

Student Worksheet 1-Company Store

Introduction

Each patch had a Company Store. This store provided the miners and their families with all the items they might need – clothes, mining supplies, food, dishes, furniture, material and thread, even candy for the children. It also served as a bank by cashing the miner's paycheck and often was the post office, too.

On payday miners went to the Company Store to get their pay. Sometimes the stores gave the miners pieces of paper called 'scrip' which was like paper money, but it could only be used at the Company Store. Before giving the miners' their money, the clerks would subtract from their paychecks all purchases they had made at the store, and also the rent for their company-owned houses. Then the clerk would give the miner whatever money was left over. Often there was very little money left for the miner after he had paid his expenses. Sometimes miners had nothing left over and actually owed the company money. Many miners felt they could never get ahead and save any money due to this process.

Some Company Stores sold quality merchandise and charged only slightly higher prices than other stores. Some Company Stores helped the miners and their families when times were rough – allowing them longer credits before bills were due, or giving them food to help get through until the next session of work began. But other Company Stores were corrupt – they sold poor quality goods and greatly overcharged the customers for them – for instance selling a \$1 item for \$3. Some Stores would bully their workers to buy from their store only – threatening them with loss of their job at the mine if they did not buy their goods at the Store.

1. Read the Introduction above.
2. Read stories from the residents of the coal patch.
3. View the pictures provided.

Answer the following questions:

1. What services did the Company Store provide miners and their families?
2. How did the miners pay at the store?
3. Who owned the store?
4. Were the stores fair or unfair in their pricing? Explain.
5. How do you think miners felt about the Company Store?

6. What is a “monopoly?” In what way was the Company Store a monopoly? (You may use a Dictionary to help with this answer.)

On the back of this sheet:

Look over the previous questions, introduction and stories and create a 2 to 3 sentence summary statement to explain to the class what the Company Store was and how it worked.

Choose two pictures to put on the class display to represent the Company Store.