

RIGHT-TO-WORK LEGISLATION

GRADES 10-11

DAVID FAERBER

TIME ALLOTMENT: Two 50-minute classes.

OVERVIEW:

In 1976, the Louisiana Legislature passed the state's first right-to-work legislation. Right-to-work laws basically say that no person may be denied employment, and employers may not be denied the right to employ any person, because of that person's membership or non-membership in any labor organization. Even though he signed the legislation, then-Governor Edwin Edwards did not support the idea, but felt it was necessary in order to attract industry to the state. Students will look at each side of this issue and examine the advantages and disadvantages of right-to-work laws.

SUBJECT MATTER: Social Studies, Economics, History, Government

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

Students will be able to:

- Students will define right-to-work laws.
- Students will list advantages of having right-to-work laws.
- Students will list disadvantages of having right-to-work laws.
- Students will identify regions of the U. S. where right-to-work laws have been enacted.
- Identify which categories of workers can and cannot be forced to join a union.



STANDARDS:

National Content Standards in Economics

<http://www.civiced.org/stds.html>

Standard 10: Role of Economic Institutions

Institutions evolve in market economies to help individuals and groups accomplish their goals. Banks, labor unions, corporations, legal systems, and not-for-profit organizations are examples of important institutions. A different kind of institution, clearly defined and enforced property rights, is essential to a market economy.

Standard 16: Role of Government

There is an economic role for government in a market economy whenever the benefits of a government policy outweigh its costs. Governments often provide for national defense, address environmental concerns, define and protect property rights, and attempt to make markets more competitive. Most government policies also redistribute income.

Louisiana Social Studies Content Standards

<http://www.lcet.doe.state.la.us/doe/assessment/standards/SOCIAL.pdf>

- H-1A-M3:** Analyzing the impact that specific individuals, ideas, events, and decisions had on the course of history; (1, 2, 3, 4)
- H-1A-M4:** Analyzing historical data using primary and secondary sources; (1, 2, 3, 4)
- H-1B-M18:** Discussing significant developments and issues in contemporary United States history; (1, 2, 3, 4, 5)
- H-1D-M1:** Describing the contributions of people, events, movements, and ideas that have been significant in the history of Louisiana;
- H-1A-H3:** Interpreting and evaluating the historical evidence presented in primary and secondary sources; (1, 2, 3, 4)
- H-1B-H17:** Analyzing developments and issues in contemporary American society; (1, 2, 3, 4, 5)



MEDIA COMPONENT:**Video:**

Louisiana A History, Episode 6, *No Story Is Ever Over*. (Louisiana Public Broadcasting)

Web sites:

<http://www.nrtw.org/rtws.htm>, U. S. map showing states that have enacted right-to-work laws.

http://www.nrtw.org/a/a_1.htm Answers to the question "Can I be required to be a union member or pay dues to a union?"

http://www.epinet.org/content.cfm/briefingpapers_rtw-ok Economic Policy Institute writing on right-to-work laws and economic development.

MATERIALS:*Per Student:*

- Activity sheet (**Focus on Video**)
- Butcher paper (chalk board or dry erase board can be used in its place)

PREP FOR TEACHERS:

1. **CUE** video to *Rouges and Reforms*. Preview this segment, which will last about two and a half minutes.
2. Visit Web sites and preview the materials there for use in the classroom. Bookmark each Web site on each computer to be used. Visit Web sites and preview the materials there for use in the classroom. Bookmark each Web site on each computer to be used.
3. Look closely at this website http://www.epinet.org/content.cfm/briefingpapers_rtw-ok Decide which parts of the arguments you want students to read to report to the class. You may want to use three or four of the writings.
4. Prepare one copy for each student of the **Focus on Video** activity sheet and **Do I have to join the Union?** activity sheet.
5. Have butcher paper and markers (or use chalk/dry erase board) to compile list of advantages and disadvantages of right-to-work laws.
6. When using the video provide students with worksheet to answer as they watch the video.
7. **Focus for Media Interaction:** Read questions and find answers as you preview the video. Provide students with a copy of the Focus for Media Interaction worksheet.

INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITY:**(Setting the Stage:)**

Ask students if their parents are members of a labor union. Depending on the school setting, the response will be different. Point out to students that union membership in the U. S. has been declining and that a number of states (23, including Louisiana) have enacted right-to-work laws. These laws allow worker not to be forced to join a union as a condition of employment. In this lesson, students will examine the advantages and disadvantages of states enacted these laws, look at states that have done so, and discuss how unionism effects employment.

LEARNING ACTIVITY:**Day One:**

1. Introduce the idea that Louisiana needed to attract jobs during the late 1970s. In 1976 the state adopted a right-to-work law and then Governor Edwin Edwards, signed it into law, even though he opposed it. Edwards had had the support of labor unions throughout his political career, and this move was not in the unions' best interest.

2. Inform students that they will be viewing a short segment of the video, *Louisiana: A History*. Distribute *Focus on Video* activity sheet.
3. Provide your students with a **FOCUS FOR MEDIA INTERACTION** by asking them: "Why was Edwin Edwards opposed to right-to-work laws? If he was opposed to right-to-work laws, why did he sign the legislation?" **Start** the video beginning at *Boom or Bust*, which is approximately 20 minutes into the video. **Pause** the video at the end of the segment, after you hear "We have no intention of taking this lying down."
4. Review questions on *Focus on Video* activity sheet.
5. Conduct a discussion of who might benefit from right-to-work laws and who stood to lose with their passage. Be sure to address the following topics;
 - a) What led to the boom period in Louisiana in the 1970s? (*the oil and gas boom*)
 - b) Why might a politician be in favor of right to-work laws? (*brings in jobs and tax revenue*)
 - c) Who stands strongly against these laws? (*labor unions*)
 - d) Why would they (unions) be so strongly against laws that might be more industry into the state? (*loss of power and importance of unions, lower paying jobs for workers*)
6. Have students make a list of states that currently have right-to-work laws. This can be found at <http://www.nrtw.org/rtws.htm>.
7. Show students the map of states (in blue) that have right-to-work laws and ask them to list connections (geographic and other) that states with these laws have.

Day Two:

1. Distribute activity sheet "Do I have to join a union?" Have students write a short summary using the information found at http://www.nrtw.org/a/a_1.htm.
2. Direct students to this Web site: http://www.epinet.org/content.cfm/briefingpapers_rtw-ok. Divide the class into groups and have them study several of the writer's findings on the impact of right-to-work laws. Have them report findings to the class.
3. Using the butcher paper or chalk board make a list of the pros and cons of right-to-work laws.

CULMINATING ACTIVITIES:

Choose three students to be union organizers and three to be business owners. The rest of the class can be potential employees. Have them debate the merits of union and non-union shops. Make sure debate is intellectual, not emotional or personal.

CROSS-CURRICULAR EXTENSIONS:

LANGUAGE ARTS:

- Write a letters to potential employers who may bring industry to the state touting the benefits of coming to a state with right-to-work laws.

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS:

- Write letters to the editor of the local newspaper voicing opinions on right-to-work laws. Invite a member of a local union to speak to the class. Have him/her explain the benefits of union memberships and state the union's stand on right-to-work laws.

STUDENT MATERIALS:

See attached:

- *Do I Have To Join a Union?* activity sheet.
- *Focus on the Video* worksheet

Do I Have to Join a Union?

Using the Web site “Can I be required to be a union member or pay dues to a union?” http://www.nrtw.org/a/a_1.htm, describe the rights of each of the following types of employees.

Federal Employee
Private Sector Employee
Railway or Airline Employee
State or Local Government Employee
Public School Teacher or College Professor

Focus on the Video

Louisiana: A History Episode 6

Answer these questions as you view the video.

1. What was the first thing Edwin Edwards did once he was first elected governor in 1972?
2. To what former governor did many political reporters compare Edwin Edwards?
3. What industry paid for the growth of state government in the 1970s?
4. What monument to the state's swelling economy and soaring confidence was completed in 1975?
5. What legislation ended labor union's tremendous influence in Louisiana?
6. Why did Senator Russell Long want right-to-work laws passed in Louisiana?

