

# THE HISTORY CHANNEL CLASSROOM STUDY GUIDES

## Empires of Industry

*Empires of Industry* is a series that 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 that 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 Textiles and other American 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.

### Black Gold: The Story of Oil

Modern America depends on a steady source of petroleum and petroleum by-products to satisfy its ever-increasing and voracious appetite for fuel. Oil, the "black gold" of the ground, is one of America's most precious and abundant commodities, and yet America still needs the oil exports of Arab nations to fill its need. *Black Gold, The Story of Oil* chronicles the birth and rise of the oil industry in the United States, from its fledgling beginnings, through the days of John D. Rockefeller and the robber barons, to the Gulf War and the present.

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### Discussion Questions

1. Oil is sometimes called "black gold." Why is it called by this name?
2. Prior to the discovery of kerosene, Americans illuminated their homes with candles or whale oil. How did kerosene change the lives of Americans? How did the discovery of kerosene change the process of gathering petroleum?
3. What is persistence? How did Edwin Drake's persistence finally pay off? What other figures in American history have displayed remarkable persistence?
4. Standard Oil made John D. Rockefeller one of the richest men in American history. How and why did Rockefeller get into the oil business?

5. Discuss the concept of a boom/bust economy and the boom/bust towns that surrounded the oil industry. What industries today still have boom/bust characteristics?
6. How did Standard Oil eliminate most of its competition?
7. Besides being one of the richest men in America, John D. Rockefeller was also one of the most criticized. Why did Rockefeller face so much criticism?
8. Why did Thomas Edison's light bulb threaten the oil industry?
9. How did the automobile industry save the oil industry?
10. In the early years of the 20th century, Spindle Top in Texas erupted into the largest oil well in America. How did Spindle Top change the oil industry?
11. What is OPEC? Why did it place an embargo on the United States in the 1970s? What were the results?

### **Extended Activities**

1. Create a poster that illustrates the uses for petroleum and petroleum by-products and also suggests some other alternatives for these products.
2. Imagine that you are a newspaper reporter. Write an account of the eruption of Spindle Top that conveys the magnitude of this oil strike to your readers.