

Using an Oral History to Explore Jobs at the Port of Baltimore

Grade: 4

Class Period/Duration: 90 minutes

VSC Standards/Indicators:

Economics Grade 4

- 4.A.4 Describe regional economic specialization in Maryland and the ways people live and work
- b. Describe how specialization results in the interdependence of people
- 4.B. 1 Describe the types of economic systems in Maryland
- b. Give examples of the kinds of goods and services produced in Maryland during different historical time periods

Geography Grade 4

- 3.A.1 Use geographic tools to locate places and describe the human and physical characteristics of those places
- b. Use photographs, maps, charts, graphs and atlases to describe geographic characteristics of Maryland/United States
- 3.C.1 Describe and analyze population growth, migration, and settlement patterns in Maryland and the regions of the United States
- d. Describe the transportation and communication networks for the movement of people, goods, and ideas to, from and within Maryland such as Bay Bridge, National Road, B& O Railroad, the Port of Baltimore, and C & O Canal

Social Studies Skills and Processes Grades 3-5

- 6.D.1 Identify primary and secondary sources of information that relate to the topic/situation/problem being studied
- c. Locate and gather data and information from appropriate non-print sources, such as music, artifacts, charts, maps, graphs, photographs, video clips, illustrations, paintings, political cartoons, interviews, and oral histories
- 6.D.2 Engage in field work that relates to the topic/situation/problem being studied
- c. Design and conduct surveys and oral histories

Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- Locate and describe places where bananas are grown
- Identify the specialized jobs associated with unloading bananas at the Port of Baltimore
- Describe the interdependence of the various jobs associated with unloading bananas at the Port of Baltimore

Vocabulary:

Interdependence-People depend on each other

Longshoreman- A person who works on a waterfront, loading and unloading ships' cargo. Sometimes, erroneously used interchangeably with stevedore, but longshoremen usually do all the manual work

Oral History- Information about the past that is transmitted by word of mouth rather than in written form, usually on tape, as the result of a planned interview.

Specialize- To do a certain job

Stevedore- A management company that employs longshoremen

Tally- The process of checking, or taking account of the goods placed into a ship or unloaded from a ship.

Materials/Resources:

For Teacher:

Teacher Resource Sheet #1, "The Banana Boat Song"

Teacher Resource Sheet #2, "Map of North America"

Teacher Resource Sheet #3, " 'Captain' Bill Springer, Today"

Teacher Resource Sheet #4, " 'Captain' Bill Springer"

Teacher Resource Sheet #5, "Timekeeper"

Teacher Resource Sheet #6, "Autos at the Port of Baltimore"

For Student:

Student Resource Sheet #1, "Stevedore"

Student Resource Sheet #2, "Longshoreman"

Student Resource Sheet #3, "Checker"

Student Resource Sheet #4, "Selector"

Student Resource Sheet #5, "Messenger"

Student Resource Sheet #6, "Customs Agent"

Student Resource Sheet #7, "Unloading Bananas: Sequence Chart"

Teacher Background:

Bananas were first introduced to the United States at the 1876 Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia. By the end of the century, the development of refrigerated steamships allowed mass importation of the once exotic luxury. Baltimore's Pier One at Pratt Street was the port of entry for the tropical fruit until the late 1950's when a modern facility was built at Locust Point. Banana boats were unloaded daily from the Locust Point facility until United Fruit moved its operations to Wilmington, Delaware in the early 1980's.

This lesson is based on an oral history of the life of "Captain" Bill Springer conducted in the Fall of 2006. Teachers should remind students that oral histories can often be "stilted" and do not flow like a story. This oral history is in the formats of both narrative and question and answer because that is the way the oral history took place.

Lesson Development:

1. **Motivation:** Display Teacher Resource Sheet #1, "The Banana Boat Song." If possible, play a recording of the song. Have students read/listen to the lyrics. Ask:

What is this song about? Accept all answers. Explain that this song, based on a Jamaican Calypso folk song was written and recorded in 1956. It was inspired by the authors' trip to Jamaica where they had seen dockworkers working the night shift loading bananas onto ships. The song tells of the morning after the night shift is over and the workers want their work to be counted up so that they can go home (this is the meaning of the lyric "Come, Mr. Tally Man, tally me banana/ Daylight come and we wanna go home.").

Note to teacher: "The Banana Boat Song" can be found in McGraw Hill's Share the Music, Grade 4 or <http://www.singalongwithme.com/banana/>.

2. Display a map of North America (Teacher Resource Sheet #2). Have students locate Jamaica. Tell them that while this song talks about bananas from Jamaica, bananas are grown all over Central America, including Costa Rica and Honduras. Have them locate Costa Rica and Honduras. Tell students that these countries have tropical climates that are ideal for growing bananas. (Teachers may wish to have students trace routes from the Central American Ports to United States Ports.)

Note to teacher: For more information on how and where bananas are grown, visit <http://www.chiquita.com/>.

3. Ask: How do bananas get from Central America to Baltimore? (*By boat*).
4. Tell students that Baltimore used to be one of the ports to which bananas were shipped. They are going to be learning about the different jobs associated with the unloading of the banana boats once they got to Baltimore.
5. Show Teacher Resource Sheet # 3, "Captain Bill Springer, Today." Explain that they are going to be examining an interview with "Captain" Bill Springer in order to identify the types of jobs that used to be associated with banana boats in Baltimore.

Note to Teacher: If students are unfamiliar with Oral Histories, see the Maryland Historical Society, www.mdhs.org, for more information about reading an oral history interview.

6. Explain that after Mr. Springer served in World War II, he returned to Baltimore, and found employment at Glenn L. Martin, a company that specialized in the production of airplanes. One Friday he was told that he was no longer needed. He went to the Employment Office to look for a new job.
7. Display Teacher Resource Sheet #4, "Captain Bill Springer." Read the information with the class.
8. Break students into 6 groups. Distribute Student Resource Sheet #7, "Unloading Bananas Sequence Chart." Explain to students that each group is going to examine one of the jobs listed on the sequence chart.

9. Tell students that Mr. Springer’s first job at United Fruit was as a timekeeper. Display Teacher Resource Sheet #5, “Timekeeper.” Read the information with the class and have students come up with a 1-2 sentence job description of a timekeeper. Record the description on a transparency of Student Resource Sheet #7, “Unloading Bananas Sequence Chart.”
10. Assign each group one of the remaining jobs from Student Resource Sheet #1-6. Distribute copies of the appropriate resource sheet to each group. Each group should read their assigned reading and write a 1-2 sentence job description. Complete the master copy of Student Resource Sheet #7, “Unloading Bananas Sequence Chart” as groups report out.
11. Explain that each of the workers specializes in a particular aspect of unloading the banana boat. Tell them that they are going to be acting out a skit that illustrates the job of each of these specialized workers.
12. Unloading A Banana Boat Skit:
Before Skit:
 - Set up the room as if it were Pier One Pratt Street. The front of the room can be the ship and the back of the room can be a railroad car or truck.
 - Create a “stem” of bananas using a cardboard tube (such as a carpet tube or wrapping paper tube) covered with yellow paper (A broom could also be used.) Try to make the “stem” as unwieldy as possible to simulate its heaviness and bulkiness-they could weigh as much as 100 pounds.
 - Assign the following roles to students:
 - one stevedore
 - one timekeeper
 - four longshoremen- two to unload the boat and two to carry to and load a railroad car or truck
 - one selector
 - one messenger
 - one customs agent
 - Have them refer to Student Resource Sheet #7 to prepare for their assigned role.
Round One:
 - Have students act out the job of unloading the bananas from the ship and taking them to the railroad car. Each student should act out his or her assigned role.
 - After “loading the boat” several times, have students discuss the skit. Lead them to the idea that each person has a specialized job and that they each have an important part in unloading the boat and loading the railroad car/truck.
Round Two:
 - Have students line up and prepare to act out the skit again.

- As the students begin the skit, pull one of the students from the line, saying that they have just become sick and must go home.
- Have students act out the job of unloading the bananas from the ship and taking them to the railroad car/truck.
- After “loading the boat” ask students to discuss the success of the skit without one of the workers.

13. Display the definition of Interdependence. Ask:

- How were the banana boat workers interdependent?

Discuss.

Assessment:

1. Have students respond to the following prompt:

You are a longshoreman at Pier One Pratt Street in Baltimore. You and your co-workers are responsible for unloading the banana boats. Write a journal entry describing a day at work.

Think about the following as you write:

- your job duties
- job duties of others
- how your job is dependent on the jobs of others

Closure:

1. Have student volunteers share their journal entry with the class.

Lesson Extensions:

- Tell students that bananas are no longer shipped into the Port of Baltimore. Instead, the Port is one of the leading automobile ports in the United States. Display Teacher Resource Sheet #6, “Automobiles at the Port of Baltimore.” Discuss. Have students investigate the brands of automobiles that are shipped into Baltimore
- Have students examine banana plantations and the work and workers associated with them.
- Have students examine the role of the workers who loaded the banana boats in the tropics.
- Have students examine the role of workers who transported the bananas from the Port (railroad workers, truckers, etc.).
- The United States Customs and Border Protection is a part of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Have students investigate this department to learn about its history and purpose.
- Have students conduct an oral history interview with a person who has worked or is currently working at the Port of Baltimore. See the Maryland Historical Society, www.mdhs.org, for more information about conducting an oral history interview.

The Banana Boat Song

Day-o, day-o
Daylight come and me wan' go home
Day, me say day, me say day, me say day
Me say day, me say day-o
Daylight come and me wan' go home

Work all night on a drink of rum
Daylight come and me wan' go home
Stack banana till de mornin' come
Daylight come and me wan' go home

Come, Mister tally man, tally me banana
Daylight come and me wan' go home
Come, Mister tally man, tally me banana
Daylight come and me wan' go home

Lift six foot, seven foot, eight foot bunch
Daylight come and me wan' go home
Six foot, seven foot, eight foot bunch
Daylight come and me wan' go home

Day, me say day-o
Daylight come and me wan' go home
Day, me say day, me say day, me say day...
Daylight come and me wan' go home

A beautiful bunch o' ripe banana
Daylight come and me wan' go home
Hide the deadly black tarantula
Daylight come and me wan' go home

Lift six foot, seven foot, eight foot bunch
Daylight come and me wan' go home
Six foot, seven foot, eight foot bunch
Daylight come and me wan' go home

Day, me say day-o
Daylight come and me wan' go home
Day, me say day, me say day, me say day...
Daylight come and me wan' go home

Come, Mister tally man, tally me banana
Daylight come and me wan' go home
Come, Mister tally man, tally me banana
Daylight come and me wan' go home

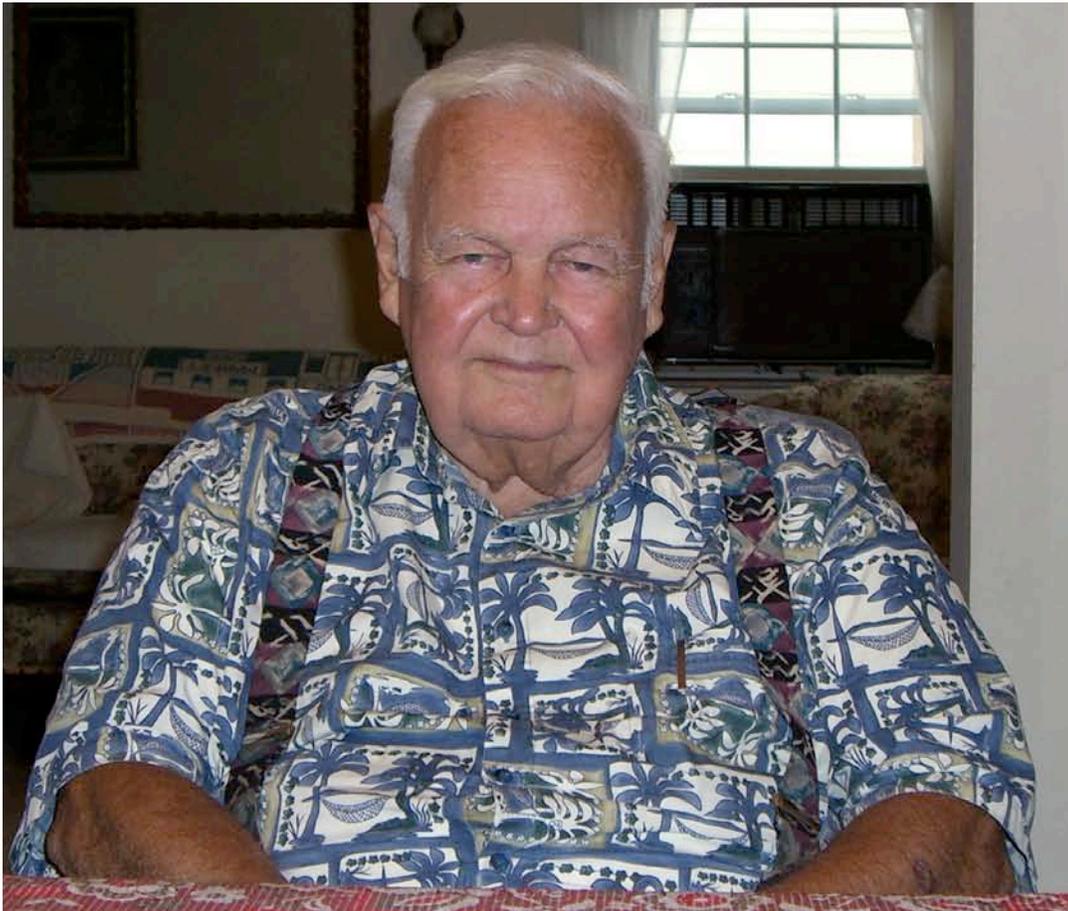
Day-o, day-o
Daylight come and me wan' go home
Day, me say day, me say day, me say day
Me say day, me say day-o
Daylight come and me wan' go home

<http://www.lyricsdownload.com/harry-belafonte-banana-boat-song-day-o-lyrics.html>

Map of North America



“Captain” Bill Springer, Today



“Captain” Bill Springer

Background:

“I asked for slips of jobs from employment office. United Fruit Company advertised for a timekeeper. I didn’t know of a timekeeper’s job but I thought it was something I could do. I started out and it was raining and found that it was about 5 or 6 blocks to the United Fruit company office at Pier One Pratt St. [This is where the Aquarium is today.] and the other fellow that had the slips had stopped in out of the rain and went to get breakfast and didn’t show up for a while. In the mean time I was interviewed and found out what the job was. At Martin I had some experience with a new device called a calculator. I had one-hour [of] instruction with it and saw one a couple of times when I was close up to some airports. I was asked if I knew how to operate one. I said yes. The fact was that I was hired.”

On the United Fruit Company in Baltimore:

“Banana cargo at Pier One Pratt St. consisted of elevators that had pockets, continuous operating elevators that lifted bananas by the stems at the place where they were held and then from the elevators that would be landed on conveyors to a truck loading platform or a rail car on a car float and then they would be put on a man’s back and carried to the door of the rail car or carried into the truck and there were stems of bananas that weighed as little as 60 or 120 lbs per stem. Bananas were then loaded in rows in the rail cars and fastened and loaded in the trucks in the same way. The trucks would be weighed in light and weighed out heavy so they were actually involved in truck scales and operating. There were B & O Railroad car floats that had 12 cars on each float or Pennsylvania Railroad floats that had 10 cars. And we had the four places of discharge for each of the hatches and the average ship carried about 40,000 stems of bananas.”



Timekeeper

They had actually 4 gangs [involved in unloading one ship]. The gang entailed a group that would be unloading from the inside of the ship and a group on the outside would be loading trucks or railroad cars. The number of men entailed in the operation of unloading bananas was almost 300 men. [There were a] total of 4 gangs. Some men were checking in in the morning, disappearing, and appearing in the evening to checkout. My job was to make sure men were there working.



The operation started to change about 1958 when [United Fruit began to work] with the B & O railroad. A new terminal was built on the south side of Locus Point and this was a much more modern operation. The car floats were no longer something that was part of the operation. But we had actually a terminal that had road that would have reefer cars pushed into the railroad by the railroad and a conveyor belt down the middle in front of the cars and the cars were loaded that way and gradually the operation changed into what was primarily trucks so then the conveyors would first to get the fruit from the ship that went on what was called conveyors they were about 1500 ft in length. Each one continuous conveyor there were 4 different conveyor belts. And the way that bunches were taken off—two men standing on stand and each would grab one end of the stem of the banana and lift it on the shoulders and they would be carried into the truck or rail car when the cars were loaded they were pulled out and then on their way and messengers would accompany the trains to see that they were either heated or iced depending on the weather and they would go to the destination of the cars. It was our part of the fruit dispatch company, which was an arm of United Fruit. The truck of course weighed in light that emptied in loading spots. In this terminal there were rail car spaces for 63 cars and 42 trucks and was normally a one-day operation for the ships.

Autos at the Port of Baltimore



- Baltimore's Port was the first port of entry for the Volkswagen Beetle, starting around 1960.
 - In the past decade, more than 3.5 million cars and small trucks have rolled through the Port of Baltimore.
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- More than 500,000 automobiles move through Baltimore's public and private terminals annually.
 - Baltimore's strategic Mid-Atlantic inland location means shorter distances between manufacturer, port and market, making exports a day closer to the port from manufacturing plants.
 - Imports quickly reach dealers and consumers in the fast growing Baltimore-Washington consumer market, one of the largest and wealthiest in the nation.
 - Baltimore has close proximity to major interstates. Rail options include direct service to the Midwest, via Norfolk Southern's Harrisburg terminal hub and CSX's Annapolis Junction hub.
 - A bar code scanning system captures detailed information about every vehicle moving through the port and the drivers who handle them, tracking inventory and reducing damage.

<http://www.marylandports.com/CIC/autos.htm>

Stevedore

My responsibility at the time I left the time keepers office and became part of the stevedoring staff as Assistant Head Stevedore, meant that I would meet the ship in the



morning at 5:00 or 5:30 am would see that the men were checked in properly and that the gangs are usually there and they hired the proper number of men. And that the timekeeper's office was always available and they would have tags that were issued to each man. And they got paid at the end of each

day. That was standard procedure at that time. My job with the inclusion of getting the ship cleared at the immigration/customs/plant quarantine and see that men were all placed properly and the ship was rigged and then I would take a place at the control group and would call for different classes of fruit that we had trucks with ready to load on railroad cars... The longshoremen had to open the hatches. There would be an open space all the way down. Men would go in and load the bananas into the pockets. The men on the course would be an 8:00 start on the discharge, lunch from 12:00 to 1:00 and then come back to complete the ship usually in 4 ½ to 5 hours but the big changes from the early start of the program the ship had to be cleaned after the discharge. That entailed lifting the grates and sweeping all the areas under so the air could flow from the next cargo and that there would be no ripe bananas left that would start to ripen the fruit. The turn around time at the new terminal was so great that there was very little cleaning done.

Longshoreman



Q: What does a longshoreman do?

They handled cargo in the ship. They handled the parts of the cranes, they take the cargo from the end of the landing and to the place of rest. And handle it again when its transported somewhere else. And they handle packaging to where its sent.

Q: Did longshoremen work for one company or were they able to show up and pick jobs daily?

For the most part longshoreman worked in gangs. A gang would probably work for more than one company but they would get their orders by 4:30 the previous day. In a lot of cases, the work was posted on a board somewhere or there was an answering service they could call.

Q: Did they get paid

overtime?

They got time and a half before 8:00 in the morning. If they had a meal hour involved 6-7 in the morning 12 noon and 6-7 in the evening it was double time.

Q: Did you have men who stayed all day like that?

Most of the men would be hired at 7 to load the ship and would be there until they finish. Some times it would be until 10pm.

Q: You would unload one boat in one day?

In most cases, yes.

Q: And how many in one week?

Usually 3.

Checker

Q: Are there any other jobs associated with unloading cargo besides the longshoremen and stevedores?

Long shore men and stevedores are almost used interchangeably. Stevedores do more supervision and long shore men do more back work.

Q: So those two categories encompass everything?

There were checkers, when a truck comes in, if it scheduled to have 600 boxes there are men to make sure there are 600 boxes loaded and the paperwork is completed before it goes to the scale.

Q: Did they get paid better than longshoremen?

Slightly, yes, but I think it was 10 cents an hour more.

Selector

Q: This picture is post 1958?

Yes

Q: Are the bananas green at this point?

We tried to have mostly green, but some were ripe and they would be pulled out sold separately. The bananas you see on that belt are what you called blacks. They were graded by, we had a Jamaican who could grade bananas. And he'd pick the sizes and qualities and he had different colored slips he would call out and the long shore men would come over, put a little water on it and slap it on the bag. And that's a large, that would be about 110-120 lbs of bananas that you see in that picture. And some customers like the big oversized bananas and some liked the small ones. We called them 9 hands. They would have as many as 12 hands on a stem. But 9 hands is the biggest terminology. And the smaller groups would have 8 hands would be labeled separately and then there would be ripens or colors.



Q: Who was the person who would grade the bananas?

That would be the [man from Jamaica].

Q: There would be one person who did this all the time?

He did. We had other individuals who were Americans.

Q: And they called them graders?

They called them selectors.

Messenger

Q: Were there any other jobs that we haven't talked about?

I mentioned the messengers who traveled with the trains. To see if they were properly heated or iced.

Q: They went with the trains. This might be a 2 or 3-day trip and come back?

They might go to Detroit.

Customs Agent

Q: So we have selectors, messengers. Customs?

Customs would visit the ship when it first arrived and they would check all the papers and see that everything was entered properly.

Additional Note on U.S. Customs Agents:

- Check containers and trucks for smuggled agricultural products or packaging materials that might contain species that could harm United States agriculture or environment.
- Examine wood pallets that could hide larvae of wood-boring insects that could attack United States trees.
- Make sure that imported fruits and vegetables are pest free.

http://www.cbp.gov/linkhandler/cgov/newsroom/fact_sheets/agriculture

Unloading Bananas: Sequence Chart

