

## **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](http://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](http://www.mdhs.org), for more information about conducting an oral history interview.