

Tobacco

Migration/Immigration and Community Building

This lesson supports CONNECTICUT PUBLIC ACT NO. 19-12
Semester 2: Unit 4.4-1 and 4.4-2, 5.1, 5.2, 5.5, 5.7, 5.8

Learning Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- Examine and evaluate different types of primary sources and secondary sources. (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.1)
- Use primary and secondary sources to answer essential question EQ8. (HIST 9-12.16)
- Use evidence from primary and secondary sources to explain how people from Puerto Rico and Latino(a) communities have played a role in shaping U.S. society, economy, and culture. (HIST 9–12.4 CIV 9–12.2, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.1)
- Take action against an issue in today’s society using their analysis of primary and secondary sources. (Social Justice Standards from “Learning For Justice” AC.17)

Program Framework (45-60 mins):

1. Introduction: Connecticut Tobacco Valley – 10 minutes
2. Group Activity 1: Examine the Sources - 20 minutes
3. Answer EQ8 – 10 minutes
4. Group Activity 2: Take Informed Action – 10 minutes
5. Wrap Up – 5 minutes

Lesson Description:

In this lesson students will explore how migrants from Puerto Rico and immigrants from several Caribbean countries came to Connecticut to work at tobacco farms; and developed community as a reaction to discrimination they faced. This lesson emphasizes development of research and inquiry skills, close reading and observation, and analysis. In this lesson, students learn how to examine and gather information from different types of pre-selected primary and secondary sources, including oral histories, photographs, newspaper articles, videos, and other items from the CHS collection and other archives. Students will use this information to support a claim and develop an argument. Students will use their research to take action against an issue facing our society today.

Materials: Examining Sources Graphic Organizers; 3 source packs, laptop to view source packs, 5 W’s Organizer, pencil/pen

1. Introduction: Connecticut Valley Tobacco

When we address questions about the past, primary sources and secondary sources provide valuable information. A **primary source** is something produced at the time by a participant in or a witness to a historical event or era. There are many types of primary sources: photographs, written documents, videos, interviews, objects, etc. **Secondary sources** are created by studying the primary sources and can provide important information about a primary source. Secondary sources are the work that historians have already done. Which source is better? Neither! We need both primary and secondary sources when addressing a research question, forming an opinion, and taking action in the present.

What is our essential question?

EQ8 AGENCY AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: In what ways have Puerto Rican/Latino people demonstrated agency in developing organizations and strategies to address pressing issues in their communities?

Background:

To understand this essential question, we need to talk about tobacco farms.

There is a long history of tobacco growing that began with the Native Peoples that live in what we today call Connecticut. For this lesson, we will focus on the 20th century. Tobacco was Connecticut's most valuable cash crop in the 1920s. Most Connecticut tobacco growers grow a superior quality shade tobacco. This labor-intensive crop is grown under white netting to mimic a tropical environment. During World War I, as workers increasingly moved into war effort industries, there was a need for tobacco laborers.

At this time, the search for a reliable labor source led to an ongoing relationship that began in 1916 and lasted more than 50 years between growers and a special group of Southern workers: Black college students. Marcus Floyd, President of the Connecticut Tobacco Company, first came up with this idea. CT farmers began working with the National Urban League, to recruit workers using Black newspapers. For these young people, a summer away was an opportunity to earn money for their education, enjoy freedom from parents, and get some relief from their segregated communities.

To house the students, growers created residential camps on their tobacco plantations. With these residential camps, Southern Black high school students could be recruited as well.

During World War II, many men headed to war and many women headed to factory jobs to fill the shortage of workers. Connecticut tobacco growers needed workers too. Tobacco growers and the U.S. Government made arrangements with other countries and Puerto Rico to find seasonal workers. This lesson focuses on migrant and immigrant workers.

A significant wave of immigration from the West Indies (mainly from Jamaica, Barbados, Bahamas, and Dominica) to the United States began in the 1940s due to the British West Indies Temporary Alien Labor Program. Many settled in the Hartford area because the labor shortage of World War II meant there were available jobs in the tobacco fields along the Connecticut River Valley. Men worked in the fields while women often found work as housekeepers, teachers, nurses, and aides.

Also at this time, most Puerto Ricans migrating to Connecticut were hired by local growers to work seasonally from spring to fall under contract with the Puerto Rican Department of Labor. Migrant workers spent half a year on U.S. mainland farms and then returned to the island to labor in cane fields or sugar mills.

Conditions were tough for workers on the tobacco farms, despite what various reports and newspapers stated. The work day lasted 10 to 14 hours a day, 6 or 7 days a week, with no overtime pay. In addition, the plane fare from Puerto Rico to Connecticut was deducted from the workers' pay (it was reimbursed only if the workers completed their contracts). Meals, health care, and other expenses were also taken out of the workers' low pay. Workers lived in large barns or barracks with up to 60 people in 1 building. They slept on cots with little to no privacy. The workers suffered from the cold in early spring and in the fall. See *Connecticut Explored* article by Ruth Glasser, Fall 2002, for more details on the history of tobacco farming <https://www.ctexplored.org/tobacco-valley-puerto-rican-farm-workers-in-connecticut/>

Take a closer look

- A. Display google slide presentation: [Connecticut Valley Tobacco](#)
 - Advance to Slide 2: Review the map of the Caribbean. Ask students to locate Puerto Rico, Jamaica, Bahamas, Barbados, and Dominica.
 - Advance to Slide 3: Point out the purple circle. This is the Connecticut Valley Tobacco region where farms were located in Connecticut. The region does extend into Massachusetts. We are focusing on CT in this lesson.
 - Advance to Slide 4: Conduct a brief [Visual Teaching Strategy](#) (VTS) for this photograph.
 - i. What's going on here?
 - ii. What do you see that makes you say that?
 - iii. What more can we find?
 - Advance to Slide 5: If time allows, conduct a brief VTS for this postcard.
 - i. What's going on here?
 - ii. What do you see that makes you say that?
 - iii. What more can we find?

2. Group Activity 1: Examine the Sources

To answer this essential question EQ8, students will examine several primary and secondary sources in groups of 3 or 4 students. These sources focus on the experiences of people who have migrated from Puerto Rico or who have emigrated from various Caribbean countries for work in Connecticut, specifically on the tobacco farms.

- A. Divide the class into groups of 3 or 4 students.
- B. Each group will be given a source pack (primary and secondary sources) to examine and evaluate as a group.
- C. Each student will complete an [Examining Sources Graphic Organizer](#) for each source.
 - Students should work together and discuss each source .
 - Students will look for information about how people from Puerto Rico and Caribbean countries faced discrimination and at the same time created community in Connecticut and add the information to the graphic organizer.
- D. Share out the source analysis: Each group will share 1 source with the class. Give a 2 sentence overview of the source including why this source is or isn't a reliable and useful source. Then share an example of discrimination and/or making change in the community from this source.
 - Students should have 1 or 2 blank copies of the Examining Sources Graphic Organizer to take notes during other groups' share out.
- E. *Optional: To extend this activity, each group can examine another set of sources and complete additional graphic organizers.*

3. Answer EQ8

EQ8 AGENCY AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: In what ways have Puerto Rican/Latino people demonstrated agency in developing organizations and strategies to address pressing issues in their communities?

- A. Students will use their graphic organizers they completed with their group and the graphic organizers they completed from the share out to answer EQ8.
 - Students will write 1 paragraph using 3 pieces of evidence from their graphic organizers to answer EQ8.

4. Group Activity 2: Take Informed Action

Students will work with a partner to complete this activity. It is preferably that students partner with a classmate that examined a different set of sources in Group Activity 1.

- Each pair will reflect on the problems migrants and immigrants in Connecticut faced and the solutions they created to solve these problems.
- Each pair will decide if the solutions people used in the 50s-90s still work today.
- Each pair will choose a pressing issue in their community and brainstorm ways they can take informed action.
 - Students will use the [5 W's organizer](#) to organize their ideas.
- Each pair will create a social media post about the issue in their community that needs to be addressed. Be specific in describing the actions to take. Include who, what, where, when, and why on the post!

5. Wrap Up

- A. Each pair will share their social media posts.