

# *Scrip, Bandannas, and a Canary*

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Big Ideas: Investigate three common items of the past and how they became integral part of the life of the coal miner.

Essential Question: What significance do scrip, canary in a cage and the red handkerchief have to a coal miner and the development of West Virginia history?

## **Social Studies Standards**

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SS.2.20 examine the cultural life of West Virginians through storytelling and various art forms (e.g., songs, instruments, artwork, photographs, etc.)

SS.2.21 compare and contrast past and present lifestyles of West Virginians.

## **Visual Arts Standards**

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VA.O.2.4.02 explore how art is one aspect of a culture and cite examples.

VA.O.2.4.04. create art that reflects a style of a group from history.

## **Activity 1: Scrip**

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As part of an investigation of the many industries in West Virginia, students will learn the significance of scrip, red bandannas and the canary during social studies/history time or in cooperation with the social studies/history teacher. These arts-related activities present common items from West Virginia's past that can be found in the West Virginia State Museum. These three items will be featured in three separate activities and will be presented along with a lesson on coal mining. Documents and supporting information will be supplied in this learning plan for the teacher to share with students. Each activity will result in a product. Evaluation will be determined as to whether the individual student completes the product.

### *Background Information:*

Scrip became a way of life for the coal miners and their families. A different sort of barter took place in the coal field communities. When coal companies opened new mining operations in unpopulated districts, they usually built houses to rent to their

workers. They also built stores to sell workers the food and household products they needed. These company houses and company stores often made a good profit. But they involved very little cash trading. Instead of cash, the coal companies paid their miners in “scrip.” This consisted of metal tokens. Each token stood for a certain value in regular money. Each company created its own scrip, which could be traded for goods in the company store. However, the scrip issued by each individual company was different from the scrip of other companies. The miner was forced to trade only at his company’s store in order to obtain full value for the scrip. “Independent” storekeepers would take the scrip only at two-thirds or three-fourths of its value, if they took it at all. The practice of issuing scrip made it hard for miners to obtain cash. (John Alexander Williams. *West Virginia: A History for Beginners*. Martinsburg, WV (Appalachian Editions. 1997. p. 228)

*Learning Plan:*

Students will view and discuss photographs of scrip found in the West Virginia State Museum. Students will first name their fictional coal mine and then design scrip for that mine using the Designing Scrip worksheet. The lesson should take about 45 minutes.

**Student Materials-Activity 1**

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*Designing Scrip Worksheet*

pencils

photographs of scrip

Extended Learning - Students may replicate a scrip design from the photographs and then find the location of the mine on a map

**Activity 2: Red Bandannas**

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*Learning Plan:*

Review information with students found in [this article](#). Begin this lesson by first listening to the interview for primary source information about the term “redneck” and the significance of the red bandanna found in the article from the Blair Mountain Reenactment Society. Students may scaffold information by dividing into groups and reporting back to the class the information found in their section of the article. The teacher may lead a group discussion to answer these questions:

- Why did the miners wear the red bandanna?



- Was West Virginia the only place the term redneck was used in a coal mining context?
- Was the red bandanna the coal miner wore the “railroad” style bandanna?
- What did the red bandannas worn by the coal miners most likely look like?

*Learning Plan:*

Students will create a repeating or radial design in creating a bandanna design. The teacher should preview the following YouTube videos to see how to approach creating a repeating design with the students. [Video 1](#) [Video 2](#)

Students will make a repeating design in shades of red to resemble a bandanna and display by mounting on black paper. The lesson should take about 90 minutes. Creating the red design could take up to two hours depending on the student design. Students could work on the design independently after getting started as a group.

**Student Materials-Activity 2**

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9”x 9” sheet of drawing paper

red crayons

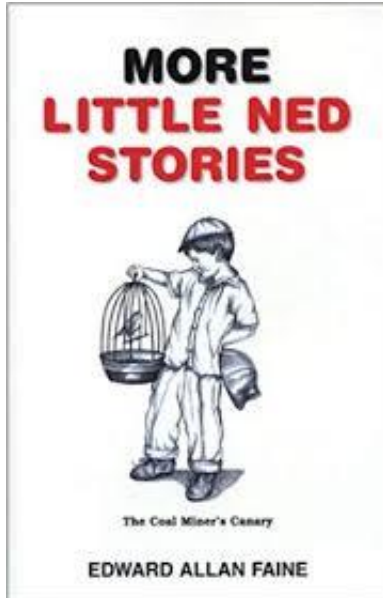
Sharpie

optional 12” x 12” black paper for backing

### Activity 3-Canary in a Cage

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Begin by showing students the image below:



The instructor will lead students in a discussion about the illustration using the provided "Things to Think About" [sheet](#).

Students will make a simple toy. The subject will be the canary in the cage. Uses the toy [template](#) provided and follow the directions on the template called "Canary in a Cage."

The class may go over the factual information provided by the West Virginia State Museum:

#### *Safety:*

Canaries were once regularly used in coal mining as an early warning system. Safety always has been on the minds of miners, and, in the early days, mining was anything but safe. One of the most dangerous elements is methane gas. In the early days, open-flamed lamps often triggered methane explosions. One of the oldest methods for detecting methane was to take a caged canary into the mines. If the canary died, miners knew there was methane in the mine, and they had just a few minutes to evacuate. Canaries eventually were replaced by safety lamps. If the safety lamp's flame went out, miners knew the deadly gas was present. By the mid-1900s, miners carried sophisticated methane detectors and self-breathing apparatuses containing oxygen.



### **Notes to the Instructor**

Activity 1 will take about 30 minutes. Activities 2 and 3 require about 90 minutes depending on student engagement. Work from these activities should be mounted and displayed.

The three activities presented draw attention to three items that are displayed in the West Virginia State Museum and are related to the history of the coal industry. These items were common for the time and had significance in the daily lives of the people.

## Designing the Scrip

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Company scrip, a substitute for government-issued legal tender or currency, was issued by a company to pay its employees. It can only be exchanged in company stores owned by the employers of the mine.

Between paydays, companies issued workers scrip as a line of credit. Some companies even paid workers with scrip instead of money. Usually, company-issued scrip could be spent only at stores operated by that company. While the earliest scrip was in paper form, coins became more common by the 1920s. Scrip coins usually were made of copper, brass and aluminum. (West Virginia State Museum)







### Discussion

- What does each coin have in common?
- If you owned a coal company what would you name it?
- If you had a cut out in your coin what shape would it be?
- Design your scrip

## Other Resources

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Learn more about the domestic canary [here](#)

Learn more about the West Virginia Mine Wars with this movie from [WVPBS](#) and American Experience