



Energy Generating a Culture: American Coal Miners and Coal Mining Culture

Guide for Curriculum Unit 04.04.01
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Washing machines, televisions, air traffic control towers, and the Panama Canal all have one thing in common: they each require tremendous quantities of energy. In America's free market system, many believe that the end-consumer is the one who absorbs all of the costs of the procurement of energy. In a sense, this may be true - each of us who purchases a commodity inherits a fraction of the costs incurred before reaching us. However, this does not tell the whole story of a commodity's journey. In the case of electricity, entire (sub)cultures have developed out of the profits generated by - and the costs incurred in - the generation of energy for consumers. One important example of this truth is coal mining culture.

This unit will introduce students to the lives of coal miners through scientific, historical, and literary texts in both print and electronic media. Sources will include investigations of coal industry titans to regulators and anecdotes describing children's worries for their fathers in the mines. Students will take away an empathetic understanding of what it takes to make their lights come on in both technological and human terms. Moreover, they will be able to articulate the contribution that coal miners make to our society through multiple performances of understanding: written, pictorial, and dramatic.

(Recommended for English and History, grades 10-12.)

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