

Teacher Guide for *Fire in the Hole!*

Title: Fire in the Hole! / by Mary Cronk Farrell.

Publisher: Clarion Books, c2004.

ISBN: 0-618-44634-6

LCCN: 2004004501

Dewey: -Fic-

Classifications: Fiction

Interest Level: 5-8

Reading Level: 5.1

Honors and Awards:

2005 Western Writers of America SPUR Award

2005 Bank Street College Best Book

2005 Notable Social Studies Trade Book

2006 New York Public Library Best Books for the Teenage

Reviews:

VOYA (Voice of Youth Advocates)

"A compelling historical novel...both gripping and poignant...fast paced and peopled with vivid, believable characters."

Kirkus Review (October 1, 2004)

With his mother dead, his father imprisoned, and rent due, 14-year-old Mick must take responsibility for his family. But does this mean giving up his dream of college and becoming a newspaperman? Is he betraying his unionist father by taking a job in the mines as a non-union worker? Set in Idaho during the 1899 Coeur d'Alene mine disputes, when radicals blew up the ore-concentrating mill and Federal troops responded with mass arrests, Farrell's debut follows Mick as he works the mine, engineers a rescue of his father, and finds his own path in life. Fictional newspaper articles by Mick's mentor Mr. Delaney and a good author's note contribute historical and legal context for this story of family, dreams, and an important segment of American history. (Fiction. 10-14)

Booklist (Fall 2004)

Gr. 5-8. "Based on actual events, Farrell's first novel fairly brims with details and mining history. Farrell's characters and their motivations ring true, and the ending leaves hope that things will improve not only for Mick but for everyone. A good choice for historical fiction buffs and readers studying the mining industry and labor unions." *Kay Weisman*
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Understanding Time and Place:

Mick's story unfolds during a tumultuous decade of labor strife across the nation. Throughout the western states clashes between miners and mining company owners flared into violence. In Pennsylvania federal troops were called in to quell strikes by iron, tin and steel workers. Employees of the Pullman Palace Car company which manufactured railroad cars were also put down by US soldiers. [Background on labor unions provided on page 6]

The setting for Fire in the Hole! is a valley cut through the northern Idaho panhandle by the North and South forks of Coeur d'Alene River and its tributaries. In 1899 this valley was known as the Coeur d'Alene Mining District. Mines large and small extracted lead and silver from the river valley and mountainsides. The towns and mining camps of the region were populated mainly by single white men and some families. These men were tough and independent, their character more like the base rock from which they wrestled the ore than the fine silver that resulted from their labor. They saw themselves as taming the wild, taking raw nature and building something larger and more lasting than themselves. Native people also lived in the region. This had been the homeland of the Coeur d'Alene Tribe for many thousands of years, but the Tribe had been forced onto a reservation to the south and west of the Silver Valley 20-years earlier. The Coeur d'Alenes had subsisted on this land of prairies, verdant forests and abundant fish and wildlife for uncounted generations.

Analyzing Character and Plot:

- Describe the main character, Mick O'Shea. Name early influences on Mick, a defining incident and how he changes throughout the story.
- Name several other characters and explain how they are important in the development of Mick's character.
- What qualities does Mick have that help or hinder him?
- What obstacles does he face in attaining his goals? How does he overcome them? Can you think of other choices he might have made and how those might have worked out?
- Can you identify a theme in this novel? Does this theme come up in your life, or do you have trouble relating to it? Explain.
- What did you like about this story? What did you dislike about it? Was the ending satisfying?

Discussion questions:

- In what ways do events in the novel in 1899 relate to present day? Do similar things happen now? Do teenagers find themselves in any similar situations?
- Do you relate to Mick or any of the characters in the story? Why or Why not?
- How do you see men and women's roles defined in "Fire in the Hole!"? What qualities made a "man" or "woman" in the late 1800's? How are men and women's roles different today? How are they the same? Do you agree or disagree with men and women having certain roles?
- Taking into account the experiences of Mick's mother and father in this story, which do you think had the most difficult life?

- In the late 1800's many people believed that it was destiny for the Caucasian race to "conquer" the mountains, prairies, and waters of the West as well as the Native peoples. Do you agree or disagree with this?
- The many natural resources of the land from East to West have helped make the United States a powerful world force. Have the results of this been negative or positive?
- Do you think unions are still necessary? Why or why not?
- As the United States' industrial strength grew, divisions opened wider between workers and management causing labor unions to organize. Often strikes or protests by the unions sparked violence which led to loss of life. Do you think this violence was necessary to achieve change such as better wages and conditions for workers?
- What is martial law? Can you imagine living under martial law? What would that be like?
- If you were arrested today for a crime, what rights would you have? Does it ever happen today that people are arrested and not given due process (the right to know charges against them, the right to an attorney, the right to a speedy trial, the right to trial by jury)?
- Many miners and other low wage workers during the period of the Industrial Revolution were immigrants. Americans were sometimes suspicious of their differences. How does this remain an issue in our country today?
- When new power drills replaced miners' muscle and hammers, companies needed fewer workers. New technology also required new skills. Do you think this contributed to the rise of unions? How? How does new technology impact workers today?

Activities across the Curriculum:

Resources:

Online:

<http://homepages.uhwo.hawaii.edu/~clear/Timeline-US.html>

Comprehensive timeline of events in US labor history

<http://bailey83221.livejournal.com/30663.html> A very good timeline of Labor History Timeline for 1806-1986

<http://www.lutins.org/labor.html> An Eclectic List of Events in U.S. Labor History

Nice timeline compiled by Allen Lutins

<http://www.laborheritage.org/> **The Labor Heritage Foundation** works to strengthen the labor movement through the use of music and the arts.

Books:

“Kids at Work: Lewis Hine and the Crusade against Child Labor” by Russell Freedman (Clarion books, 1998)

“Rosie in New York City: Gotcha by Carol Matas (Aladdin Paperbacks, 2003)

“Farmworker’s Friend: The Story of Cesar Chavez” by David R. Collins (Trailblazer Biographies, 1996)

“Mother Jones: Labor Leader) by Steve Erwin, Charles, III Barnett, and Leslie F. Orear (Graphic Biographies, 2006

Dear America: “Dreams in the Golden Country” by Kathryn Lasky (Scholastic 2003)

Curriculum Activities:

Art:

- Research labor songs and musicians. Share recordings in class or teach students to sing one of the songs.
Several of the many labor musicians are: Joe Hill, Woodie Guthrie, Sarah Ogan Gunning.
A few of the many, many songs are: “*Don’t Go Down in the Mine, Dad,*” “*Ludlow Massacre,*” “*Sixteen Tons,*” “*No Christmas in Kentucky*”
- Have students choose a trade or craft to research, put together a costume representing a worker, and design a protest poster. Hold a *Labor Parade* with students acting the parts of different workers. Each could give a short speech from the worker’s point of view explaining why they are protesting or striking.

Social Studies:

- Have students research the American Labor movement and choose one of the following activities to complete.
 - On a map of the United States plot the location of five important labor incidents. Write a paragraph on each including important information about the incident.
 - Make a timeline including a dozen important events in the history of the American Labor Movement.

--Choose one particular turning point in the US labor movement and write an essay on what happened and what difference that made.

--Choose a labor leader and give a persuasive speech either refuting his or her views, or telling why this person was an inspiring leader.

- **Debate the Role of Labor Unions.** Take on a particular current or historical role such as employee or factory owner. What impact does the union have on your life?
- **Compare Child Labor Issues.** Compare the child labor issues of 1900 with the issues in 2000. How are they alike and different?
- **Debate whether unions are necessary today.** Organized labor is not as powerful today as it once was. Unions have helped workers earn higher wages and better working conditions, but some people think they are too powerful.

Language Arts:

- “Fire in the Hole!” is historical fiction. The main character and his family are fictional characters. But the major events of the story really happened and some of the minor characters were real people. Imagine yourself living through an historical event you are familiar with and write a story about it with yourself as the main character.
- The author of this novel used actual newspapers from one-hundred years ago to research the events of this story. Check if your public library has old newspapers, perhaps on microfilm. If so, go to the library and read some articles from a newspaper at least 50-years-old. Report to your class what you learned.
- As you read the novel, write down any words that are unfamiliar to you and look up their definitions. Do you know these words: *galena, labor union, scab, strike, martial law, flapjacks, hoisted, plucky, gulch, lode, galley*
- Mick disagrees with his father about his future work. Can you see Da’s point of view? Write a one page essay arguing either Mick or his father’s point of view.
- Have you ever had a disagreement with your mom or dad? Create two characters, a child and parent. Write a story using your disagreement as the plot. How does the difference of opinion work out?

Math/Economics:

- The union wage in “Fire in the Hole!” is \$3.50 per day. Research inflation since 1899 and calculate how much money that would be in today’s dollars.

Science:

- Research the use of metals today. In what ways does your lifestyle depend on mining?
- A century after the discovery of silver in Northern Idaho, the area has been designated by the Federal Environmental Protection Agency as one of the largest and most polluted sites in the United States. See if you can find out what effects mining by-products have on people and their environment. Lead, zinc and

mercury are some of the left-overs from silver mining in Idaho which are now present in the earth and waters of the area.

Background on Labor Unions:

Did you know that many of the workers in America's first factories, mines and farm fields were children ages eight to fourteen? They often worked seven days a week and up to twelve hours a day. They had no vacations, sick days or medical benefits, and many never went to school.

Restrictions against child labor and benefits for child and adult workers came about slowly and with great struggle. Changes like the five-day work-week, the 8-hour day, vacation and sick pay grew out of the determination and sacrifice of working men and women who banded together to demand rights from the powerful corporations who employed them. Workers united to form labor unions. These unions also battled for social change, for instance: the right of every child to a public education.

The roots of American trade unions reach back to the early days of American history. Primitive unions, or guilds, of carpenters, leather workers, cabinet makers and cobblers formed here and there in cities along the Atlantic seaboard of colonial America. They played a significant role in the struggle for independence. For example, carpenters disguised as Mohawk Indians participated in the Boston Tea Party in 1773.

Philadelphia's Carpenters' Hall was the site of the signing of the Declaration of Independence and the First Continental Congress in 1774. Philadelphia carpenters were also responsible for the first strike in the US in 1791. They walked off the job demanding a uniform workday from 6am to 6pm. The effort failed. Forty years later in July of 1835 child workers in the silk mills in Paterson, NJ, stopped work demanding an 11 hour day/6 day work-week.

In 1806 the union of Philadelphia Journeymen Cordwainers (leather workers) quit work demanding higher wages. Authorities convicted the leaders of criminal conspiracy and the union was bankrupted. This set the precedent by which the United States government would take sides with company owners and fight union workers for years to come.

As the 19th century rolled on, cotton mills, weaving factories, steel mills, coal mines, railroads and many other industries boomed across the land. But few workers shared in the prosperity and power of the company owners. The labor movement developed as people united to bargain for their needs and rights. As a group they had more bargaining power than individuals. Union members walked a long, difficult and sometimes deadly road before they gained recognition by employers and were able to make lasting changes.

The strike, when workers walk off the job, is the unions' best weapon. When employers refuse to listen to workers' concerns, workers can all agree to stop working. Then the company has several choices. Management could decide to give in to union demands. Or it could shut down. Pausing production causes lost revenue, but workers would be without income and might eventually agree to go back to work. A third option would be for the company to bring in non-union workers to replace the strikers. These

workers, called *scabs* by strikers and *strikebreakers* by the company, agree to the current wages and conditions without complaining, so operations continue as usual.

When new workers are brought in strikers often picket the company, jeer at scabs and try to block their way onto the jobsite. Companies might hire guards to protect the incoming workers. Throughout the long years of the labor movement confrontations between strikers and company guards sometimes grew violent. The government then called in soldiers, almost always on the side of industry. Strikes could erupt into small wars, called labor wars, with people on both sides injured and killed. In several such incidents children were killed.

Little by little the unions made progress for workers. For instance, in Atlanta, Georgia, 1881, three thousand Black women laundry workers pulled off one of the largest and most effective strikes in the history of the south. In 1906 the International Typographical Union successfully struck for an 8-hour day. Strikes continued to erupt in violence causing death and injury through the early 1900's.

It was during the Great Depression beginning in 1929 that many American's attitudes toward unions began to change. People had seen business owners and industry managers as the nation's leaders and union members as dangerous radicals. But when businesses throughout the country failed and millions of people had no jobs, Americans began to favor unions. President Franklin D. Roosevelt ushered in new laws supporting labor, though these new protections would not last 20-years.

During the World War II labor shortage, however, workers gained fringe benefits such as hospital insurance, paid vacations and holidays and retirement pensions. The late 1940's would be the height of union strength as roughly 36-percent of all laborers (excluding agricultural workers) belonged to unions. In the 1960's and 70's two new groups organized for the first time. President John F. Kennedy issued an executive order giving federal employees the right to collective bargaining, though not to strike. Also Cesar E. Chavez established what is now the United Farm Workers of America. The UFWA won important gains for migrant workers and others farm laborers. Chavez is best known for his leadership, along with Dolores Huerta, of the successful five-year nonviolent boycott against California grape growers, which protested poor working conditions and the use of pesticides harmful to farm workers.

Though unions gained many of the benefits taken for granted today, organized labor is not as powerful as it once was. Less than 13-percent of American workers are union members. Critics argue unions are too powerful and in some instances corrupt. Workplace rights continue to be a controversial issue with Americans today.