explore some evidence from our Progressive era of 100 years ago. As history detectives, we need evidence to build a story about what happened during that time. **(Activity 2 -- Distribute readings about unfair business practices. Analyze readings.)**

(You may wish to talk about the game of monopoly, which many of your students may have played. The game illustrates that when you own all the properties in a set, a monopoly, you can charge higher rent prices than when you own just one. Or when you own both utilities you may charge ten times the role of the dice, instead of four times.)

Once he had a monopoly, a business owner changed prices, which increased, and quality, which often declined. The monopoly owners also increased profit by paying workers lower wages for longer hours, and by not spending money to keep factories clean and safe. They even corrupted government. They bribed politicians to stay out of the way and not protect customers or workers.

How are we doing with our story of the Progressive era? We've found out a hundred years ago some companies formed monopolies. Was that a good thing? What were some of the bad things monopolies could do? (Gouge consumers, treat workers badly, drive small business owners out of business, etc.) What else have we learned about this era? (Poor work conditions and wages.) So far, the progressive era isn't looking very progressive. What was our definition? Advancing, improving? See any of that yet in what we've talked about? Hmm. Well, a detective puts her story together one piece at a time, so let's look at some more evidence from a hundred years ago.

(Photographs and written accounts of child labor conditions. **See Activity 3.**)

Before we go on, let's take inventory again.

- ❖ What's happening in the progressive era? (Monopolies, child labor)
- ❖ Do we see any signs yet why this is called the *Progressive* era?

(Photos and accounts of tenement housing – see Activity 4.)

So far, do you have a bright picture of the Progressive era?

Fortunately, in the United States we have a free press. This means when something bad is happening in the country, newspaper people and other writers can make us all aware of the problem. The First Amendment to the Constitution guarantees this right. "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof, or abridging the freedom of speech or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances." Have you ever thought about how many ways freedom of speech is important? (This is a good place to digress a bit on the brilliance of the first amendment and its impact on the watchdog nature of the press, on individual freedoms, on the potential tyranny of the majority, etc.)

Thanks to the First Amendment, certain journalists (writers) 100 years ago called the attention of the general public and politicians to the abuses of their time. They wrote book and magazine articles about harsh conditions in American life. Their nickname was "muckrakers". Why do you think they were called that? (The president at the time, Teddy Roosevelt, said they raked up the muck) What sorts of things do you think the muckrakers wrote about? (Students may mention monopolies, tenements and child labor.)

(Muckrakers Group Activity – Activity 5)

- ❖ What did congressmen do in response to people's concerns about child labor and tenement conditions and meat-packing factories?



(Progressive Laws -- Activity 5)

I think we've got enough clues now to put together a story of the Progressive era. Let's start by taking inventory. What sorts of clues have we gathered? (Primary sources -- Muckraker accounts, photos, laws / Secondary sources – books and video.)

What did we learn about from the clues? (Monopolies, work conditions, child labor, tenement slum conditions, muckrakers, political action or law-making.) Why do you think this period 100 years ago was called the progressive era? Is it an accurate name for the period? Did progressives get changes made quickly? Or did some changes take time? When was child labor abolished? Have any of you been to a big city? Do we still have slums in our cities? Do you think there's still work to be done? What sorts of things would you want to change about our country?

(Activity 6)

To tell the story of what we've learned, we're going to make mind maps. Each of you will draw a set of pictures that represent concepts from the unit. You might think of this as drawing a set of cartoon pictures. As a group your cartoon pictures will tell a history, or story, of the Progressive movement. (Teachers – you may wish to begin this activity by having students brainstorm as a class elements of one of the unit concepts, such as capitalism. Students would then choose one or two of those elements to illustrate on their maps. And on their own or in pairs, they would replicate the brainstorming process, thinking of elements to illustrate the other main concepts.)