

# Working in a Logging Camp: A Case-Study Approach

## LESSON 6—GRADE 11

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### PRESCRIBED LEARNING OUTCOMES

- apply critical thinking—including questioning, comparing, summarizing, drawing conclusions, and defending a position—to make reasoned judgements about a range of issues, situations, and topics
- draw conclusions about an issue, situation, or topic
- recognize connections between events and their causes, consequences, and implications (e.g., relate current events to historical contexts)
- identify attributes associated with active citizenship, including
  - ethical behaviour (e.g., honesty, fairness, reliability)
  - empathy
  - individual and collective responsibility
  - remaining informed over time
  - advocating responsibly for own and others' rights

### LESSON TITLE

Working in a Logging Camp: A Case-Study Approach

### TIME

One class.

### OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to:

- read a fictionalized account of life in a logging camp and identify the variety of working conditions that existed for loggers in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Canada.
- discuss the emotional impact such conditions had on individuals.
- offer solutions to the problems that arise in the account.
- assess the fairness of employer practices.

### INTRODUCTION/OVERVIEW

A case study is a fictionalized account of an event or activity that presents facts and information in a composite format. In this case, Joe is a fictional character whose experiences are created from the composite stories outlined in Jack Scott's book, *Sweat and Struggle* (see bibliography). Having students read and work with case studies allows them a way into historical events that is both personal and emotionally engaging.

### MATERIALS NEEDED

Individual copies of the case study, including the discussion questions that follow it.

### ACTIVITIES

1. Have the students read the case individually.
2. Have the students form small groups of two or three.

3. Have them discuss the questions and as a group write down their responses.
4. Share the group responses with the class.

## **EVALUATION/ASSESSMENT (OPTIONAL)**

Have students write a list of demands for changes to the working conditions experienced by the loggers that could be presented to the employer to rectify the terrible working conditions.

Give one mark for each suggested change that matches an unfair working condition, to a maximum of 10 marks.

## **STUDENT HANDOUT**

### **WORKING IN A LOGGING CAMP: A Case Study**

Joe scratched his leg. This dry, cold weather was terrible for his skin. He couldn't remember when he last wasn't itchy. The guys he roomed with laughed at him and said it was fleas, but Joe was a clean lad, and he knew it was the dry air that was causing his skin to scratch and chafe.

Joe finally heard his name called. He moved to the table where the recruiting agent for the logging company was sitting. He sat opposite him and removed his wool cap. The agent looked him over with a practised eye and began asking him questions.

"Name. Previous experience. Are you willing to agree to the terms of employment? Are you ready to leave on Saturday? Okay, you're hired. Sign here."

Joe made his mark on the paper and hoped that Uncle Albert had told him the truth about what was on the paper. If so, he had just agreed to spend five months in the bush, cutting trees for the company. In return, he would be paid a dollar a day for every day's work he did. His room and board would be provided, and living necessities for his five months in the bush would be available for purchase from the company store.

Joe felt the excitement rise in him as he walked from the hiring hall. He finally had a job. He would get out of this dry, windy town and see a part of the province he had never been to before. He hurried home to his flophouse to pack his few meagre belongings. He wanted to be ready when the train pulled out of the station Saturday morning.

Men milled around the train station, waiting for the signal to board. The steam rising from the engine warmed them in the cold morning air. The sun had not yet broken over the horizon, and there was a definite smell of snow in the air. The men smoked and drank tea or coffee, and some even ate a breakfast packed for them by someone they were leaving behind. The energy in the train station was exciting yet strained. Joe wanted to get going. He had tired of waiting these last few days since he had signed up for this job.

Finally, the train was moving, leaving the city behind it. The men slept, talked, sang, and played cards in the carriages that had been assigned to them. The hard wooden benches weren't so bad if you had some natural padding, but the skinny ones complained that their rear ends were getting bruised from the bumping and jarring motions of the train. The old timers laughed at the complaints.

"You'll look back upon these few sores and bruises with fondness in a couple of weeks," old Fred said. "Your bones and muscles won't know what hit them after a week in the bush. No fancy feather beds or lovely women to turn to either. Get used to the life boy. You're a logger now."

Joe smiled to himself. A logger. That's what he was. He'd been a good one, too. Loggers could make a lot of money he'd heard. That's what he wanted. A lot of money for a lot of work; he was willing to do that.

Soon the train reached the station, and the men got off. The teamsters were waiting with wagons pulled by sturdy horses to take them the 60 kilometres back into the bush where they would be cutting. The teamsters

had been hired earlier to bring in supplies and set up the camp. All that was needed now were the loggers. The men piled onto the wagons, and Joe noticed that they were on sleighs. The snow surrounding them made blades the only sensible mode of travel. If a river wasn't available for log transport, then winter logging was a common practice. The ground was firm in the winter, snow was easy to slide logs over, there was little chance of forest fire and the woods were as cleaned out as they were ever going to be.

Joe felt the silence of the forest surround him. Even though there were 40 other men beside him, he felt the isolation. As the wagon turned, he saw a man holding a shotgun salute the driver. Joe was surprised and wondered why on earth a hunter would be standing in the middle of nowhere as if waiting for the loggers to ride by. He asked old Fred about it.

Fred laughed and told him that was no hunter. That was one of the company guards. He made sure only company loggers were on the company's property. Logging a tract of land meant big dollars for the company that had the rights, and the company protected its rights. Joe shook his head. He had so much to learn about how logging was done.

When the men reached the camp, they saw the two shanties that had been built for them. One would be their bunkhouse, and other held the dining room, office, and company store. Joe filed into the bunkhouse. He noticed the places in the walls where the boards gaped. He felt the wind whistle through the walls. One window was not enough to light the place, but he figured he wouldn't be spending much time in the bunkhouse during the day. Beds were bunked and placed close together. He'd hear his neighbour sigh, they were so close together. There were no blankets on the beds. "Jeez, I'll freeze to death without blankets," Joe thought to himself.

Joe found out that the company would sell the loggers all the supplies they needed and put the bill on credit. When he went into the "store," he asked to buy one of the wool blankets they had. The storekeeper gave him a blanket that was filthy, crawling with lice and full of holes. He wanted \$5 for it. Joe was outraged. A brand new Bay blanket cost \$3.50 in town. This thing was definitely not new. He wasn't even sure it was a blanket. Looking at the other items for sale, Joe realized that all of the goods were shoddy and expensive. Oh great, he thought. At the end of the five months of work, the company would tally all that he had spent, including the \$4-a-week room and board he was being charged and deduct what he had spent from what he was owed in wages. Joe wasn't too worried though. At \$1 a day for each day worked, he'd still make a lot of money.

Three weeks into the logging job, the first storm hit. It blew for four days. The men were forced to sit in the bunkhouse or cookhouse, feeling the cold and chill of the storm. Joe's scratching was getting worse. He had bleeding sores on his arms and legs now. He went to the foreman to ask if a doctor was available, but the foreman just laughed.

"You can go walk to the city if you want a doctor, but then you'll have broken your contract and forfeit your wages. Don't forget, you'll still owe for all your room and board and the things you bought."

Joe's heart sank. He realized that this week he had made no money and yet still owed \$4. He couldn't get any real medical attention, and he didn't know if he could stick it out and stay alive. He'd ask old Fred what to do.

Fred told him about a few men who had taken off during night's cover to get away from the camp. The company would send the guards after them and ask for help from the local NWMP. If the worker was found, he'd be lucky if he was only put into jail. Often he'd be beaten for trying to rob the company of what it had been owed. He'd heard tell of one fellow who had fought back when he was found and beaten. That man had been killed by the guards for "resisting arrest." The guards were hired company men, who had no real legal authority, but the law backed them up all the same.

Joe's spirits sank even deeper. He figured he'd be working for the company for five months and owe them money at the end of it all. What a predicament.

What are your responses to this case?

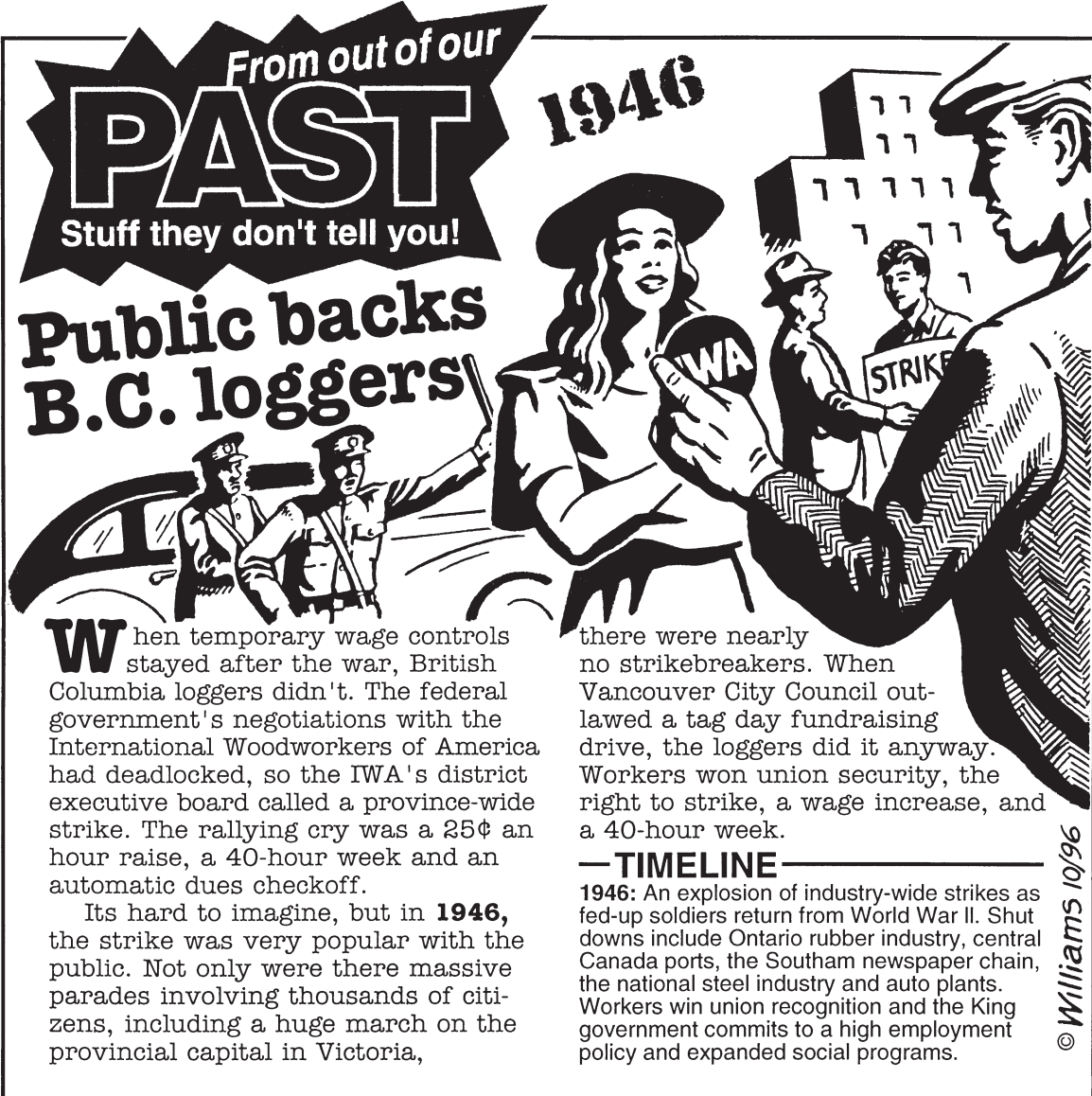
What would you do if you were Joe?

What role do you think a union could play here?

What improvements to the working and living conditions would a union want?

How do you think the company would respond to these changes?

Does government have a role to play in this kind of situation?



**From out of our PAST**  
Stuff they don't tell you!

## Public backs B.C. loggers

**1946**

**W**hen temporary wage controls stayed after the war, British Columbia loggers didn't. The federal government's negotiations with the International Woodworkers of America had deadlocked, so the IWA's district executive board called a province-wide strike. The rallying cry was a 25¢ an hour raise, a 40-hour week and an automatic dues checkoff.

Its hard to imagine, but in **1946**, the strike was very popular with the public. Not only were there massive parades involving thousands of citizens, including a huge march on the provincial capital in Victoria,

there were nearly no strikebreakers. When Vancouver City Council outlawed a tag day fundraising drive, the loggers did it anyway. Workers won union security, the right to strike, a wage increase, and a 40-hour week.

— **TIMELINE** —

**1946:** An explosion of industry-wide strikes as fed-up soldiers return from World War II. Shut downs include Ontario rubber industry, central Canada ports, the Southam newspaper chain, the national steel industry and auto plants. Workers win union recognition and the King government commits to a high employment policy and expanded social programs.

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