

# Financial Challenges Facing Canadian Workers: Political Cartoon



GRADE

8

In this lesson, students create political cartoons to explore financial challenges that affect Canadian workers.



## Subject

History

## Suggested Timing

80 minutes

## Financial Literacy Objectives

At the end of this lesson, students will:

- enhance their financial vocabulary;
- describe how current events related to finance can affect families (i.e., how 'globalization' affects the finances and financial opportunities of working families)
- describe consequences of financial decisions.

## Curriculum Expectations

Social Studies, Grades 1-6 and History and Geography, Grades 7-8 (2004)  
History

### Canada: A Changing Society

- Compare the challenges facing farmers and workers at the beginning of the twentieth century to those facing farmers and workers today.
- Communicate the results of inquiries for specific purposes and audiences, using media works, political cartoons, oral presentations, written notes and reports, drawings, tables, charts, and graphs.

## Assessment

Creation of political cartoon

## What You Need

- The Conditions of Canadian Workers in the 20th and 21st Centuries handout (Appendix A)
- Creating a Political Cartoon: Features to Include (Appendix B)
- Political Cartoon Rubric (Appendix C)
- Citizenship Card: Challenges Facing Canadian Workers (Appendix D)
- Paper for political cartoons
- Pencils, black fine liner markers
- Computer with a data projector to show *Winds of Change: Reforms and Unions* video (McCord Museum in Montreal) available at:  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b46udxbMvqM&feature=related>
- *Click, Clack Moo: Cows that Type*, by Doreen Cronin and Betsy Lewin (2000: Atheneum). Note that this is available online via PBS Kids.

## Minds On

### Video

Either watch *Winds of Change: Reforms and Unions* (approximately 4 minutes)  
OR read *Click Clack Moo* to the class.

In response to the video or reading, ask the students:

1. What are the financial challenges facing workers in the video or story.
2. What are some of the causes of these financial challenges?
3. What choices do these workers have to improve their financial situation?

## Action

### Reading Response

Distribute *The Conditions of Canadian Workers in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries* (Appendix A). Ask students to read quietly and to underline one or two lines from the reading that they responded to most strongly. To assist struggling readers, including ELL students, utilize pre-reading strategies and supports recommended in “Think Literacy (2005): Cross-Curricular Approaches, Grades 7-12”.

Starting at one end of the classroom and moving quickly from student to student, have each student read their chosen lines aloud, without commentary.

Once everyone has had a chance to participate, discuss:

1. What lines were repeated?
2. Why do you think that is?
3. What themes or ideas seemed to jump out?

### Activity: Political Cartoon

Students are to create their own political cartoon comparing the financial challenges facing Canadian workers in the twentieth century with the financial challenges facing Canadian workers in the twenty first century.

Distribute the *Creating a Political Cartoon: Features to Include* handout and explain the exemplar (Appendix B).

## Consolidation/ Debrief

### Gallery Walk

Students display their political cartoons in the room, and the class has a gallery walk.

Using the critical questions below as a guide, make connections among issues and their depictions in the cartoons.

Distribute the *Citizenship Cards*.

### Check for Understanding

Discuss the following questions as a class:

1. Are the financial challenges facing women workers the same as those facing male workers?
2. Are the financial challenges facing visible minorities the same as those facing “White” Canadians?
3. Are the financial challenges facing recent immigrants the same as those facing Canadian-born citizens?



## The Conditions of Canadian Workers in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries

Canada's industrialization (1880 - 1914) brought about great increases in productivity. However, this rapid economic development did not benefit all social classes equally. As businesses grew prosperous, their employees (workers) did not fare as well. Poor, unsafe working conditions and unfair practices resulted in the deaths of thousands of workers every year. Conditions included long working hours (ten to twelve hour days, six days a week) and fines for talking or late arrival. The latter measure encouraged workers to arrive early and stay late because the employer's clock was, in some cases, set and reset to benefit the employer's bottom line.

Workers could be fired or laid off whenever it suited the employer. Living conditions for working class families were harsh. A family of five often lived on the floor of a house, sharing one or two rooms. Toilets were often located at the back of the house near the water supply, which meant that **cholera, typhoid, and diphtheria** were common among working class families.

With the advent of the streetcar and the automobile, wealthier families—as well as churches and social clubs—moved out of urban centres to the clean air and open spaces of the suburbs.

Few working class families could afford to eat well and most ate only potatoes, bread, oatmeal, and milk. In 1901, the cost of living was about \$13.38 per week in urban areas, but the average male worker made only \$8.25 per week. This situation necessitated that children enter the workforce, especially those from very poor families, to help their families survive. These young boys and girls received lower pay, and faced the same dangerous working conditions as adult workers. Married women, who rarely returned to the workforce after marriage, often supplemented the families' income by taking in boarders, working as part-time seamstresses, and offering laundry services.

The influx of workers to urban areas, a lack of government labour regulations, and unfair employer work practices created a low standard of living which eventually gave rise to the modern union movement. To counter the impoverishing financial effects of an **unregulated market economy**, workers joined together to form unions. Leaders of unions would bargain with employers to develop worker-friendly legislation and social assistance (unemployment insurance, housing, minimum wages, etc.).

In early twentieth-century Canada, workers went on strike in increasing numbers to demand better pay, improved working conditions, the abolishment of child labour, a minimum wage, and shorter working hours (the Winnipeg general strike of 1919 is a well-known example). Together with social reformers, unions helped to elect pro-labour representatives to parliament and continued to advocate for labour reform in the media and through direct action (striking) throughout the early twentieth century.



## The Conditions of Canadian Workers in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries

During the Second World War (1939 - 1945) labour unions in Canada grew significantly. Between 1940 and 1945, union membership doubled, until 700 000 workers were in a union. In response to a wave of strikes during the Second World War, and after years of **labour agitation** and education, the Federal government recognized the right of workers in certain industries to join unions and bargain collectively. In 1940, the Federal government, under the control of the Liberal leader, William Lyon Mackenzie King, created an unemployment insurance plan, partly to stave off the more labour-friendly political party, the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) (which later became the New Democratic Party, or NDP). The federal Medical Care Act of 1966 followed the example set by the governments of Saskatchewan and Alberta by providing financial support for provincial **Medicare** programs that were universal, comprehensive, and publically administered.

### The Condition of Canadian Workers (Twenty-First Century)

Trade agreements between countries, combined with rapid technological advancements, have created new challenges for workers. Consumer goods can be produced much more cheaply and production efficiency has greatly improved. With the signing of **free trade agreements** such as the **North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)**, companies can more easily relocate their production facilities from high wage countries (e.g., Canada) to lower wage countries (e.g., Mexico, China, Indonesia) in order to cut their labour costs. These countries often have lower environmental production regulations and some allow the hiring of child workers, further reducing production costs.

Since companies can now easily relocate to other areas, Canadian workers are increasingly facing competition from workers all over the world. The ability of companies to relocate also dissuades workers from joining unions. Canadian workers who face this tough global competition have entered an era of job insecurity, lower benefits, and lower pay. Many Canadian workers are increasingly able to find only contract or part-time work instead of full time work. Pension coverage for workers has also fallen as companies have cut benefits. Many are concerned that instead of increasing financial wellbeing, these conditions will result in lower living standards for Canadian working families.

According to the federal government, the majority of future jobs will require post-secondary education. In addition, not all jobs may require the level of knowledge and skills that workers have spent so much money to obtain. Workers with and without post-secondary education, who are out of work, face increased competition for the same low-skilled manufacturing, utilities, and sales and services jobs within Canada (further depressing wages in these occupations).

The constant change and increased competition emblematic of this era of globalization have created an environment of insecurity for workers. As governments face increased debt as a result of recent economic crises, pressure to lay off public workers and/or decrease their pay and benefits has intensified. Governments are also confronted with the need to reduce their expenditures on social programs (health, education, welfare, etc.) in order to pay down their debts.



## The Conditions of Canadian Workers in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries

In closing, twenty-first century Canadian workers face many financial challenges. For some, the solution is to ask workers to submit to continual “lifelong learning” so that they can be ready for the jobs of the future. However, some are concerned that further education is not the solution, and as in the early twentieth century, workers must gain back the power they lost to employers.

### Glossary

*Unemployment insurance:* A government program that provides workers who have been laid off from work with money each month while they try to find another job.

*Cholera:* A bacterial infection transmitted by contaminated food and water. Symptoms include diarrhea, vomiting, and severe dehydration.

*Typhoid:* A serious infection caused by *Salmonella typhosa* ingested with food or water.

*Diphtheria:* An acute infectious disease caused by the bacillus *Corynebacterium diphtheriae*. The disease causes difficulty in breathing, high fever, and weakness. The toxin is particularly harmful to the tissues of the heart and central nervous system.

*Unregulated market economy:* An economy that operates by voluntary exchange in a free market and is not planned or controlled by a central authority; a capitalistic economy with little government interference.

*Labour agitation:* Acts by labour organization (unions) that attempt to stir up public opinion for laws that benefit workers.

*Medicare:* A government sponsored health care program that provides health care for all Canadian citizens.

*Globalization:* A process in which countries become more economically, politically, and culturally integrated. This process is aided through technological inventions (information technologies, airplanes, containerization, etc.) and trade agreements.

*Free trade agreements:* Trade agreements that lower tariffs and assist the movement of goods across borders.

*North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA):* A free trade agreement between Canada, the United States, and Mexico.



## The Conditions of Canadian Workers in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries

### Discussion Questions

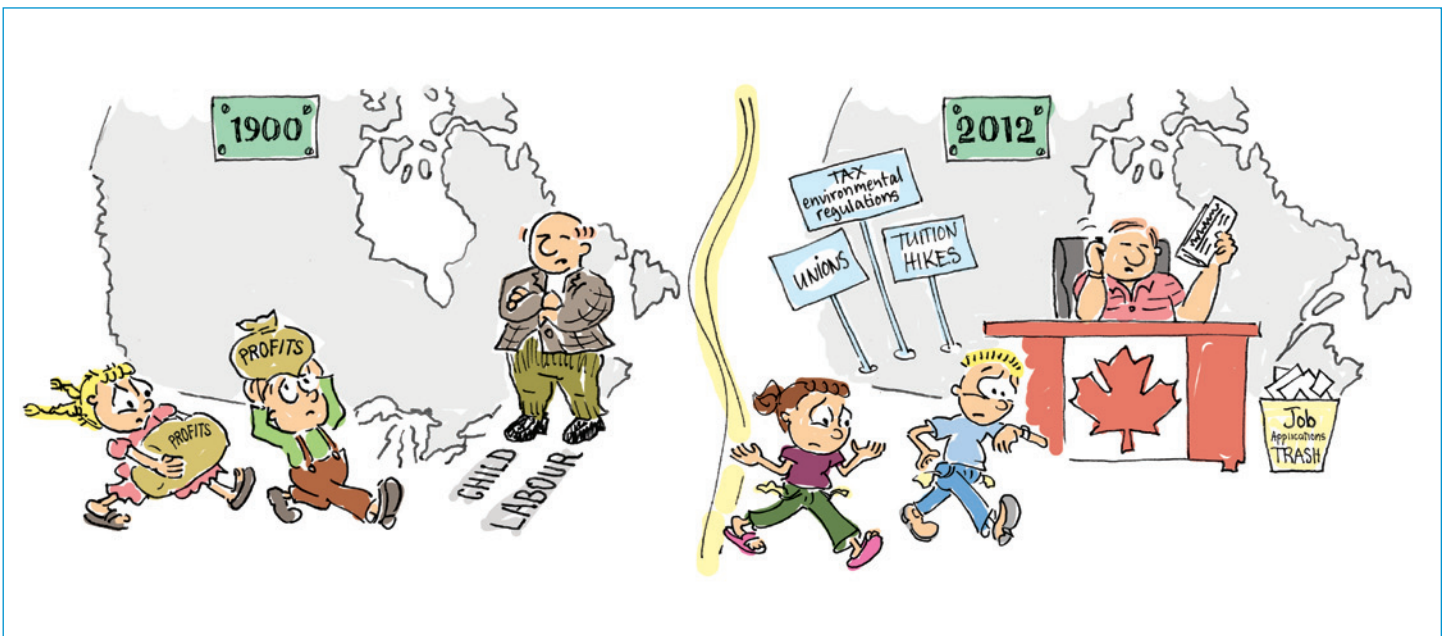
1. What financial problems did Canadian workers face in the twentieth century?
2. How did Canadian workers attempt to overcome these financial problems?
3. What are the current financial problems facing Canadian working families, and what financial decisions led to these problems?
4. How do you think Canadian working families might be able to overcome these financial difficulties?
5. What are the benefits of the financial decisions made by governments (e.g., free trade agreements such as NAFTA) that contribute to “globalization”?

## Creating a Political Cartoon: Features to Include

1. **Caricature** – Often the people or objects are exaggerated.
2. **Analogy** – Often the situation is not depicted literally. Similar characters or even appropriate animals can be used (e.g., Britain is often depicted as a lion).
3. **Symbols** – These can be used to represent ideas, and in the process clarify the meaning of a person or object. A flag is an example of a symbol.
4. **Title**
5. **Labels**
6. **Dialogue Bubbles**

### Exemplar

The Financial Challenges Facing Child Workers: Child Labour and Canada 1900 vs. 2011







## Political Cartoon Rubric

Category	Level 1 (50-59%)	Level 2 (60-69%)	Level 3 (70-79%)	Level 4 (80-100%)
<b>Knowledge</b>				
Understands challenges faced by workers	The student has difficulty understanding the challenges workers face.	The student demonstrates an understanding of some of the challenges facing workers.	The student demonstrates an understanding of most of the challenges facing workers.	The student demonstrates expert understanding of the challenges facing workers.
<b>Thinking</b>				
Compares challenges in different historical periods	Student compares the challenges faced by Canadian workers in the twentieth century with the challenges faced in the twenty first century with limited clarity.	Student compares the challenges faced by Canadian workers in the twentieth century with the challenges faced in the twenty first century with some clarity.	Student compares the challenges faced by Canadian workers in the twentieth century with the challenges faced in the twenty first century with considerable clarity.	Student compares the challenges faced by Canadian workers in the twentieth century with the challenges faced in the twenty first century with a high degree of clarity.



# Citizenship Card: Challenges Facing Canadian Workers



**Citizenship Card**  
Challenges Facing Canadian Workers



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