

THE HISTORY CHANNEL CLASSROOM STUDY GUIDES

Empires of Industry

Empires of Industry is a mini-series which explores the cornerstones of America's economic might that established the United States as a world leader. Each of the one hour programs in this remarkable series focuses on an industry which played a unique role in America's rise to world economic dominance. The stories of changing fortunes in the steel, coal, brewing, ship building and textile industries reveal much about our country's past and present.

Empires of Industry would be useful for classes on American History, History of Science and Technology, Economics and American Culture. It is appropriate for middle school and high school.

Andrew Carnegie and the Age of Steel

Andrew Carnegie and the Age of Steel chronicles the rise of the iron and steel industries in the United States and the personal ascent of immigrant Andrew Carnegie, whose steel company would one day make him the richest man in America. The American iron, and later steel, industries were the backbone of the Industrial Revolution in the United States, supplying the material that would enable the growth of railroads, skyscrapers, war machines and a host of other industries. It is the story of the rise of big industry in the United States, in all its glory, and all its shame. While the steel industry would make men such as Andrew Carnegie wealthy beyond imagination, it would also cripple, maim, and kill those who toiled to keep the furnaces blasting and the steel rolling.

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Discussion Questions

1. To some people, Andrew Carnegie was the manifestation of the "American dream."
2. The United States' iron and steel industries helped make the United States the most powerful nation in the world. What was the role of these industries in the U.S.' ascent to world power?

3. Molten iron is called “pig iron.” How did it get this nickname? How does this nickname reflect the lives and times of the workers who coined it?
4. Many early iron workers, as in other early industries, were indentured servants. What is an indentured servant? How did indentured servants contribute to the growth of both colonial America and the United States?
5. How did the iron industry contribute to the American Revolution and American independence?
6. What is the “hot blast” process and how did it change the iron industry?
7. What is the “Bessemer” process and how is it responsible for the birth and growth of the steel industry?
8. Steel is known as the “beast of American industry.” What is meant by this phrase and why is the steel industry associated with it?
9. Working in the steel mills was one of the most dangerous jobs in industry. What were some of the dangers to steel workers? Why would workers continue to work in so dangerous an environment?
10. How did the invention and mass production of the automobile influence the steel industry?
11. How has foreign competition changed the way America conducts business?

Extended Activities

1. Create a poster that illustrates the process of turning ore into iron in the early iron industry. Then illustrate how the advances in technology altered the process.
2. Imagine that you are a journalist during the Homestead Strike of the 1880s. Write an editorial in which you recount the events of the strike and give your views on both the workers' and owners' positions.