



NEW BEDFORD FISHING HERITAGE CENTER

Land of Opportunity Multi-Day Unit

Activity Overview: Students will read about labor unions, hear from guest speakers, and visit the Rotch-Jones Duff House and the New Bedford Fishing Heritage Center to determine if they think New Bedford is “a land of opportunity.”

Grades: This activity was created for students in middle school, but can be adjusted for other grades as needed.

Essential Question: Is New Bedford a land of opportunity?

Background Information: In the context of this potential unit, scholars will have already learned about labor unions by reading the middle-grade novel, [Esperanza Rising](#). For those without such curricular tie-ins, it might be useful to include some prior reading about labor unions as a way to help build that background knowledge.

Activity Directions:

Day 1: Visit [Rotch-Jones-Duff House](#)

- Contact: Dawn Salerno- dsalerno@rjdmuseum.org; 508-997-1401
- What did you notice about the house?
- What did the house tell you about the economy of New Bedford?
- Was New Bedford a land of opportunity in the 19th-century during whaling?
 - (Basically set the stage that people making fortunes off the waterfront is not a new thing, to help scholars see a through-line between the nice houses out in Dartmouth and Mattapoisett today are connected to the fish houses on the water today, the way that whaling built the RJD house)

Day 2: Reading - build background knowledge

- Choose 1-2 articles depending on what you choose to do. Would recommend pairing "Guatemala to New Bedford" with one of the more negative-trending stories.
 - [Death of a Fish Plant Worker](#)
 - [Day of Anguish](#)
 - [Guatemala to New Bedford](#)
- Ask scholars to answer the guiding question of "Is New Bedford a land of opportunity?" based on those articles.
 - (In order to understand the exhibits at the fishing heritage center, scholars will need to have background about immigrant communities to New Bedford and the challenges they face. You can't make sense of new

information without a grounding in prior knowledge so this will help set the stage for scholars to understand what they see at the museum)

Day 3: Make connections - Guest speaker(s)

- If you need assistance securing speakers who work in the fishing industry, specifically seafood processing, please contact Laura Orleans at New Bedford Fishing Heritage Center- director@fishingheritagecenter.org; 508-993-8894
- Frame for scholars that they are trying to figure out the answer to the question: "Is New Bedford a land of opportunity?"
 - One speaker from seafood processing management:
 - What does your company do?
 - What's hard about your job?
 - How many pounds of seafood do you process?
 - How much money is made per boat?
 - Do you think New Bedford is a land of opportunity?
 - etc. (allow scholars to come up with their own questions)
 - One speaker that works as a seafood processor:
 - What is your job like?
 - What do you do?
 - What's hard about it?
 - What do you like about it?
 - Why did you choose your job?
 - Do you think New Bedford is a land of opportunity?
 - (allow scholars to come up with their own questions).
 - Ask scholars to look for similarities and differences between what the two speakers had to say.

Day 4: Visit Fishing Heritage Center:

- Contact: Laura Orleans- director@fishingheritagecenter.org; 508-993-8894
- Watch "Finest Kind" intro video shown at Fishing Heritage Center:
 - What did you notice about the video?
 - What was most surprising?
 - Based on the video, does New Bedford seem like a land of opportunity?
- To allow a class to move easily throughout the space, break into three groups, going to three different "stations"
 - Group 1: "free" group allowed to move, supervised, around the different, non-labor related sections of the museum. To allow for space, might need to have two "free" groups, and potentially give them some sort of structured scavenger hunt
 - Group 2: visit left (north) wall of museum re: different labor organizations
 - What are all of these different groups?
 - Why did they matter?
 - How is working on the waterfront different today than it used to be?
 - Is New Bedford a land of opportunity?

- Looking for:
 - lots and lots of labor unions that aren't around anymore
 - they helped organize workers, and lots of workers cared about belonging in them
- Group 3: Visit right (south) wall of museum
 - Preview/review what a strike is and why strikes matter.
 - What did you notice about the strike?
 - What happened after the strike?
 - How have the workers in fish plants changed?
 - How has working in a fish plant changed?
 - Is New Bedford a land of opportunity?
 - What you are looking for:
 - Strike was a big deal - lots of people very worked up about it, it was very important
 - After strike lower pay
 - After strike largely immigrant, latino and indigenous workforce

Day 5: Write

- Using evidence from the articles we read, the places we visited, and the speakers we heard from, answer the question, "Is New Bedford a land of opportunity?"

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